

Rebuild the American Dream by Investing in Public Education

3. Invest in Public Education. We should provide universal access to early childhood education, make school funding equitable, invest in high-quality teachers, and build safe, well-equipped school buildings for our students. A high-quality education system, from universal preschool to vocational training and affordable higher education, is critical for our future and can create badly needed jobs now.

The Problem

- Many [students don't have the knowledge](#) and skills needed to succeed in college or the workplace. Most 4th graders are not proficient in reading or math, and only one in three 8th graders performs at or above the proficient level in reading or math. [U.S. Dept. of Education]
- Educational outcomes are particularly [low in distressed areas](#). Over 95 percent of 4th grade students in Detroit are not proficient in math or reading. Of the 3,000 low-income 9th graders in Denver schools, [fewer than 150](#) of them landed a college degree within six years of graduation. [US Dept. of Education, Pell Institute]
- Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to get access to a quality education and thus trail behind their more advantaged peers. But if the barriers to black and Latino students were removed, enabling their performance to match whites', then [GDP would have jumped](#) 2-4% in 2008, between \$310 billion and \$525 billion. [McKinsey Consulting Group]
- School [funding is not distributed fairly](#) across schools and districts. In New Hampshire, a district with a 30 percent poverty rate receives about two-thirds the money per student than a district with no student poverty. [Education Law Center]
- Besides preparation, the primary barrier to obtaining college education is cost. Between 1990 and 2009, tuition and fees rose 275 percent. Federal [financial aid has not kept up](#); during the same time period, the percent of college costs covered by a Pell Grant declined from 45 percent to 35 percent. [White House Middle Class Task Force Staff Report]
- By 2025, the United States will need about 30 million more workers with at least some postsecondary education. Without serious change to our higher education and workforce training policy, [we will fall 8 millions workers](#) short. [Center on Education and the Workforce]

The Solution

- **Start Early with Every Child:** States must provide universal access to early childhood education so that students come to school [prepared to learn](#). Currently, [40 percent of children](#) ages 3 to 5 are not enrolled in nursery school, preschool or kindergarten. [AFT, Annie E. Casey Foundation]
- **Invest in Teachers:** We must make increased investments in teachers so that all students have access to a high-quality education. New teachers [earn less](#) than their peers in other professions requiring comparable education and responsibilities, and the [gap in starting pay](#) between New York City teachers and lawyers today is 57 times what it was in 1970. [NEA, McKinsey]
- **More Time for Learning:** We must extend the school day so that students have an opportunity to learn. On average middle school teachers in Finland, Japan, and Korea spend [197 days on instruction](#) per year compared to the 180 days in the US. [Center for American Progress]
- **Give Youth a Contract for College:** Skyrocketing tuition, complicated financial aid and a conservative shift from grants to loans have made the new ticket to the middle class too costly for precisely those aspire to it. A [Contract for College](#) would give federal grants, not loans, to all students from working- and middle-income families – and cover costs like child care and transportation. [Dēmos]