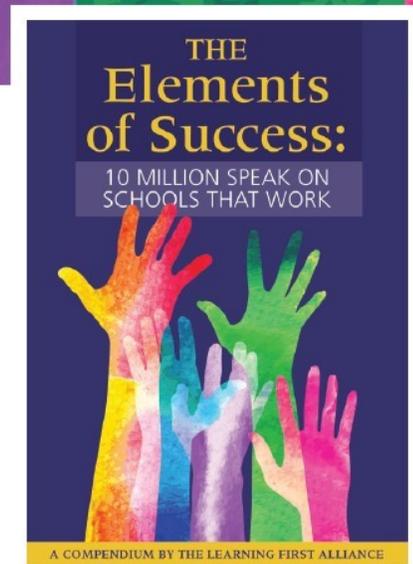


Commitment to Equity and Access



What do successful schools look like? There is no one answer. Each successful school reflects the beliefs and character of its community, and each addresses the needs of its students in its own way. However, in *The Elements of Success: 10 Million Speak on Schools That Work*, the Learning First Alliance identifies six elements common to all successful schools. Members of the Alliance, who represent more than 10 million educators, parents and local policymakers, agree these are the factors needed for a school to perform at a high level and help all students succeed, while understanding these elements don't look the same in each school. How they are achieved and integrated depends greatly on context.

One of these elements is a commitment to equity and access.

What does that mean? Successful schools maintain high expectations and provide welcoming environments for all students, including English language learners, students with disabilities, children of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ students and others. In them, **equity** does not mean **equality**; these schools provide high-quality services and supports that address the individual needs of their students to give each the opportunity for success.

Successful schools demonstrate commitment to equity and access in many ways, including by addressing:

- **Opportunity to learn:** Successful schools consider the distribution of opportunities and resources in their community, and they work to overcome inequities in them. They address the “opportunity gap” in many ways, based on local needs, for example, by offering quality early childhood education, enriching summer school opportunities, providing trauma-informed instruction and enabling connections to social services and health care.
 - **Academic opportunities:** Successful schools ensure all students have access to challenging, high-level coursework and a rich curriculum, offering academic supports to accelerate progress so this access is meaningful. They offer courses in the arts, physical education, computer science and other subjects that contribute to a complete education. They also integrate materials reflective of the diversity of their school, including in classrooms and school-sponsored activities, to help all students connect to classes and coursework.
 - **Digital equity:** Successful schools make sure all students can benefit from learning opportunities driven by advances in technology. For example, they work to provide students who lack home resources with the devices needed to complete schoolwork and with opportunities to use broadband in school as well as libraries and other locations.
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- **Equity in discipline:** Successful schools treat all students fairly and appropriately. They eliminate disparities in discipline practices, including suspension and expulsion rates, between students of color and students with disabilities and their peers. In general, they use discipline strategies that keep all students in school and learning.
 - **Identity equity:** Successful schools are constantly considering how to meet the needs of all students and working to address new challenges as demographics and social norms shift, with a new light shining on something schools have not frequently dealt with: identity equity. These schools are, for example, working to provide appropriate accommodations for transgender (including transitioning) youth and to meet the needs and protect the rights of students who wear hijabs, turbans or other articles that serve as a core piece of their identity.

A commitment to equity requires schools to be flexible and agile to meet the changing needs of their students. For instance, one year may find a school building with several students challenged by autism; the next, students learning English who also have a learning disability, or disadvantaged students' families constantly moving because of economic upheavals. As they consider their unique context, in successful schools educators, parents and local communities work together to develop programs to meet their needs. While specific activities vary, the commitment to equity and access is present in all successful schools.

Of course, just because a school has such a commitment doesn't mean that it will thrive; it is a necessary, but not sufficient, factor in success. For example, a school committed to equity and access that has poor leadership or lacks family and community engagement will struggle. True success requires all six elements of successful schools:

- Focus on the Total Child
- Commitment to Equity and Access
- Family and Community Engagement
- Distributed Leadership
- Strong, Supported Teaching Force and Staff
- Relationship-Oriented School Climate

To learn more and read the full report or executive summary, visit <https://learningfirst.org/elementsofsuccess>.

Learning First Alliance Members

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