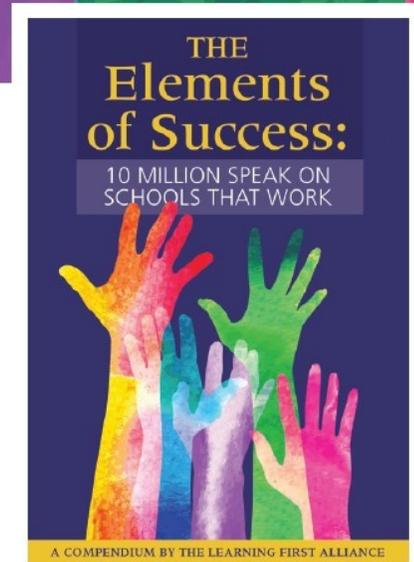


Policy Implications and Recommendations



We know how to provide world-class education in the United States. In many places, it has been – and is being – done. And these places share common attributes. What does this mean for federal, state and local policy?

Through a comprehensive review of resources from its member organizations, which represent the education community – the local practitioners, parents and policymakers working in and on behalf of schools every day – the Learning First Alliance has identified that the integration of six key elements exists in all successful schools. These elements, detailed in *The Elements of Success: 10 Million Speak on Schools That Work*, are critical in school improvement efforts. Yet their identification is only the first step.

LFA also recognizes that where schools are working, it is because they have developed programs specific to their goals and challenges, combining these six elements in very different ways that meet their individual needs and evolving as those needs change. Local school and district officials, in partnership with families and communities, are leading this work. For it to occur on a large scale, we must see a policy focus that emphasizes decision-making by those closest to the child.

The Elements of Success

Focus on the Total Child

Successful schools support all students' needs, inside and outside the classroom, to help them become effective, empowered learners. They design and carry out programs that offer all students a rich educational experience, supporting their academic and social/emotional learning and physical development so they develop the skills needed to succeed in an ever-changing environment. These schools customize learning to individual students, taking advantage of advances in technology as they do so. They also provide opportunities for students to explore careers and nurture their talents and interests.

Commitment to Equity and Access

Successful schools ensure all students have access to high-quality services and supports enabling them to set and reach high goals for learning. In them, *equity* does not mean *equality*; they recognize some students need additional resources to have the same opportunity for success as others. They ensure the needs of all student populations are met, including English language learners, students with disabilities, children of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ students and others. Successful schools recognize such students are assets and diversity is a strength.

Family and Community Engagement

Successful schools effectively engage families and communities in support of students. In doing so, they identify barriers to such engagement and work to overcome them. Their efforts to build authentic connections to families are centered on a belief that every parent wants the best for their child and, when provided the right invitations and opportunities, they can help their child, and all children, be successful.

Distributed Leadership

Successful schools define leadership broadly. Leadership is distributed – to principals, teachers, school counselors, community members and others in the building – and decision-making is a shared endeavor. In these schools, leaders (regardless of job title) meet high standards of practice and are supported in their development. They understand that effective communication is a critical component of school success, and they build solid, trusting relationships with both school and community stakeholders.

Strong, Supported Teaching Force and Staff

Successful schools are staffed with educators – including teachers, principals, school counselors, technology specialists and others – who are well-educated, well-prepared and well-supported. These educators meet high standards of practice. They benefit from continuous learning and support along the professional continuum, including through high-quality pre-service education, ongoing high-quality professional learning, meaningful evaluation tied to professional growth and opportunities to take on leadership roles regardless of official title.

Relationship-Oriented School Climate

Successful schools create a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility among staff and students and with families and communities. These schools are safe, welcoming and respectful to all. They establish teaching and learning as core values while recognizing success in pre-K–12 schools is not an end but a step in the lifelong learning process. They support positive behavior and build healthy, supportive relationships and a sense of community both between and among students and staff. In them, students have frequent opportunities for participation, collaboration, service and self-direction, strengthening their connection to the school.

Moving Toward Success

Overall, the most startling implication of this report for the discussion on education policy is how little the mechanisms of good schools are touched by the advice of state and federal authorities. *The Elements of Success* makes clear that successful schools are built on the needs of individual students and communities. While all successful schools have these six elements, how they are achieved and implemented varies based on context, allowing each school to provide an effective education to each student. These schools are not designed from afar or manipulated to fit a rigid model of what a good school looks like.

Yes, this is a criticism of current methods of federal and state involvement in public education. But it is not an indictment of their goals, nor is it a call to remove them from the education process. Federal and state education supports need to expand, with a continued emphasis on equity, family engagement, professional and leadership preparation and development and the total child, as well as in cultivating and supporting accountability systems that both provide information to the public and inform instruction.

Simply put, this compendium calls for a fundamental shift in decision-making. To have an impact, state and federal officials should focus on creating conditions that give those working closest to students what they need to do their jobs well, not on prescribing specific reform strategies or one-size-fits-all models of schooling, teaching or learning.

What Is Needed?

Federal, state and local policymakers should:

- Emphasize the need for more well-prepared educators (teachers, administrators, school counselors, specialists and others) and support pre-professional programs.
- Dedicate resources to ongoing professional learning that ensures educators can effectively apply emerging technologies and insights into learning, adapting their practice so graduates have the skills and knowledge needed for success in a rapidly changing world.
- Provide support so educators can access the specialized information and programs needed to impact the children they serve, especially children whose families live in poverty, speak English as a second language or are identified as in need of special education services.
- Ensure schools are adequately staffed, for example, having student-to-school-counselor ratios that meet the standards of the profession and the needs of students and small class sizes, particularly when working with high-need students.
- Craft federal and state research agendas to provide the information schools need, including specific research on how these six elements interrelate; students with individual needs learn and should be taught; and curriculums and assessment systems should be designed.

Schools are never static; they are constantly changing. For example, now many schools are beginning to incorporate apprenticeship and other work/academic programs. They have begun using 3D printers both in lessons and to create products. In wider society, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) is in the process of shifting from being a research tool to being a diagnostic tool. In the near future, it will be able to identify autism and learning disabilities, providing data schools must learn to incorporate into their programs. Communities will continue to face traumas of natural disasters and violence. And as social norms continue to shift, families will continue to be re-envisioned with new concepts of parenthood and personal identity.

What exactly will come next is hard to predict. What we know is that schools will need resources – of time, money and human capital – to coordinate with their wider communities and adjust what they do to meet the changing needs of society.

The Elements of Success offers policymakers the opportunity to empower more schools to achieve success. Policymakers must shift from emphasizing compliance focused on mechanics to supporting local decision-making and a set of elements that – when incorporated at the school and district level by school boards, superintendents, teachers, school counselors, parents, technology educators and other education professionals – allows schools to transform themselves into what we need, and our students deserve, our best.

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

Learning First Alliance Members

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; AASA, The School Superintendents Association; American Federation of Teachers; American School Counselor Association; Consortium for School Networking; Learning Forward; National Association of Elementary School Principals; National Association of Secondary School Principals; National Education Association; National PTA; National School Boards Association; National School Public Relations Association