

Statement of Principles

1. Fifty-four years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*, forty years after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and twenty-five years after the publication of *Nation at Risk*, we must confront a shameful national reality: If you are an African American or Latino child in this country, the probability is high that our public education system will fail you, that you will not graduate from high school, that your ability to function successfully in the twenty-first century economy will be limited, and that you will have no real prospect of achieving the American dream.
2. This reality is especially shameful in a country built on the core idea of equality of opportunity, a country divided for too many years by racial discrimination and injustice.
3. Despite the urgency of the need and the righteousness of the cause, public education today remains mired in a status quo that not only ill serves most poor children, but shows little prospect of meaningful improvement.
4. We must have an honest and forthright conversation about the root causes of this national failure. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. That is the trap we must avoid or risk losing another generation of our children.
5. The sad reality is that these systems are not broken. Rather, they are doing what we have designed them to do over time. The systems were not designed with the goal of student learning first and foremost, so they are ill-equipped to accomplish what is demanded of them today.
6. Changing the system so that it better meets the needs of students will require not only a shift in our collective thinking, but also a shift in power. As the civil rights movement itself makes clear, such transformations inevitably generate resistance and political conflict. We must no longer shirk from that struggle. The stakes are simply too high.
7. In practical terms, this means that we must take immediate steps to:
 - a. Ensure that there is an effective teacher in every classroom, and an effective principal in every school, by paying educators as the professionals they are, by giving them the tools and training they need to succeed, and by making tough decisions about those who do not;
 - b. Empower parents by giving them a meaningful voice in where their children are educated including public charter schools;
 - c. Create accountability for educational success at every level -- at the system and school level, for teachers and principals, and for central office administrators;

- d. Commit to making every decision about whom we employ, how money is spent, and where resources are deployed with a single-minded focus: what will best serve our students, regardless of how it affects other interests;
 - e. Call on parents and students to demand more from their schools, but also to demand more from themselves;
 - f. Have the strength in our convictions to stand up to those political forces and interests who seek to preserve a failed system.
8. Breaking through those forces requires the rest of us to declare that enough is enough. Our failure to educate our children reflects on all of us. We must call out policymakers who would never send their own children to so many of our public schools but who enthusiastically support policies that entrap other families in such hopeless circumstances.
9. On behalf of all of our children, we must insist that our elected officials confront and address head-on crucial issues that created this crisis: teachers' contracts and state policies that keep ineffective teachers in classrooms and too often make it nearly impossible to get our best teachers paired up with the students who most need them; school funding mechanisms that ignore the reality that students are supposed to be the primary focus of schools; and enrollment policies that consign poor, minority students to our lowest-performing schools.
10. We can't wait another forty years to get this done. Today's children only get one chance to be well-positioned for success in our society.
