

# ***Declaration: Coalition for the Future of Education***

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## **Abstract**

This letter is a declaration addressed to Dr. Cardona and Members of the Biden Transition Team from the Coalition for the Future of Education, proposing A Simplified Path Forward.

Background: In late 2020, the Center for Educational Improvement (CEI), as part of its own internal visioning process, realized the importance of a cohesive movement to further five best practices for schools during this pivotal time in the U.S.:

- 1) Integrating up-to-date research and information on neuroscience and neuroplasticity into teacher preparation and administration preparation programs.
- 2) Increasing the efficacy of social emotional learning by supporting the use of “coherent” programs to alleviate trauma and improve SEL skills.
- 3) Supporting visioning for the future of education, rather than the protocol of simply planning and implementing programs for 2021.
- 4) Conducting Youth Listening Tours and building youth leadership.
- 5) Advancing the use of innovations, including technological innovations, in schools.

From the Center’s initial work, they set about listening to adults and youth and developed the Coalition for the Future of Education (CFE), currently a 28-member Coordinating Committee composed of seasoned educators, aspiring leaders, and youth from across the U.S. Directed by Dr. Melissa Patschke, a retired principal in PA, the Coalition is actively engaged in a variety of actions as they continue to gain input.

Read about the Coalition [at CEI’s website](#). The coalition is inviting HER readers to [sign onto a letter](#) to the Biden Administration and Secretary of Education Cardona and to watch for upcoming announcements and ways in which educators can further support CEI’s vision for a holistic, student-centered approach to education.

*Keywords:* education, future, Coalition for the Future of Education, A Simplified Path Forward

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Dear Dr. Cardona and Members of the Biden Transition Team,

The Coalition for the Future of Education represents a diverse group of individuals and organizations dedicated to supporting and positively impacting the future of education in the United States and globally.

● We believe that 2020 showed us that education has changed and must continue to evolve to better meet the

needs of all youth, ensure equity and justice, increase the participation of youth in educational decision-making, and prepare young people for their futures.

● We are concerned about the trauma and injustice that accompanied the COVID pandemic in 2020. Healing is needed. More supports are needed to address student mental health and well-being.

- We agree with major educational researchers and leaders such as John Hattie, Robert Marzano, and Deborah Meier: Students must be more involved in planning and determining their education. Their autonomy and individual and collective voices are needed.
- We agree with Vickie Zakrzewski at the Greater Good Science Center: Students are thirsting for meaning. As Paulo Freire has indicated, education must go beyond preparing students for careers; it is needed for a conscious understanding of freedom and for self-understanding leading to critical agency and “self-managed lives.”
- We understand that at the local, regional, state, and national levels, visioning for the future of education is needed. The foremost visioning process we recommend is iterative \_ it is a process used by successful businesses. It builds on Senge’s (1990, 2012) approach to learning organization and includes analysis of what works, creative tension, consensus building, and vivid reimagining of what could be.

### **We Envision**

This Coalition envisions a world that leans in with heart and compassion for self, others, and our environment, where people and institutions are dedicated to expanding conscious acts of caring, building resiliency, and advancing learning, equity, and justice.

We envision safe and equitable schools with education that serves as the foundation for our humanity; it is flexible and empowering. There is room for adventure, students drive their own learning, learning and self-understanding are celebrated, and communities support their individual and collective self-care, resiliency, and well-being.

### **Supporting the Future**

The education we envision for the future is supported by a growing understanding of neuroscience and heart-mind connections, the adverse effects of childhood trauma, the importance of effective remote learning, and the essential nature of solidarity in affirming dignity, equity, and justice. The future we envision is one of compassionate school practices, bolstered by research on the significance of student engagement and student leadership.

Understanding neuroscience, heart-mind connections, and the adverse effects of trauma. Research on neuroplasticity, executive functioning, heart intelligence, and building student resiliency updates our understanding of the psychology of learning. It is time that teacher education programs integrated this into their instruction. Each teacher and each school should be prepared to operate with a

foundational understanding of how healing and learning are dependent upon supportive adults and strategies to build neuropathways that support cognition and well-being.

Advancing the use of technology. As we turned to virtual learning, technology took on a prominent role. Technology will play an ever-growing role in preparing students for their futures.

Helping students find meaning while maintaining high academic standards. Learning can be enhanced with greater recognition of student interests and by listening to them and helping them find meaning, value, and purpose in their education. Students need experiential activities and community-based opportunities for problem solving and entrepreneurial initiatives. We must review instructional curricula to ensure that our understanding of history is not dominated by one voice, but rather all voices are heard \_ that marginalized groups are included. For the future of our democracy, we must revisit history for accuracy and relevance \_ seeking truth, inclusiveness, and justice. We must also ensure that students have a better understanding of civics, citizenship, and their participation in democracy.

We recognize that the psycho-social-emotional needs of children and youth have been inadequately addressed with an over-reliance on standardized expectations and assessments and concern that students follow prescribed protocol. Yet, in the future, measures of growth will continue to be needed \_ even as some adjustments are also in line. More flexibility is required. Education of the future will include measures of academic success; however, education will not be driven by lists of standards and high-stake assessments.

Equitable access to resources. Justice and equity for all children require equitable access to education, technology, and other resources supporting education.

The growing importance of self-care, mindfulness, and social-emotional learning. The trauma, stress, and suffering experienced by children and families in 2020 is continuing into 2021. Now, more than ever, teachers, staff, students, and families need effective self-care practices. Their healing and well-being can be advanced by integrating key components from mindfulness and social-emotional learning into classroom instruction and home-school interactions.

### **A Simplified Path Forward**

We envision a “simplified path forward.” The path is not dependent on long lists of initiatives, goals, objectives, and competencies. Rather, it starts with a basis in being aware of how we learn and how to overcome suffering and trauma. It continues with empathy and a compassionate understanding

of ourselves and others. It includes the components we have identified: student voice, equity, self-care, and enhanced experiences with technology.

- To heal and move beyond the trauma we have all experienced, we must focus on positivity to uplift our souls and our nation. The call is to build toward greater compassion and competence \_the confidence we all need for success.
- The road forward will also take courage. However, courage is individualistic. We each experience fear and bravery differently. Courage is multi-faceted, and as individuals, we may display courage in some areas and have difficulty being courageous when handling other concerns. However, as Maya Angelou states “Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can’t be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.”
- We need systems that are sustainable and coherent (Michael Fullan, 2016) and educational leaders who seek to build trust, overcome divisiveness, and build community to further a sense of belonging and collective efficacy.

### **Youth Leadership**

We value the voices of youth. We vow to listen to them and help advance their leadership. The first few months of 2021 present a unique opportunity to steer a new and vital course for education -- a course that is authentic, that helps youth connect with their own inner wisdom.

- The course we are proposing is one that is being shaped by youth, one that urges mentoring and scaffolding for young people, and one that builds on individual self awareness, metacognition, and self-monitoring.
- By applying principles from neuroscience, we can enhance executive functioning (focus, attention, and self-regulation) and strengthen critical thinking and decision making. • We seek to teach youth greater compassion and resiliency, as we all learn about self care and how our own self-care is a foundation for our effectiveness. When we are overwhelmed with stress, we are not fully available to our students; we need positive mindsets and ways to help youth vision for positivity, an inclusive way forward, and learning that is exciting and meaningful.
- We support a pedagogy that promotes confidence and self-agency and extends students strengths.

To shift to a culture where each student is guided on an individual path that honors oneself and others will require intensive efforts. Members of this Coalition have spent decades growing our understanding of what can happen \_

we support research, policy decision making, and revamping teacher preparation and other training to focus on an empowering process with students at the heart of our efforts. Substantial evidence substantiates the viability of what we are recommending. However, for the major changes we are seeking to happen at the scale we envision, with the scalability we seek, will require intensified efforts, an expanding consciousness, and for many, a change of mindsets and practices.

We stand ready to collaborate with you in the months to come. We invite you to participate in our March Youth Listening Tour. This tour will be a cornerstone to our work; listening to youth, we will take important steps to collaborate with them and build a hope-filled future that will revitalize education and reinvent how caring is embedded into the fabric of our communities and our lives.

### **Suggested Actions**

To achieve a future that helps us move beyond trauma and suffering will take a multi-pronged approach. Funding, resources, professional development, revisions in teacher education, policy changes, leadership development, technical assistance, and research are needed for the following:

- Youth listening circles and youth leadership development to help education become meaningful, to have a greater purpose, and to ignite student learning.
- Ensuring that teacher preparation programs update their understanding of the psychology of learning to reflect neuroscience, trauma, and heart-mind intelligence. • Revising educational administration programs so that they reflect a visioning perspective and the key components of this proposal.
- Taking steps to simplify how we approach social emotional learning by providing an overarching framework that addresses neuroplasticity, awakening awareness (mindfulness or consciousness), self-compassion and compassion for others, confidence and courage, and community building.
- Revamping education to be more equitable, just, and inclusive. This includes revisions to policies and practices, including revisions to the teaching of history and civics.
- Ensuring self-care for teachers, other school staff, students, and families.
- Collaborating with technology providers to expedite innovation and use of advanced technologies in schools.

- Ensuring that diverse voices, including marginalized groups, are part of the process of revisioning education and that this revisioning be reflective of innovation, what works, and best practices from many fields. Education can not be re-envisioned in a silo. Visioning must occur within a broader community that involves families and neighbors, and includes a global perspective, with an eye toward not only discovering, but also sustaining, promising educational practices.

We are requesting that the U.S. Department of Education consider summits, initiatives, directives, and funding that includes the above parameters. We are requesting a meeting with Secretary Cardona and representatives to discuss our concerns and ideas.

Sincerely,

Chris Mason, Center for Educational Improvement