



- 
- [issues](#)
- [topics](#)
- [about](#)

Home / Issues / 45

## Education Policy Moving Forward: Power and Progress at the State Level



by Linda Darling-Hammond

*“The onus now is on educators, community organizations, civil rights organizations, and others in the states to engage with state agencies to build new approaches to educational improvement.”*

It is clear that Trump has only really one stated goal, which is to expand choice through charters and vouchers, with a frame around privatization, and I think we can look to his own experiences with Trump University’s for-profit approach to providing education for some clues. So, we can anticipate that the framing for the proposals will include for-profit institutions in K–12, as well as in higher education, that are less regulated than they are now. That’s what we have been told.



### HOW CAN “CHOICE” BE BENEFICIAL?

I think it will be very important for people to sort out what the features and conditions are for a productive public education system that provides what’s needed in a democracy, and the ways in which strategies like charter schools may fit in that context and add value, and

Appears in...

Issue 45  
 Educational Justice in the Next Four Years: Post-Election Reflections

Related content

[Going Local: Priorities and Strategies for Municipal Leaders](#)

---

[Foundations as Change Agents: Developing Leadership and Infrastructure](#)

---

[Post-Election Apprehension, Activism, and Educational Justice](#)

---

[High-ELL-Growth States: Expanding Funding Equity and Opportunity for English Language Learners](#)

the conditions under which choice strategies disrupt and are destructive to public education and actually undermine access to a quality public education for all kids. Choice can go in either direction, and we need to be much more sophisticated about how we think about the frameworks. So, for example, in some states – like California, Minnesota, Massachusetts – charter school laws are fairly thoughtful about the responsibilities of authorizers and schools that are chartered. The expectation is that they’ll accept all of the kids who apply, and they will not keep out or push out children who are harder to educate. There is much less access in the system for either fly-by-night or for-profit institutions. Whereas, with charter laws in states like Louisiana, Indiana, Ohio – which you might think of as a “Wild West” kind of approach – there has been an enormous amount of exploitation of public funding by charter operators who are not providing high quality education and do not have the pieces in place that would allow all kids to be served well, and that are making, in some cases, very large profits on the backs of taxpayers’ public funding. So, I think we have to anticipate that it will be important to be clear about what are the productive ways that “choice” can move forward and be a benefit and what are the less productive ways – and be prepared to organize both policy and practice around those.

## ESSA AND THE POWER OF THE STATES

The other thing that we should be ready for – and this is a good-news story – is the implementation of the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#). One of the interesting moments we have is that under the leadership of Republican Senator Lamar Alexander, along with Patty Murray, a minority leader in the Senate, we have a bipartisan bill that replaced No Child Left Behind, corrected some of its major failings, and put a lot of opportunity in the hands of the states to figure out how to organize for public education improvement. Given the very large majorities that pass the bill and the fact that it occurred with Republican leadership, I think it’s unlikely that it will be easy to undo that piece of legislation, despite whatever a new Secretary of Education might come in believing they want to do.

The onus now is on educators, community organizations, civil rights organizations, and others in the states to engage with state agencies to build new approaches to educational improvement. States plans are due in September of 2017. There are many, many positive elements in the law that can be taken advantage of over the coming nine months. Among those is the fact that schools cannot be evaluated only by test scores; states must use multiple measures to look at school progress, and these

Becoming the Face of the  
Community for Public  
Education Reform in New  
York City

must include things like graduate rates and progress of English learners. They can include indicators like school climates, social-emotional learning, chronic absenteeism, suspensions or expulsions – ways to both tackle equity issues that have been longstanding and to support improvements in school climate and operations that ultimately lead to both achievement and attainment and better school environments for kids.

The law requires states to enact standards that look at higher-order thinking skills and assessments that do so, and allows explicitly for the use of projects, performance tasks, and portfolios as part of state assessment systems, and for multiple kinds of evidence about students' learning. Taking advantage of that could transform the way in which we think about assessment, the way in which we think about measuring student learning, and how we make those opportunities more authentic and grounded in what kids actually have to do in college and careers, rather than filling in bubbles on multiple-choice tests. So, there are real opportunities there that are explicitly written into the law.

ESSA gives states the opportunity to put assessments in place that are not used for punishments and sanctions, but instead for improvement and information. There are no longer requirements that certain things have to follow on the heels of particular changes in scores. States have the opportunity to design continuous improvement systems for schools to put in place thoughtful ways of engaging in things like school quality reviews, to choose and support interventions that are very responsive to the needs of children for schools that need assistance – anything from wraparound services in community schools to strategies like high-quality professional development, investments in strong curriculum, and investments in preschool education, which may close the gap that occurs before kindergarten. So there is a lot that is possible under ESSA, and it will really be up to educators, their partners in the community, and parents to work with state agencies to build a new approach to how education is pursued and improved.

## **OTHER STATE-LEVEL PROGRESS**

In Georgia, the voters rejected the idea of an “Opportunity School District,” which was to be modeled after the Louisiana Recovery School District, which if you look at the data with reasonable comparison groups, has done little to improve student achievement and a lot to stratify and segregate the provision of education in the state (Adamson, Cook-Harvey & Darling-Hammond 2015, pp. 39–43). This is not a moment where we need more stratification and segregation. It's a moment where we need to invest in public schools that bring people

together, that are organized around inclusion, around the idea that every school should be worth choosing and every child should be chosen, which was not the result of that approach in Louisiana.

In Massachusetts, the voters said they were going to stick with our public education system as we have it and **not expand charters**, although there are some wonderful charters. That was really a vote in favor of making sure the public education system is the site for innovation, is the site for improvement, is the site for serving all children.

We've been buffeted by a lot of ideology at the federal level. Education is not actually always so partisan at the state level, because both Republicans and Democrats who are involved – for example, in educational committees in the legislatures and in statehouses – are typically interested in creating schools that work for kids.

I think it is important for the public to be engaged. It's important for educators to be engaged to be sure that the voices for quality are there, that the voices for productive investment are at the table. But a lot can be done at the state level and good progress can be made irrespective of what's happening federally.

### **“THIS ELECTION HAS TRIGGERED A MOVEMENT”**

As a candidate, Trump was explicitly and, I think, consciously divisive in his statements of disdain for so many groups of people – Muslims, immigrants, Latinos, African Americans, the LGBTQ community, and you can go on. Because of that, there has been a real organization of resistance to the message of hate by a lot of people, and because it has been so explicit, I think that has enabled and stimulated a lot more explicit opposition against it. In the United States, we have often been too sanguine politically, not highly organized and activated to stand together and say, “What does it mean to be an American? What do we stand for as a nation? What do we stand for as people? What do we stand for as individuals? And how do we actually stand collectively with others?”

I think that this election has triggered a movement. Now, it has also triggered a lot of hate activity, but because that has come to the surface, it's triggered a lot of people to say, “No, that's not who we are.” So, it's an interesting moment, like various important moments in our history – in the height of the Civil Rights era in the 60s and the early 70s, in the moments like the founding of the Republic, the Civil War, where people have had to stand up and say what they stand for and be counted and really throw down, so to speak. This is a moment like that.



I think the good news is so many people are standing up and saying, we are Americans who stand for an inclusive America and we're going to fight for it, rather than sitting at home on the couch flicking from CNN to Fox News. I think that's hopeful.

**Related topics:** [Equity](#) [Partnerships for Collective Impact](#)

[Display References](#)

All materials © Brown University unless otherwise specified.

[Usage & Permissions](#)  
[Order Print Copies](#)  
[Contact](#)



Annenberg  
Institute for  
School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY