



In the coming months the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign will release a series of advocacy and policy proposals developed from the thought leadership of grassroots coalitions and programs with a proven track record of success. These proposals are designed to focus state and local advocacy and policy efforts on specific proposals to give each student a fair and substantive opportunity to learn. This is the first proposal in the series.

Opportunity to Learn Policy Proposal #1: Personal Opportunity Plans

CONTEXT FOR PROPOSAL

For more than two decades the United States has reported huge systemic achievement gaps while doing little to address the systemic opportunity gaps that lead to these achievement gaps. Today in the United States more than 20 million students are below proficient in reading and math, with a disparate number of Black and Latino males in this group. Many of these students are being pushed out of school or pushed through school without the needed skills to be successful in careers or college.

The opportunity to learn is a human and a civil right. The United States cannot afford to lose these students and still remain a moral, democratically effective and economically strong country. These 20 million-plus students are critical to the nation's future and must have the skills and preparation needed to set the United States on a trajectory to remain globally competitive by meeting the national goal of being a world leader in post-secondary graduation rates by 2020. Students and their parents should not be expected to wait any longer for a fair and substantive right to an opportunity to learn.

A plan to protect each child's right to an opportunity to learn and achieve our national 2020 goal MUST be powerful and comprehensive enough to address the need to restore each of those students we have left behind by meeting each student's personal learning needs and opportunity gap.

Charter and voucher proposals are too low-yield to provide immediate systemic relief. Thousands of service providers (City Year, faith institutions, mentoring and tutoring program, and health clinics) are currently available to support districts, schools, teachers, parents and students if they are properly aligned and given the appropriate resources. Education and advocacy coalitions like Dignity in Schools, Broader, Bolder Approach, the Alliance for Educational Justice, Communities for Excellent Public Schools and the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading have made numerous credible requests for systemic supports and improvements. Action is required now.

Thus the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign proposes the following policy proposal shell for local and state advocates to localize and promote.



PERSONAL OPPORTUNITY PLANS

Every student who is a grade level or more behind in math or reading should be given a Personal Opportunity Plan that provides the student access to supports in three areas:

1. Academic (tutoring, extended-day learning, English language instruction, etc.);
2. Social (mentoring, parent university); and
3. Health (vision, dental, mental health).

In any school where more than one-third of the students are eligible for a Personal Opportunity Plan the districts must create a plan to intentionally connect service providers of these supports to the school. The steps involved for these schools are:

- A comprehensive needs assessment — done in partnership with parents, educators, students and community members — so that local solutions are tailored to local problems.
- Implementation of research-based instructional and educational reforms.
- A plan to address essential social, emotional, and physical needs of students.
- Coordination of resources to support service deliverers' efforts to provide supports to students in the school.
- Recognition that parent, student and community leadership is critical to sustainable student success.

While students are under a Personal Opportunity Plan their discipline rules should favor keeping them in educationally sound environments instead of automatic suspensions or expulsions. Should out-of-school suspensions be necessary, the students could likely be suspended to a mentoring program or faith-based institution while continuing educational services. Students who are in the juvenile justice system should be automatically eligible for a Personal Opportunity Plan.

A goal of the Personal Opportunity Plan is to provide the intense supports necessary to sunset a student plan in one or two years, whereby the student would be restored to grade level. Special request to extend the student's Personal Opportunity Plan an additional year should be considered, however schools and districts should be monitored on the percentage of students with Personal Opportunity Plans beyond the two-year period to ensure appropriate supports are being provided.

IDENTIFYING RESOURCES TO SUPPORT PROPOSAL

- Resources needed to support these plans can be generated through restructuring the state's criminal justice system — reducing the use of incarceration for nonviolent offenses and reinvesting those resources to provide students supports on the front end.
- Advocates can also support increases on revenues to specifically support providing students Personal Opportunity Plans.
- Advocates can join state leaders to pursue federal resources to support providing students Personal Opportunity Plans.
- The cost of not making these investments is higher than targeting resources up front to provide each student a Personal Opportunity Plan and a fair and substantive opportunity to learn.