



## WHAT WE STAND FOR

### PREAMBLE

Since 1999, Stand for Children has championed countless policy and budget choices across ten states that continue to benefit millions of children today.

For the organization's first 13 years, members in Stand states and chapters worked independently to identify local challenges facing children, to figure out what's working across the nation, and to advocate for effective solutions.

In 2012, to ensure that we are maximizing our collective impact, we decided to develop a shared viewpoint on how to accomplish our mission and to prioritize strategies that have proven effective in closing the achievement gap.

"What We Stand For" is that shared point of view.

To develop "What We Stand For", Stand for Children commissioned fifteen education policy research papers to identify the most promising strategies for ensuring that disadvantaged students graduate high school, ready for, and with access to college. We convened a task force with representatives from the 10 Stand for Children state offices to review the research, draft a shared perspective, and solicit and incorporate feedback from Stand staff and members. The task force approached the project with independence, rigor and pragmatism.

The result of their work is "What We Stand For" and the supporting research papers; these tools are now available to Stand's staff and members across the country. In the future we will provide additional useful, evidence-based tools to Stand's members, leaders and staff.

Together, we'll use this information to make an even greater difference for students in the coming years.

## OUR VISION & MISSION

Stand for Children believes ALL children deserve an equal opportunity to succeed in life. Education is the key that unlocks the door to success. Far too many children, through no fault of their own, aren't getting the education they need to make it in life. We are passionately committed to righting this wrong.

Our mission is to ensure that all children, regardless of their background, graduate from high school prepared for, and with access to, a college education. To make that happen, we:

- Educate and empower parents, teachers, and community members to demand excellent schools.
- Advocate for effective local, state and national education policies and investments.
- Ensure the policies and funding we advocate for reach classrooms and help students.
- Elect courageous leaders who will stand up for our priorities.

## CRITICAL MILESTONES

A child has a strong chance to be prepared for and have access to college or career training if key milestones are met during that child's education. Critically, each child needs to be:

- Ready for school when entering kindergarten,
- Reading on grade level by the end of third grade,
- Attending and passing all classes in middle school,
- Enrolled in Algebra I no later than 9<sup>th</sup> grade,
- By the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, on-track to graduate,
- Graduated from high school, and
- Enrolled in college or career training without the need for remediation.

## WHAT CHILDREN NEED

*Essentials every child needs to reach the critical milestones and be prepared for college or career training*

***Every child needs access to quality pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten.***

Early childhood learning positively affects children throughout their lives. Three and four year-olds need access to quality pre-kindergarten and five year-olds need access to full-day kindergarten. Children are much more likely to reach the critical milestone of reading on grade level by the end of third grade if they have quality pre-k and full-day kindergarten. When resources are limited, access for underserved students should be prioritized because they stand to benefit the most. Intervening early is more cost effective than waiting to remediate students in middle and high school and beyond.

***Every child needs effective teachers and principals.***

Effective teachers and principals are the top two in-school factors impacting student achievement. Strong, well-supported teachers and principals can close the achievement gap, help underserved students stay on track, and impact students throughout their lives. Ensuring every child has a strong principal leading their school and effective teachers in every class, every year, requires a comprehensive approach to developing educators, including effective systems for:

- training and preparation,
- recruitment hiring, and placement,
- mentoring and induction,
- evaluation that is connected to well-designed professional support and development,
- competitive compensation, and
- retention of the strongest educators and dismissal of ineffective educators.

In addition, to ensure the most effective teachers go into and stay in the profession, we need to value and celebrate teachers for their invaluable contributions.

***Every child needs high expectations and quality instruction tailored to their needs.***

Quality instruction requires rigorous and aligned standards, curriculum and assessments. Standards must clearly outline what students have to know and be able to do at every grade level to be prepared for college and other training beyond high school. Curricula, instructional approaches, and learning tools must help students master these standards. Assessments must accurately track students' progress and inform strategies to help them succeed. A variety of useful assessment tools are critical for educators and students.

Access to all of these tools must be distributed equitably to all students, regardless of their background. Schools must expect all children to learn at a high level, and they need to tailor quality instruction to meet each child's needs. Students learning English and students with learning disabilities need quality instruction tailored to enable them to

access to the same curriculum as other students. All students need adequate time to reach learning goals and the ability to move ahead at their own pace.

***Every child needs a safe and supportive learning environment.***

In order to reach critical milestones, students must feel safe and supported, and be treated with equity and respect. Schools that create a positive culture, reinforce positive behavior, and meet the social and emotional needs of children improve student success. To improve student learning, schools must also build trust and meaningfully partner with parents, whose engagement makes a tremendous difference for students, and with the broader community.

***Every child needs effective guidance and support to access college or career training.***

Because young people need education and training beyond high school to find living wage jobs, all schools need to focus on preparing students for the next step. Students must complete academic courses that prepare them for the next step after high school without the need for remediation. Students need the opportunity to earn college credits in high school which prepares them for higher level work and can save their families money on college tuition. Underserved students in particular need support and guidance in applying for college or career training, securing financial aid, and developing college and career success skills.

## **WHAT SCHOOLS NEED**

*Essentials for a public education system that helps all students be prepared for college or career training*

Equal opportunity for all children requires a **system of high quality schools** that help students stay on track to graduate from high school prepared for college.

***Schools need effective leadership and oversight***

School governance takes many different forms and involves a variety of players. Schools and districts are given direction by elected or appointed school boards, state boards and departments of education, legislatures, and sometimes charter school authorizers, mayors, and recovery school districts. In every governance structure, decision makers must regularly evaluate the impact of their decisions and make improvements based on careful analysis.

To ensure every student has access to a school that will effectively prepare them for college and career training, decision makers must focus on their core responsibilities and avoid micro-managing districts and schools. Core school board responsibilities include hiring and evaluating the superintendent, setting goals and strategy, approving budgets that maximize funds to essential educational strategies, closely monitoring the quality of schools, and authorizing appropriate support and intervention when schools aren't meeting the needs of students. School board members must have the capacity to effectively oversee the schools they are responsible for and be able to hold district schools and public charter schools to the same high standards.

State Superintendents and State Boards of Education must ensure high school graduation equals college readiness, that assessments accurately measure whether students are on track to high school graduation, and that assessments are a tool for learning, not a barrier to learning. They must also effectively monitor school and district quality and provide support and intervention for districts and, if necessary, schools that are unable to adequately meet the needs of students. Governors and state legislatures must focus on what works to prepare all students for college and make policy and budget choices that support that goal.

***Schools need transparent information about performance***

Decision makers in education should assess schools based on their progress in helping students graduate high school prepared for college and school staff's work with students should be responsive to key indicators of school quality and student performance. They should be guided by information about student progress in their decision-making about schools. Decision makers must ensure that accurate and timely information about school quality is accessible to educators, parents, and the community so that they can provide meaningful and relevant input into key decisions. Parents and students need understandable, relevant information about local schools to ensure they can choose the best school.

***Schools need sufficient funding, spent wisely***

Quality public education is an expensive undertaking – a vital investment which delivers tremendous social and economic returns. To ensure limited dollars produce the best possible outcome for students, every possible dollar must be directed to essential educational strategies through disciplined budgeting, strong financial controls, and a constant search for efficiencies. Such intentional spending builds public support for sufficient investment in practices that make the greatest difference for students.

To ensure that underserved students graduate from high school prepared for college and career training, targeted investments must be made to meet their specific needs. Achieving the best possible outcomes for students requires budgeting sufficient funds based on student need, and then ensuring those dollars reach the students they are intended to serve.

## **USING WHAT WE STAND FOR TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR STUDENTS**

The essentials listed above are guidelines for Stand for Children states. The specific solutions Stand works on at the state and local level align with the point of view outlined above. Stand's state staff and leaders decide which specific solutions to pursue based on the difference a solution will make for students in that particular state or school district, whether the solution is supported our members and key stakeholders, whether the solution is achievable, and how our pursuit of the solution will impact our organizational health.

Stand for Children will periodically review this document to ensure it reflects the latest information available to achieve our mission. In addition, to provide additional support that enables our state staff and members to implement the educational and system essentials as quickly as possible, we will develop a range of tools and resources.