

Talking Points:

Inviting the Public Into Expert Understandings of Key Educational Concepts

The following talking points can be used flexibly – as a source of themes for longer written pieces, as short responses in media interviews or public appearances, or as set-ups to “pre-frame” a conversation on specific policy or program proposals. Each pulls from rigorously tested messages that have been shown to shift thinking away from common but unproductive ways of thinking about education, and to build the public’s support for more effective approaches. They need not be used word-for-word, but when adapting, communicators should take care when adapting to maintain the core frame elements in each.

One final note is in order. While the talking points are arranged by specific educational topics (assessment, space and time reforms, etc.) this is for ease of reference only. One of the major insights yielded from the Core Story investigation was the extent to which these issues are intertwined in public thinking – and how important it is for advocates to understand these overlaps. A communication about assessment will be influenced by public thinking on skills and learning; a conversation about space and time will be influenced by public thinking about reform; and so on. To use these talking points – and the Core Story - effectively, communicators must recognize the assumptions that the public brings to the topic, and choose the framing tools that effectively respond to and redirect those patterns of thinking. For this reason, it’s important for a strategic framer to be familiar with the points on topics that aren’t “their” issue.

Assessment

- We can all agree that one of the most important goals for our education system is to develop each child's talents, so that a diverse set of skills is available to our community. As we make decisions, we must think about fostering the potential of the next generation, and that means we can't take a one-size-fits all approach. [Frame element: *Human Potential*]
- To ensure that we're developing a wide range of important skills that our nation will need in the future, we need assessment systems that offer multiple ways to assess learning - just as drivers need different kinds of instruments on their dashboards. Each indicator light or meter offers a specific type of information. There are also ways to directly observe and make adjustments: mirrors and windows are just as important as the gauges. In the same way, our education system will work best if students, teachers, and systems are assessed and guided by multiple types of information to help them navigate toward more effective learning. [Frame element: *Dashboard, Windows, and Mirrors.*]
- With the goal of ensuring that we are building many skills for a complex future, a "dashboard" approach to assessment makes sense. [The current proposal/policy/program] helps us put this into practice by offering an effective way to tell how well we're doing, so we can adjust and improve. It works like this... [Frame Elements: Solutions and Explanatory Chains.]

Equity/Disparities

- ◉ We can all agree that one of the most important goals for our education system is to develop each child's talents, so that a diverse set of skills is available to our community. In a complex modern society, we have many important roles to fill and it is in our best interests to develop the human potential of all children so that we have the skills we need. [Frame element: *Human Potential*]
- ◉ To ensure that we're making the most of the talents all children bring, we need to think about the opportunities they have to develop their skills and knowledge. Learning opportunities are like charging stations, and all learners need lots of chances to charge up so they can take an active role in their learning. The network of charging stations includes schools, community-based learning resources such as great parks, libraries, and museums, and supports for healthy development such as nutrition, health care, and safe and inviting places to play and be active. The current system is built so that it provides fewer charging opportunities for some of our nation's children – some children encounter charging stations everywhere they go, while others live in charging dead zones. This isn't in line with our values. [Frame Element: *Charging Stations*]
- ◉ If we look at the data on [equity indicator], we can see the effects of the spotty charging systems we're providing the next generation. Given that most jobs in the US economy of the future will require some form of post-secondary training, it's just not practical to continue with a situation that produces this kind of outcome. [Frame Elements: Numbers and Order – introducing disparities data only after establishing a productive way for them to be interpreted.]
- ◉ In order to improve learning, we should focus on building effective charging systems everywhere – so that all students, no matter where they are, have the chance to learn, grow, and develop into the productive adults we need to have a thriving society. [Frame Elements: *Fairness Across Places* and Context – establishing collective benefits of education.]

Skills and Learning

- ◉ As we set out to improve learning, our most important goal should be to create citizens who are part of an agile and adaptable workforce, capable of performing the jobs of the future and contributing to our society as citizens with problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Preparing for the surprises ahead requires adding new knowledge and skills to the traditional curriculum. That includes updating the ways we teach—and building in multiple opportunities for learners to practice using the important skills our country will need in the 21st century. [Frame Elements: *Future Preparation* and *Workforce Preparation*]
- ◉ What we now know is that learning is much like the process of weaving a rope: No single strand can do all the work of the rope. Instead, for a rope to be strong and useable, each strand needs to be strong and woven tightly together. As we learn new skills, our brains weave these strands together into ropes, which we use to do all the things that we need to be able to do — solve problems, work with others, formulate and express our ideas, make and learn from mistakes as we learn new things. Students need chances to learn how to weave strands into different ropes in different contexts, so that they're flexible, and they need many opportunities to practice using the resulting ropes. This kind of learning equips them with skills they can use in many ways — in school, but also importantly in life. [Frame Element: *Weaving Skills Ropes*]
- ◉ We live in a constantly changing, information-saturated world. In order for students to grow into adults who can successfully navigate this world, young people have to learn how to use information the way cooks use ingredients. This means learning the qualities of good information, where it comes from, what it can be used for, and how to use it in multiple contexts. That kind of learning, like learning to cook, comes from hands-on experiences, opportunities to experiment and make mistakes, and opportunities to refine and try new approaches. In this kind of “learning kitchen,” the teacher’s role becomes one of a mentor chef, setting new challenges and guiding learners toward producing knowledge. [Frame Element: *Cooking with Information*]

Space and Time

- To move our country forward, we must make sure that our education approach isn't outdated, but rather that it is in keeping with the times. We need to take a fresh look from time to time, to make sure what we're doing is advancing our goals, and often that means adopting a more contemporary approach to the way we do things. [Frame Element: Progress]
- Evidence tells us that learners need multiple ways to engage with ideas, just as pollinating insects and birds must touch multiple flowers to do the important work of sharing pollen. Multiple pollination points are especially important because engaging learning in a variety of spaces, times, and activities helps students to cross-pollinate ideas in ways that truly grow concepts and ways of thinking. We need to consider and connect all the pollination points we could use to help enrich learning and grow important skills. Doing this requires us to integrate classroom learning with all of the many places outside of the classroom where young people learn - libraries, community centers, museums, and afterschool programs - to increase opportunities for knowledge and curiosity to grow. [Frame Element: Pollination Points]
- Right now, we have a chance to improve our education system by [policy/proposal.] Reconfiguring our [calendar/places to learn] in this way will expand the opportunities to learn, which currently, are inaccessible to many of our region's children. Americans' access to a great education shouldn't be determined by zip code – we should ensure it is available everywhere across the region/nation. [Frame elements: Solutions and *Fairness Across Places.*]

Teachers and Teaching

- In improving our education system, it's important to use common sense to identify the kinds of changes that can really make a difference. One of the most sensible investments we can make in education is ensuring that we take a very practical approach to supporting teachers. [Frame element: *Pragmatism*.]
- Teachers are building the learning environments where our nation's future is developing. These builders need sturdy scaffolding and sufficient resources to do their work effectively, and we must remember that the quality of the scaffolding that supports teachers affects how well they do they can do their job for students. Strong scaffolding includes a network for sharing plans, tools, and materials; training and continuing education; having the right equipment in classrooms and schools; and getting useful performance feedback from supervisors. When builders face a particularly challenging project, they should get more resources, not fewer. In such cases, they need better scaffolding so they can meet these challenges. [Frame element: *Scaffolding*]
- Taking a level-headed look at what's feasible and what will have the most impact on helping us reach our goals, [policy/program] just makes sense. Here's how it works... This is a great example of a workable, effective way to provide teachers with the sturdy scaffolding they need to build our kids' brains. [Frame elements: *Pragmatism*, Solutions and Order]

Structures of Education/ Systemic Reforms and Reinvestment

- ◉ To move our country forward, we must make sure that our education system isn't outdated, but rather that it is in keeping with the times. We need to re-evaluate from time to time, to make sure what we're doing is suited to meet our current needs. [Frame element: Progress]
- ◉ It's important to remember that our nation's educational system is like an orchestra: it has many groups of players with specialized jobs, such as school boards, taxpayers, families, teachers, principals and administrators. The orchestra sounds best when each musician is skilled, the instruments are well-tuned, and the sections work together in harmony toward the common goal of playing the best music they can. But a changing America and world have handed the orchestra new music to play, and they haven't gotten in sync yet or rehearsed the new repertoire enough to be ready to perform it. No orchestra becomes great overnight, and the beauty of the music depends on lots of small steps, dedicated practice by musicians who have all the resources they need, and an orchestra conductor who can create harmony among all the parts. We can use this orchestra theory to guide how we approach education reform. [Frame element: *Educational Orchestra*]
- ◉ Just as a house needs ongoing maintenance and periodic updates if its value is to be retained, our school system needs to be remodeled from time to time. As we make changes, we are working to keep what's valuable and working well, and to update or change what's not. Remodeling is hard work and it always involves some dust, noise, and inconvenience – but if we do this right, the improvements will make teaching and learning more effective, which is important for our continued civic and economic progress. [Frame element: *Remodeling*]
- ◉ As we move forward on this reform, we must tap into our ingenuity and our spirit of innovation. Sometimes that means generating new ideas to tackle long-standing challenges, but it can also involve borrowing good ideas that are working elsewhere and being creative and thoughtful when putting them into practice. This [policy/program] is an example of this principle. Here's how it works... [Frame element: Ingenuity]