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### Creating Quality School Choices for All America’s Children

*New report provides guidance to ensure that all families have access to schools worth choosing*

[Expanding High-Quality Educational Options for All Students: How States Can Create a System of Schools Worth Choosing](#)

PALO ALTO, CA — The Trump administration’s focus on “school choice” has shined a spotlight on charter schools and private school vouchers as ways to improve education, but evidence shows that these strategies do not always result in stronger outcomes for children. State policy decisions have a great deal to do with the quality of school options, which range widely. Charters and vouchers are not the only “school choices” available. U.S. students and families have many educational options open to them, the vast majority of which are operated by public school districts.

The most popular of these options is the neighborhood school, which more than ¾ of families explicitly choose even when they have other options available. Magnet schools are as popular as charter schools, and about half the states offer choices that cross district lines. A [new report](#) from the Learning Policy Institute provides information on the range of school choices available and what factors shape their outcomes.

States manage the range of educational options in different ways with varying levels of success. LPI’s new report suggests ways states can most effectively manage “school choice” to ensure equitably available, high-quality opportunities that offer each student and family a system of schools worth choosing.

“We wrote this report based on the assumption that school choice policy is a means to an end and not an end itself,” said Linda Darling-Hammond, president of the Learning Policy Institute. “The goals of our education system include improving student learning opportunities, strengthening educational attainment, providing alternatives that fit student needs, and integrating our diverse citizenry, while preparing young people for their civic roles in a

democracy. The choices we offer students—all students—should help us achieve those goals, not put them further out of reach of the students who are at the greatest disadvantage.”

Darling-Hammond presented the report, *Expanding High-Quality Educational Options for All Students: How States Can Create a System of Schools Worth Choosing*, at a meeting of the Governors Education Policy Advisors Institute of the National Governors Association last week in Miami.

Public school options described in the report include: high-quality neighborhood schools; intradistrict and interdistrict choice plans; dual enrollment and early college options; charter schools; magnet schools; and schools based on distinct educational models. The report also treats private school vouchers, tax credits and deductions, and education savings accounts for education expenditures.

It points out that outcomes have recently been found to be less than positive for private school vouchers—which were found in four recent large-scale studies to have negative effects on student achievement relative to public schools in Indiana, Louisiana, and Washington, DC—and virtual charter schools—which studies find have lower achievement and graduation rates relative to public schools serving similar students.

Policymakers have a crucial role to play in helping to improve educational options so that they are high-quality and so that strong choices are available to all families. Among the recommendations for policymakers in *Expanding High-Quality Educational Options for All Students* are:

To support high-quality neighborhood schools, policymakers can:

- Attend to community needs in planning for new schools and existing schools.
- Create processes for assessing and improving quality for schools that may be lagging, from school quality reviews that diagnose needs to investments in leadership and staffing, professional development, curriculum, and community school models that provide wraparound health and social services where students need them.

To strengthen intradistrict and interdistrict choice plans, policymakers should ensure that:

- Districts work to ensure that many high-quality choices are available, and continually seek to improve schools so that no students are left in low-quality options;
- Strong systems of information are readily available to parents;
- Application processes are consolidated, not burdensome, and equally accessible;
- Choice is managed to support racial/ethnic and economic integration, both within and across district lines; and
- Transportation is free and readily available.

To support dual enrollment and early college options, states can:

- Encourage community colleges and 4-year colleges to partner with local high schools as well as to offer distance learning courses to expand offerings to secondary students who are ready for more advanced learning opportunities;
- Underwrite the costs of dual enrollment in college courses while students are still in high school;
- Stimulate the creation of Early College programs through competitive grants or availability of seed money; and
- Ensure that all students have access to the prerequisite coursework in middle and high school.

States and districts can improve the odds that charter schools will provide high-quality options to all students by:

- Having a small number of **authorizers** who are held to strong accountability standards.
- Ensuring that charters must meet **standards for quality** pertaining to curriculum, instruction, and assessment; hiring qualified teachers; and requiring financial viability to be authorized or renewed.
- Ensuring **access** by requiring student recruitment and retention plans and monitoring access to and continuation in schools for students with disabilities, English learners, and students of varied racial/ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds.
- Using a regular **reporting and review system** to ensure a reasonable standard of quality.
- Prohibiting or placing clear restrictions and standards on **for-profit schools** to keep taxpayer funds for public purposes and to remove incentives for schools or educational management organizations to make a profit by restricting student services or denying access to children who are expensive to educate.

States that choose to support virtual or online schools can reduce the negative outcomes that have been recorded for this school sector and enhance the chances that these schools will provide productive options for students by:

- maintaining additional special oversight for the operations of virtual/online schools, if they are authorized, so that students receive adequate support and services from a sufficient number of qualified staff with technology tools fully in place.

If providing public funding for vouchers for students to attend private schools, states can consider:

- maintaining standards of quality for schools that are the recipients of these funds, through requirements for accreditation, staff qualifications, and curriculum plans, as well as information from assessments of student progress;
- ensuring nondiscrimination standards on the basis of race, class, gender and sexual orientation, and disability status for schools that are recipients of funds to protect civil rights of students and to discourage segregation or discrimination; and

- funding only those options that advance state purposes, like the provision of more specialized high-quality services to students with disabilities, as some programs are designed to do, or the provision of opportunities for advanced study (such as AP courses) otherwise unavailable to students.

The report also recommends that states inform their efforts to provide students with excellent and equitable educational opportunities by:

- Using **high-quality research** that includes appropriate sampling strategies, comparison groups, and controls wherever possible when designing new policies to expand student learning opportunities and to advance other desirable goals such as desegregation.
- Including **research and evaluation requirements** in new policy initiatives and attending to the outcomes of research in reviewing and revising existing policies to better meet states' goals for high-quality education and equitable access.

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#### About the Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.

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