

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For over 150 years, the Southern Education Foundation (SEF) has been committed to developing and advocating for high-quality school systems for students of color and low-income students throughout the South. Today, SEF's focus includes building and supporting new education policy research, developing leaders, and fostering community advocacy to improve outcomes for students of color, but especially Black and Brown children in the South. However, the educational challenges that confront historically marginalized children and their families are too great for a single organization or group to tackle alone.

Policymakers, including those both elected or appointed to critical state and local positions, maintain tremendous influence over the quality of state education systems. Specifically, state lawmakers, board members, and superintendents develop budgets, select school improvement strategies, identify curriculums, as well as set the overall strategy of the state for education in their respective roles. As such, SEF, supported by its community partners and district leaders, has offered a slate of federal, state, and local recommendations that aim to improve the education quality for Black, Brown, and low-income students in the southern region. We hope this living document serves as a guidepost to advancing researched-based SEF education policy in the South.

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ISSUE AREA 1 – EDUCATION REFORM

- Expand access to affordable high-quality early childhood and Pre-Kindergarten programs
- Foster collaborative, stable, and quality district and school leadership
- Ensure that students of color, and other historically underserved students, are taught by well-prepared and licensed teachers by advancing evidence-based policies that support teacher preparation, recruitment, development, and retention
- Invest in the use of a community schools approach to meet the needs of the whole student
- Support parent and community engagement that results in shared accountability to improve school systems
- Provide the necessary supports, resources, and opportunities to schools with low-performing subgroups of students and with significant gaps in subgroup performance as compared to their peers
- Implement non-punitive restorative discipline practices and eliminate zero-tolerance policies for non-violent offenses
- Promote culturally relevant, rich, and rigorous curriculum that prepares students for success in college and the workforce
- Support making schools physically and emotionally safe environments for every student

ISSUE AREA 2 – SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

- Limit control of public education to the level of government closest and most responsive to the taxpayers and parents of the children being educated

ISSUE AREA 3 – SCHOOL FUNDING

- Implement equitable K-12 state funding formulas that address historical and present-day opportunity and achievement gaps and fiscal inequities that negatively impact students of color

ISSUE AREA 4 – SCHOOL CHOICE

- Eliminate school voucher programs, education savings accounts, tax-credit scholarship programs, and other efforts to fund private schools with public dollars
- Prohibit the use of public resources for virtual and for-profit charter schools
- Support the advancement of high-quality magnet schools that promote racial and socioeconomic diversity
- Support high-quality charter school networks that are inclusive, evidence-based, and accountable for serving all students

The Southern Education Foundation works to implement equitable K-12 state funding formulas that address historical and present-day opportunity and achievement gaps and fiscal inequities that negatively impact students of color.

INTRODUCTION

FOR OVER 150 YEARS, THE SOUTHERN Education Foundation (SEF) has been committed to developing and advocating for high-quality school systems for students of color and low-income students throughout the South. SEF's work has ranged from building public schools post-Civil War for the children of the previously enslaved population, to our analysis of student demographic trends in education across the South and how education policies are disproportionately impacting students of color. Our historical perspective continues to inform the manner in which we pursue our mission of advancing educational opportunities for African Americans and people of color in the South.

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reformer, said “Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery.” Today, SEF aims to support the development of schools that will enable all children, but especially Black and Brown students, to succeed in a fast-changing global economy and diverse democracy. To develop an excellent pre-kindergarten through grade 12 school system for students of color, SEF believes governments at all levels need to support and implement education policies anchored in equity and academic excellence for all students.

SEF has outlined four key issue areas (Education Reform, School Governance, School Finance, and School Choice) and

developed the accompanying policy recommendations below for state and federal lawmakers to adopt, as well as for grassroots advocates to support. We believe a strong education system supported by the accompanying recommendations will foster rich, purposeful learning experiences to children and adults. The policies support capacity-building, continuous academic and developmental improvement, and meaningful connections between school systems and communities. SEF also believes these policies will create more equitable and achievement-oriented schools for students of color in the South. However, this is a dynamic document that will continue to be updated over time based on research and partner feedback.

