

## Sample Language for speeches

### Understanding What Americans Want from their Public Schools

Based on research by the Learning First Alliance

[www.learningfirst.org](http://www.learningfirst.org)

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- What do Americans really want from their public schools? This is a question that has puzzled and perplexed educators. Fortunately, it is also a question that the Learning First Alliance and other organizations have probed in depth in recent years. So let me tell you what these folks have discovered, because, frankly, their findings have a profound impact on our professional lives as educators.
- It turns out that to understand what Americans want from their public schools, one must drill down into America's core values—and if you drill deep enough, through layer after layer of accumulated sediment, you'll eventually hit bedrock. And embedded in this bedrock you will discover something truly remarkable. You will discover that despite all the dizzying changes our society and culture have undergone, Americans still believe fervently in the American Dream. That's right—they believe that if an individual in America works hard and takes responsibility for him or herself, that individual has an excellent chance of succeeding in life.
- Americans have not wavered in this fundamental belief one iota since the Massachusetts Bay Colony established the first public school system in 1647 . . . since the founders signed the Declaration of Independence and proclaimed every person's right to "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" in 1776 . . . or since a precocious Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States in the 1830s and was amazed to learn that ordinary Americans had a "lively faith" in the "diffusion of knowledge" and a "better tomorrow."

- Most significantly for educators, the Learning First Alliance’s research shows that Americans believe there to be a strong link between achievement of the American Dream and public education. They believe that if public schools instill good work habits in children and teach them the skills and knowledge needed in the real world, those children will grow up to be productive and responsible adults.
- Individual self-determination and equal access to a quality public education are, in other words, the Ying and the Yang of the American Dream. Which is why Americans are seriously troubled that not all children in America today have equal access to a quality education.
- Americans want their public schools to reflect their core values. And they worry that public schools are falling short when it comes to teaching hard work and responsibility . . . and respectful and responsible behavior. Discipline, in our classrooms and schools, matters greatly to Americans. So do grammar, spelling, and basic math. Americans want young people graduating from high school able to write clear and grammatically correct English. They want young people to know how to solve basic math problems.
- Americans want high school graduates ready for college or the workplace—and they find it vexing when professors and employers report that a growing number of high school graduates are not ready.
- Educators share their fellow Americans’ core values. But the problem is that people don’t always know this, because we don’t spell out in plain English the values that guide us. Instead of assuming that our fellow Americans know what we believe in, we must articulate our core values.

- In addition, we must make it emphatically clear that while we believe every child is capable of ambitious learning, we also believe learning is not attained by chance, it can only be achieved through diligence and discipline.
- We cannot just talk about specific educational programs or policies. We must present a unifying vision of a quality public school—a vision that connects with the American public. In this respect, the Learning First Alliance’s research is especially encouraging.
- Americans have a refreshingly balanced view of a quality public school—a view that’s quite compatible both with our pedagogical principles and the Founders’ vision of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”
- Americans see the quality public school as one in which, first and foremost, students are happy and eager to learn, and where teachers are dedicated and trained, parental involvement is strong, discipline is good, information about student achievement is readily available, and class sizes are reasonable.
- Educators wholeheartedly agree. We share this vision with our fellow Americans—and we must make sure they know it. For a shared vision is much more than a program or policy, it is a force in people’s hearts—a force of impressive power.
- Currently, there is a disconnect between public educators and the American public, but we can bridge that gap, using as crossbeams our commonly-held values and vision.
- Quality public schools produce students capable of achieving the American Dream. This is our promise to America—and it’s a huge one—but it is a promise we can keep, if we earn the American public’s support.