

The Path to Success

Student success. These two words define the career and aspirations of three million professional educators. The words are simple, but the task is not because students come into America's public school classrooms with very different needs, backgrounds, levels of preparation and support. Educators work hard to develop the potential, independence and character of every student who shows up in our classrooms. But we know there are very real barriers to students' academic success, including the underlying issues of hunger, poverty, prejudice, family instability and illness. We desperately want to help students overcome these obstacles to achievement; we ask ourselves every day how we can raise up all of our students and give them the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in this very demanding

21st century world. We are committed to creating great public schools for all students. And that's why, in 2008, the NEA, in collaboration with the nation's top education experts, developed the Great Public Schools (GPS) Indicators Framework. The GPS Indicators Framework showcases the research- and evidence-based policies and practices that are integral to making our public schools great—these seven key ingredients are crucial to student success.

What Makes a Great Public School?

1 GREAT FOUNDATIONS

Quality early education helps prepare students so they can come to school ready to learn. A quality school readiness program requires that all students have access to: high quality early childhood education; full-day kindergarten; comprehensive health screenings and top-notch, well prepared teachers.

2 GREAT STANDARDS

All students deserve high standards, personalized instruction and a rich, holistic curriculum that includes access to advanced courses in mathematics and science as well as classes in history, art, music and physical education.

3 GREAT CONDITIONS

Students learn better in safe and supportive learning environments. When classes are small, schools are equipped with additional support staff like nurses and psychologists, and educators have adequate training and support, then achievement gaps close and students receive the specialized support they need to succeed.

4 GREAT STAFF

Quality educators engage students and accelerate achievement. All students deserve access to qualified, caring and committed teachers, as well as other school personnel with the experience, skills and support to meet students' emotional and educational needs.

5 GREAT LEARNING

Students have a better chance of life success when they are held accountable for more than their standardized test scores. The kindest and most reliable way to assess student progress is to use multiple, valid and reliable measures of student learning, beginning with professional assessment by the classroom teacher.

6 GREAT ENGAGEMENT

The research is clear—when families and communities are engaged in education, students attend school regularly, graduate and perform at higher levels. We all—educators, families, elected officials and students themselves—need to do our part to ensure student success.

7 GREAT RESOURCES

The bridge from early childhood education to college graduation cannot occur without sufficient funding. Advanced courses, modern materials and facilities, educator professional development: a high-quality education system provides the supports and resources required to meet varying student needs, but it can't be done without equitable and sustainable funding.

How Priority Schools Become Great Public Schools

When schools have the resources to develop these indicators, great things happen: graduation rates go up, absenteeism and behavioral issues go down and yes, students perform better on tests. Consider NEA's Priority Schools. Once considered "the worst" schools in an area, some Priority Schools are now among "the best," implementing world-class programs like the International Baccalaureate; teaching rocket science and using data to help improve outcomes.

Our Priority Schools successes remind us of an essential fact: we cannot transform public schools unless we're all working together—with the resources needed to make significant, sustainable change. Schools are community assets and, for vulnerable students, they may be where their health and nutrition needs—as well as learning needs—are met. Members working in NEA's Priority Schools are expanding their efforts. Some sites are now working with neighboring schools to mentor their colleagues, while others are partnering with school systems to transform entire districts. Throughout the country, NEA is providing high-level leadership and professional development to local associations and members working in Priority Schools. To learn more about what makes a public school great, visit nea.org/gpsindicators.

