



Education Reform Toolkit: Frequently Asked Questions

This document is not intended to provide “the right answers” to questions you might be asked, but rather provide illustrations of how to incorporate the framing strategies that FrameWorks’ research has proven to be effective in increasing support for policies that support child well-being. In the following Q and A, we demonstrate how an advocate might think about turning unproductive frames embedded in questions into opportunities to advance a more effective message, incorporating the specific policies you wish to promote.

Q: Why is education reform necessary?

False Start:

For more than a century, our nation’s schools maintained America’s global competitiveness. They were the first step in the earnings and skill ladder and the bridge to students for good jobs at decent wages. In the next decade, two-thirds of new jobs will require some postsecondary education beyond a high school degree. Today, too many of our nation’s youth are dropping out of high school and too many high school graduates are unprepared for the demands of postsecondary education or work. Three out of ten students who enter high school do not graduate. Four out of ten who graduate lack the skills and knowledge required to go to college or succeed in the workforce. Five out of ten who go to college do not finish.

Our high school students’ lack of preparation has serious implications for our economy and prosperity. Every year taxpayers pay \$1 billion to \$2 billion to fund remedial education to students at public universities and colleges, and as much as \$16 billion annually in lost productivity and remedial costs.

Analysis:

- Begins with global competitiveness, which reminds people of the American fight to stay on top rather than directing them to think about education reform directly.
- Foregrounds good jobs at decent wages, which is an individualistic perspective that prevents people from seeing the public purposes of education reform.
- Lists unframed statistics, leaving the reader to wonder what they mean.

Reframed Response:

We must make sure our students are prepared to contribute to the quality of life for our nation as we move into the second decade of the 21st century. In the next decade, two-thirds of new jobs will require some postsecondary education beyond a high school degree. When all of the parts of our education system work together, it's like a well-tuned orchestra. School boards, taxpayers, families, teachers, principals and administrators each have their instrument to play and should work together harmoniously to create beautiful music. But changes in the economy have handed the education orchestra new music to play, and they aren't yet ready to perform it.

However, there are many ways to help the orchestra of education improve its performance, ensuring that high school graduates are prepared for the demands of postsecondary education or work, that graduation rates at both high schools and colleges improve, and that students are prepared to contribute to our economy and overall prosperity. [Your specific policy proposal/example goes here.] By practicing these reforms and learning what works, we can create an educational system that plays the tune right.

Analysis:

- Begins with a value of future to help the audience overcome individualist thinking.
- Uses the orchestra simplifying model to broaden the picture and set the stage for reforms.
- Includes a successful policy example rather than a list of dismal statistics.

Q: The education fight in our state has been waging for years. Why act now to fix the problems?

False Start:

We simply cannot wait any longer. Our system has become so convoluted, constrained, and bureaucratic that it actually impedes educators from teaching our students effectively. Actually, many of our best successes occur where educators figure out ways to get around the system. It's no wonder, then, that only 70% of our students graduate on time and that we perform poorly against our own state standards. The state's budget problems do not free us of the responsibility to provide better schools for our children.

Analysis:

- Reinforces people's existing skepticism about reform.
- Fails to offer solutions, and makes the situation seem unsolvable.
- Portrays effective educators as people who don't play by the rules.

Reframed Response:

We simply cannot wait any longer to address the challenges our state will face in the future. We need to undertake a remodeling project to make the educational system work in our state.

When you go about remodeling a building to fix problems with the plumbing, say, or to repair the roof, you need a plan, you need skilled workers, and you need a bit of patience to complete the job.

Right now, we have an education system that's not working as it should: Only 70% of students graduate on time, and we're not meeting our own standards or holding up against other states' progress. Now that we understand the problems, we can move forward to build the solutions. As anyone who's undertaken a remodeling project knows, it's hard work, but the pay-off will be immense in a strong and prosperous state going forward.

Analysis:

- Begins with a value of future preparation to remind people why they should care about education reform.
- Uses the remodeling simplifying model to clarify the process of reform.
- Presents a solution-oriented, positive approach to reform and avoids crisis framing.

Q: Teacher quality is one of the top subjects being debated today, with solutions proposed ranging from merit pay to getting rid of tenure. Why is teacher quality important and how is it defined?

False Start:

Teachers' roles involve much more than simply providing subject matter instruction. In fact, teacher quality is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement and represents a significant public investment: In 2002 alone, the United States invested \$192 billion in teacher pay and benefits. Research points to five broad categories assumed to reflect teacher quality, including teacher experience, teacher preparation, teacher certification, teacher coursework and a teacher's own test scores. But many aspects of what makes a good teacher are not captured by these measures – the dedication, caring, and plain hard work that go into great teaching.

Analysis:

- The first sentence restates the belief the author is trying to dispute.
- Reinforces the cultural model of caring teachers as the most important factor in teacher quality.
- Relies on unframed data to make the case for issue importance rather than using a value.

Reframed Response:

There are many groups of people who have important roles in creating a successful education system, and teachers are one of them. You can think of a well-functioning education system like a well-functioning musical ensemble; all of the players know their parts, the ensemble

has practiced together until they are able to play as a single unit, and the conductor brings out the best in each player individually and collectively.

If we want to make sure that teachers are playing their part well, we must invest in the things that promote teacher quality. These include experience, preparation, certification, coursework, and recruiting the best candidates. When these teachers are then supported in their work by all the players in the education system, we will have better outcomes and will be better positioned to meet future challenges.

Analysis:

- Avoids default to caring teachers cultural model.
- Uses the orchestra simplifying model to broaden the discussion beyond only teachers to the surrounding educational system.
- Includes a value of future preparation rather than unframed data.

Q: What role do parents play in the education process?

False Start:

Cumulative evidence from several decades of research points to several benefits of parent involvement for children's learning, including helping children get ready to enter school, promoting their school success, and preparing youth for college. In the early childhood years, family involvement is clearly related to children's literacy outcomes. Moreover, parents who provide support with homework have children who tend to perform better in the classroom. Adolescents whose parents monitor their academic and social activities have lower rates of delinquency and higher rates of social competence and academic growth. In addition, youth whose parents are familiar with college preparation requirements and are engaged in the application process are most likely to graduate from high school and attend college.

Analysis:

- Reinforces the cultural model that parents are solely responsible for their children's educational success.
- Diminishes roles for schools and communities in children's educational outcomes.

Reframed Response:

All of us – parents, teachers, and community members – want young people who are prepared to meet the challenges of the future. Cumulative evidence from several decades of research points to several benefits of creating an educational system that supports and encourages parent involvement in children's learning. Parents help children get ready to enter school, promote their school success, and prepare youth for college. Schools measure and assess school readiness, provide support and extra opportunities for children who need it,

and offer guidance to both parents and youth about postsecondary options. Community members support the education system by volunteering and enlisting new volunteers, by providing mentoring programs, and by offering opportunities for young people to serve in the community during the school year and the summer. This level of engagement and support leads to better academic outcomes.

Analysis:

- Begins with a value of future preparation to ground the conversation in a sense of shared fate. Otherwise, people will forget that parents are among a host of stakeholders concerned with educating children.
- Expands beyond parents to include teachers, administrators, school site councils, school boards, business leaders, senior citizens, and ordinary citizens.

Q: Do you think it's important for states to have unified educational standards?

False Start:

To maintain America's competitive edge, we need all of our students to be well prepared and ready to compete with not only their American peers, but with students from around the world. Several organizations have initiated a state-led process of developing and adopting a common core of state standards. This work presents a significant and historic opportunity for states to accelerate and drive education reform toward the ultimate goal of children—from states across the country—graduating from high school ready for college, work, and success in the global economy. These common standards will bring about real and meaningful transformation of our education system to benefit all students. The common core state standards initiative will be evidence-based and will be aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and be internationally benchmarked. States will adopt the standards initiative through a process that will respect unique state contexts and states' rights to set standards. The first standards being addressed are English language arts and mathematics in grades K-12.

Analysis:

- Uses language about maintaining America's competitive edge that will turn the public away from a conversation about education reform.
- Focuses on individual student achievement and future success, not about what will accrue to society as a whole.
- Uses jargon such as “internationally benchmarked” that does not aid understanding.

Reframed Response:

We need all of our students to be well prepared for the future and ready to participate in a global environment. This will happen if we remodel our country's educational system, beginning with developing and adopting a common core of state standards. If you want to

remodel a house, you carefully assess what needs to be fixed, develop a plan, and gather the resources to carry it out. Common core state standards begin with the basics of English language arts and mathematics, but extend into all of the competencies that students need to succeed in college, work and life. They will be evidence-based and will be aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and be internationally benchmarked. States will adopt the standards initiative through a process that will respect unique state contexts and states' rights to set standards. This work presents a significant and historic opportunity for states to accelerate and drive the remodeling of the education system to graduate students ready for college, work, and success in the global economy.

Analysis:

- ⌚ Articulates the value of future preparation, reminding people of what's at stake for everyone.
- ⌚ Utilizes the remodeling simplifying model to set realistic expectations for a pragmatic and not-overwhelming process of change.