

# Trends in Education Philanthropy

BENCHMARKING 2025



# Acknowledgements

In 1995, a group of education funders joined together to establish Grantmakers for Education. Their goal was to create an ongoing hub for learning and connection within the field of education philanthropy. Over the past three decades, the organization has created and sustained a broad array of resources to support and strengthen the work of education funders, including the first edition of *Trends in Education Philanthropy* in 2008. This latest study documenting funder perspectives on education philanthropy in 2025 and beyond represents the ninth report in this series.

This new edition of *Trends in Education Philanthropy* would not exist without the willingness of those who responded to the 2025 benchmarking survey. Grantmakers for Education thanks each person for their willingness to share detailed information on their organization's grantmaking priorities and strategies and offer invaluable perspective on the current state and future outlook for education and philanthropy.

Along with these funders, we acknowledge the five funders who shared perspectives on the role of technology in education, advancing equity in the current environment, the importance of early childhood education, and the potential of narrative change to move education agendas. Their insights appear in Funder Q&As and deeply enrich this report.

We also thank Steven Lawrence, the author and coauthor of the three most recent *Trends in Education Philanthropy* studies, for his collaboration with the Grantmakers for Education team in creating a report that will serve as an ongoing source of insight and discussion in the field.

Finally, our deep appreciation goes to the many funders whose annual financial support of Grantmakers for Education makes our work possible. Your commitments enable the community of education funders to learn, convene, collaborate and grow stronger together.

# Trends in Education Philanthropy: Benchmarking 2025

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements . . . . .	1
Key Insights . . . . .	4
Introduction . . . . .	7
1. Big Picture Trends in Education Philanthropy . . . . .	9
2. Trends in Philanthropic Practice in Education . . . . .	15
Public Policy . . . . .	15
Education Equity . . . . .	16
Collaboration . . . . .	19
3. Trends in Education Giving . . . . .	20
Early Learning . . . . .	20
K-12 Education . . . . .	22
Postsecondary Education and Workforce/Career Pathways . . . . .	25
Beyond Classrooms and Schools . . . . .	27
4. Looking Ahead: The Right to Full and Fair Education . . . . .	31
Reflection Questions . . . . .	32
Funder Q&A . . . . .	
The Role of Technology . . . . .	14
Advancing Equity in the Current Environment . . . . .	18
The Case for Early Childhood Education . . . . .	21
The Potential of Narrative Change . . . . .	30
Appendix A: Methodology . . . . .	33
Appendix B: Education Funders' Field-Building Strategies . . . . .	35

# Key Insights

*Trends in Education Philanthropy: Benchmarking 2025* represents the latest Grantmakers for Education study of what is now and what is next for education philanthropy. This report offers insight into the priorities of the education funding community based on the survey responses of a cross-section of U.S. education funders. It also helps funders understand their role in supporting education innovation benefiting the country's learners.

## Big Picture Trends in Education Philanthropy

Over the three decades since Grantmakers for Education was established, numerous sociopolitical and economic factors have influenced approaches to and conditions of education, and others will continue to shape the current educational system. Within a dynamic context, the latest survey findings highlight five trends having a cross-cutting impact on education philanthropy going forward.

- **Outlook for education funding appears stable.** Findings from the 2025 survey suggest that funders remain committed to supporting education, with more than one-quarter of respondents expecting to increase their education giving over the next year and the vast majority of respondents anticipating that their giving will remain about the same.
- **Most funders now connect family and community wellbeing with learner success.** Reflecting a growing trend over the past decade, a substantial majority of respondents now provide funding for family/community engagement. Moreover, over half of respondents report that their organizations consider it highly important to address other dimensions of learners' lives such as health, nutrition, housing and employment as part of their education strategy.
- **Funders remain committed to equity while adapting to a changing political environment.** Despite legislation and judicial rulings unfriendly to efforts that acknowledge and aim to address systemic racism and other forms of bias, most education funders expect to continue supporting equity-related initiatives. However, some have modified the terminology they use to describe this work to address internal organizational concerns, avoid public admonition or possible retribution.
- **Funders expect artificial intelligence to transform education.** In the 2025 survey, respondents identified artificial intelligence (AI) as the technical factor with the greatest potential for a positive impact on education over the next five years. Its ability to support personalized learning was cited as a key potential benefit. However, some education funders worry that its potential negative impacts may be understood too late.
- **Strong growth in funding anticipated for a range of priorities.** Among the 39 issue areas tracked in the latest survey, all but one showed more funders planning to increase than decrease support over the next two years. Priorities most likely to benefit from growing support are economic and social mobility, intersections between education and other systems (e.g., health, legal/justice, housing, employment), narrative change and the use of technology for learning (including AI).



## Trends in Philanthropic Practice in Education

Consistent with prior Grantmakers for Education benchmarking studies, this report examines trends in three critical areas of philanthropic practice: supporting public policy-related activities, advancing education equity, and establishing and maintaining collaborative relationships.

- **Public Policy.** Among respondents close to three-quarters indicate that they fund public policy and advocacy efforts, and nearly half expect to increase this funding over the next two years. The current federal policy environment has reinforced a trend since the latter half of the Obama era toward focusing on state and local policy efforts. In addition, just over half of respondents reported supporting narrative change, up markedly from 2023. This suggests greater emphasis on exploring new strategies for moving public opinion, which will ultimately factor into public policy considerations.
- **Education Equity.** A substantial majority of respondents indicated having a focus on funding one or more historically underserved or marginalized student populations—regardless of whether they consider their organization to be equity-focused. Of the specific populations that respondents support, individuals facing economic disadvantage are most often the focus.
- **Collaboration.** The vast majority of respondents indicate engaging in collaborative efforts with other funders—primarily through learning networks and affinity group participation. Among respondents that engage in aligned or pooled grantmaking, this giving often represents a very small fraction of their overall education funding.

## Trends in Education Giving

Grantmakers for Education continues its examination of giving trends across the education continuum.

- **Early Learning.** Funder recognition of the critical importance of early learning has grown steadily in recent years and will likely continue to grow in coming years. More than half of respondents indicated that they provide funding for early childhood education.

- **K-12 Education.** Funders will continue to prioritize teacher training and development to strengthen the workforce and better prepare for 21st Century learners. According to survey responses, civic engagement is expected to benefit from increased support.
- **Postsecondary Education and Workforce/Career Pathways.** Postsecondary funders continue to prioritize workforce/career pathways, and support is likely to continue growing in coming years. Funders also report standing by their commitment to postsecondary education access.
- **Beyond Classrooms and Schools.** A majority of funders recognize that student success in the classroom is enhanced by families and communities that are resourced and supported to thrive. Respondents also emphasized the growing importance of narrative change and student voice in advancing systems transformation.

## Looking Ahead: The Right to Full and Fair Education

Education in the United States has long represented an opportunity ladder, a space for inquiry and human development, a source of innovation and a beacon of self-actualization, achievement, agency and mobility. The educational system at all levels has also perpetuated inequity as long as it has existed—a fact that several editions of this report have shown most education funders recognize and are seeking to redress.

Education funders are influenced by demographic and cultural shifts, new technologies, innovative approaches to enhancing education and their longstanding desire to ensure that all people have the opportunity to learn, lead and live to their full potential. How funders respond using all of the means at their disposal—grants, policy engagement, convening and collaboration and more—will be the essential question to explore going forward.

Whether working in collaboration with others or individually, education funders must actively make the case to policymakers and the public for why an educational system that reflects the experiences and addresses the needs of all learners and provides the means for them to achieve excellence is a fundamental right and essential to the success of our nation.

# Introduction

*Trends in Education Philanthropy: Benchmarking 2025* enables readers to consider big picture trends affecting the field, explore cross-cutting areas of philanthropic practice, access and compare key learnings and statistics across identified entry points to education and consider critical questions that will shape education in coming years. Among funder priorities identified in Grantmakers for Education's 2025 benchmarking survey, philanthropic organizations supporting education continue to increase their emphasis on strengthening the ecosystem that surrounds learners, remain committed to addressing inequities within the current educational system and simultaneously embrace and question the impact of technology on learning.

Interestingly, a look back at the first benchmarking study published in 2008 might initially suggest that not much has changed in education philanthropy over nearly twenty years. For example, while support for multilingual learners and narrative change increased substantially during this time and support for arts education and school choice decreased, teacher preparation and development and literacy/reading skills continue to be top priorities for survey

respondents. Where differences become more apparent is in the remarks funders share in response to open-ended questions. In their comments, it is clear that the approach for many has moved beyond an exclusive focus on influencing the nature of teaching, learning and student outcomes to a consideration of the role philanthropy can play to strengthen education systems and the many interconnected sectors that impact learners.

## Top Trends Impacting Education\*

### POTENTIAL FOR POSITIVE IMPACT

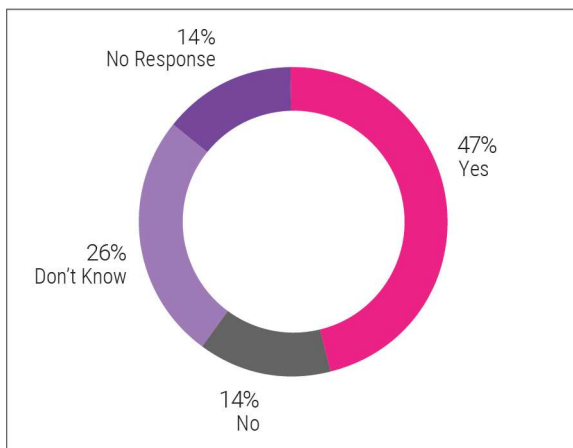
1. AI/Technology
2. Early Childhood Education
3. Literacy/Science of Reading
4. Pathways for Post-Secondary Careers
5. Personalized Learning
6. Teacher Recruitment and Retention
7. Community/Family Engagement
8. Mental Health/SEL
9. Student Voice/Advocacy
10. Systems Change

### POTENTIAL FOR NEGATIVE IMPACT

1. Anti-Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives  
Federal Education Policies
3. AI/Technology
4. Privatization
5. Politicization of Education
6. Public School Financing
7. Teacher Shortage
8. Pedagogy
9. Higher Education Costs
10. Mental Health

\* Ranking based on coding of open-ended responses to the questions: "What are up to three factors or trends you think have the greatest potential for a positive [or negative] impact on education over the next five years?"

**Do you anticipate that policies of the new U.S. presidential administration will impact your organization's educational grantmaking priorities and/or strategies?**



As in years past, funders today are undoubtedly influenced by changes in education policies and programs coming from Washington D.C. and taking place across U.S. states and territories. According to 2025 survey respondents—most of whom responded prior to the latest presidential inauguration—close to half (47%) anticipate that their grantmaking priorities and/or strategies will be impacted in some way by federal policies. (See Section 2 for more details on how respondents view the current potential for education policy engagement at the federal, state and local levels.)

This report offers funders a view on “what’s next” for education philanthropy and seeks to show how funder priorities fit into broader trends in the field. Section 1 identifies five cross-cutting trends that are likely to impact education over the next several years. Section 2 tracks the evolution of philanthropic practice by education funders in the areas of public policy, education equity and collaboration. Section 3 explores education giving for early learning, the K-12 level, postsecondary education and workforce/career pathways and giving aimed at the whole learner and out-of-school time. Finally, Section 4 considers how to shape the future of education and best serve the needs and enhance the strengths of today’s learners.

New in this edition, *Trends in Education Philanthropy* incorporates funder commentary and reflection questions to stimulate deeper inquiry and spur further conversation. Ideally, these resources will help to enrich exchanges among the staff, trustees, donors and grantee partners of education philanthropies and contribute to improved outcomes for all learners.

# 1 Big Picture Trends in Education Philanthropy

Over the past several decades, education philanthropy has used its resources and influence to improve student outcomes amidst changes in the socio-political and economic landscape. Arguably, this time is characterized by many as uncertain and unpredictable, and it is against this backdrop that survey responses suggest five crosscutting trends have only grown stronger in the current environment.

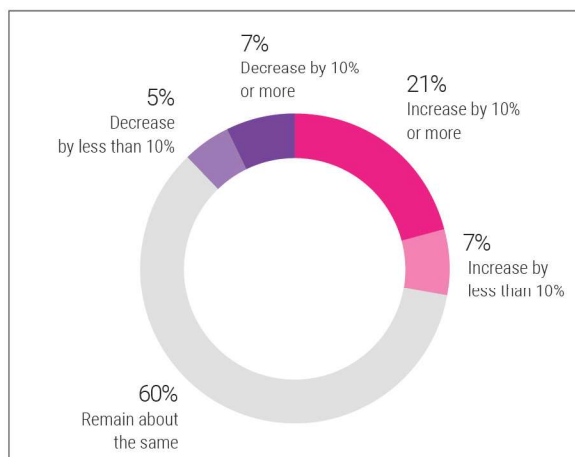
## Outlook for education funding appears stable.

Funders working across a range of issue areas have at times been criticized for responding too cautiously to significant events in the sociopolitical environment. As has been demonstrated repeatedly in the context of disasters and other major upheavals, such as the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional funders rarely set aside their well-considered priorities and detailed strategies in response to crises. Many funders do provide exceptional support to

address specific immediate challenges. Nonetheless, these funders remain committed to the issue areas and organizations they believe can best help to achieve their long-term objectives.

This consistency in support is especially critical for organizations during periods of uncertainty, when nimbleness and flexibility become even more essential and cultivating new donors can be far more challenging. Findings from the 2025 survey suggest that funders remain committed to supporting education, with more than one-quarter of respondents (28%) expecting to increase their education giving over the next year and the vast majority of respondents (60%) anticipating that their giving will remain about the same. These shares are nearly unchanged from the 2023 survey.

Change in Anticipated Education Grants Budgets in the Next Fiscal Year



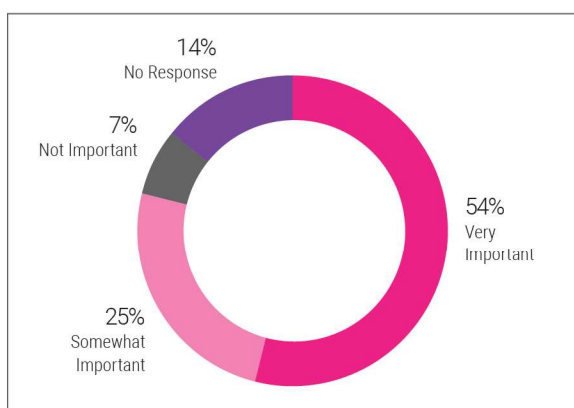
## Most funders now connect family and community wellbeing with learner success.

Over the past decade or more education funders have adopted an increasingly holistic perspective on the factors contributing to learner success. From embracing social and emotional learning to

supporting community schools and wraparound supports to facilitating trauma-informed care, there has been a growing understanding that the family and community systems surrounding learners must be well-designed and high-functioning for them to realize their potential. As one respondent observed, “Schools in isolation can’t provide sufficient help to students in poverty [or who are experiencing homelessness]. [We] need to find ways to support these students leveraging other community resources.”

There appears to be broad agreement with this sentiment, with a substantial majority of respondents (70%) indicating that they provide funding for family/ community engagement, up from 60% in the 2023 survey. Moreover, a majority of respondents to the latest survey (54%) reported that their organizations consider it highly important to address other dimensions of learners’ lives such as health, nutrition, housing and employment as part of their education strategy. “Focusing on the intersections between education and connected systems such as housing are fundamental if we want to improve access for all,” concluded one of these respondents.

**From your organization’s perspective, how important is it to address other dimensions of learners’ lives such as health, nutrition, housing, and employment as part of your education strategy?**



Education funders have adopted a broad array of priorities and a variety of approaches to support learners beyond classrooms. A number of funders shared examples of their support for addressing student homelessness and providing housing stability, with a few also addressing foster youth as a component of these efforts. Among other social and economic barriers respondents are addressing are employment, health and mental health care, childcare, emergency funds, financial literacy, public safety and juvenile justice. “Our mission is to take a holistic approach to supporting children, as such, in addition to education,” observed a respondent.

For some funders, this approach centers a place-based, community-led strategy for improving student outcomes. In fact, several respondents emphasized how they are seeking to let communities lead in identifying priorities and strategies with the greatest potential for positively impacting learners. One respondent described “partnering with community serving organizations (such as home-visiting programs for Pre-K students)... follow[ing] their lead on determining how best to meet the social and economic needs of the families they serve.” Similarly, another respondent wrote about “moving to a place-based investing strategy to let local grantees guide us in priorities with systems and areas that intersect with education.”

These efforts are not limited to early and K-12 learners. One respondent described their initiative “to address the widespread issue of basic needs insecurity among postsecondary students, which includes the lack of essential resources like food, housing, childcare, transportation and mental health services. This initiative seeks to reduce the percentage of students experiencing basic needs insecurity... through a multipronged approach.”



## Funders remain committed to equity while adapting to a changing political environment.

There has been a growing focus among funders in recent years on advancing diversity, equity and inclusion, and the education funding community appears to remain committed to ensuring greater access, opportunity and achievement across all student groups while paying attention to the conditions in education systems that promote or impede this goal.

The current presidential administration has prioritized the eradication of initiatives in government and the private and public sectors that seek to address systemic racism and discrimination and redress longstanding inequities in U.S. society. Through Executive Orders and threats of withholding education funds from states and educational institutions, reducing funding for research and other priorities, the current administration appears to be accessing a range of levers to counter efforts to advance education for the purpose of broad and inclusive social progress.

Findings from Grantmakers for Education's 2025 benchmarking survey reflect changes taking place nationally as a result of political actions from the executive branch. In the latest survey, anti-diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives tied for the top spot among factors respondents considered most likely to have a negative impact on education over the next five years. Just two years earlier, the 2023 benchmarking survey showed diversity, equity and inclusion ranking first among factors respondents identified as having the greatest potential for a positive impact on education over the next five years. One respondent commented, "Anti-[diversity, equity and inclusion] will make schools less safe for diverse children," and another added, "Financial cuts to organizations we care about and possible impact on their free speech around equity will make us double down to protect them. [We are] not sure yet what that means, but it stiffens our resolve to ensure they find a path to meeting their mission."

Political shifts are not the only factors impacting educators. In 2023 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that colleges and universities can no longer use race-based affirmative action in admissions decisions. One in five respondents (20%) indicated that this decision has affected their organization's education grantmaking priorities, strategies and/or decisions. Close to one in eight respondents (12%) indicated that their education grantmaking has been impacted in some way by the Fearless Funds settlement, which resulted in the permanent closing of a grant program intended to benefit Black women-owned small businesses. As a result, "We had to remove a bonus stipend tied to racial diversity from a teacher candidates' tuition support program," shared one respondent.

Many education funders expressed alarm over the ongoing impact of these legal and policy change on higher education. "The SCOTUS-driven end of race-conscious admissions is likely to make elite higher education less diverse (or at least have fewer Black and brown students) over time unless colleges actively work to make their admissions processes more equitable," observed one respondent. Another noted that, "I fear that, without the ability to track, learn from and refine our strategies over time, we may lose the capacity to effectively address the unique needs of different groups." This perspective was reinforced by a respondent who noted, "The anti-[diversity, equity and inclusion] backlash [is damaging] students' sense of belonging on campus and affecting the types of supports students can receive and the staff who will be available...to support them." One respondent described how their organization has "leaned into supporting the field in the wake of this disastrous SCOTUS decision. We have a suite of grants focused on helping the field adjust, e.g., working with cohorts of colleges to help them make their admissions practices more equitable, promoting the end of legacy-based admissions (a deeply unfair admissions practice), funding watchdog groups that are monitoring changes in the demographics of elite institutions, etc."

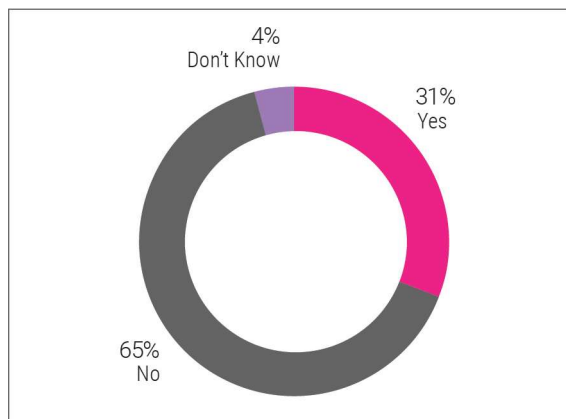
While many education funders will continue to support equity-related initiatives, some have modified the terminology they use to address internal concerns—especially at the board level—as well as avoid public admonition and, potentially, government retribution. Close to one-third (31%) of respondents to the 2025 survey indicated modifying the terminology they use to characterize their activities related to education equity. Among the many examples respondents shared were: “We still say equity but may include words like opportunity, access or belonging depending on who we are speaking with”; “Instead of using the terms diversity, equity and inclusion, we use terms like democracy, egalitarian and justice”; and “We use fairness, which resonates positively with everyone.”

Education funders have long supported improving opportunities for learners least well-served by the educational system—from early learning through post-secondary education and careers. Whether speaking in terms of racial justice, diversity, equity and inclusion or belonging and fairness, findings from the latest survey suggest that education funders will continue to support efforts to ensure strong educational outcomes for all learners. (See Section 2 for more details on how respondents are supporting educational equity.)

## Funders expect artificial intelligence to transform education.

In Grantmakers for Education’s inaugural 2008 benchmarking report, the authors noted that respondents “emphasized the need to keep pace with changes in technology and its impact on education and learning.” Yet, looking back to the more recent 2018 and 2023 benchmarking surveys, no technologies ranked among the leading factors respondents believed might have a positive influence on education. Where technology did appear was on the list of factors respondents considered most likely to have a negative impact on education in coming years—moving up from seventh to fifth place on the negative

Over the past two years, has the terminology your organization uses to describe activities related to education equity changed in any way within your organization or in field-facing communications?



list during this time. This primarily reflected concerns about the indiscriminate use of technology without assessing whether it actually advanced meaningful educational outcomes, compounded by the failure of remote learning during the pandemic to serve younger learners and its role in exacerbating educational inequality.

This changed with the 2025 benchmarking survey, as respondents identified artificial intelligence (AI) as the factor with the greatest potential for a positive impact on education over the next five years. After years of promise, the seemingly sudden proliferation and rapid adoption of AI tools, especially by learners, has focused funders’ attention on the potential for these resources to offer customizable technical support for both students and educators. “This can be a game changer in terms of saving teachers time/creating sustainability for educators,” remarked one respondent, “as well as exponentially increasing opportunities for feedback to students.” Another respondent anticipated the potential for an even more expansive impact stating, “I think AI will upend the traditional learning structure and that there is a lot of potential for the role of educator to be reimagined as a guide rather than sage.”

According to some respondents, AI's greatest potential may be in its ability to support personalized learning. One respondent speculated that "advanced AI tutors could adapt in real-time to each student's pace, learning style and areas of difficulty." Several respondents cited the advantages of AI for serving students with special needs. As a respondent commented, there is an "opportunity to better support personalized learning and more neurodiverse populations." AI may also enhance student advising. "[There is] lots of potential to improve advising and support to students as they navigate the transition into postsecondary education and...while enrolled to complete their degrees."

Consistent with this positive outlook, close to two out of five respondents (39%) indicated providing funding related to the use of AI/technology for learning, up from 33% in the 2023 survey and 14% in the 2018 survey. Moreover, about half (49%) of these funders anticipate increasing their support for this priority over the next two years, while the remainder (51%) expect to hold their giving steady.

Despite expressing genuine optimism for the potential of AI, education funders do not consider it an unqualified benefit to learners or educators. In fact, AI/technology ranked third among factors respondents believe will have the greatest potential for a negative impact on education over the next five years.

With AI among both the top negative and positive factors impacting education in the latest survey, one respondent remarked that AI "has revolutionized the resources available to educators and learners. However, its boundaries in learning environments are still being defined. I believe the question is not whether AI should be used, but how to apply it effectively and teach young learners to exercise discernment when using it. It is both an asset and major challenge." A similar concern was expressed by a respondent who noted, "This field moves so fast it will be difficult to understand negative impacts until it's too late if we aren't trained" to apply ethical standards. Another respondent framed their concerns around the potential for corporate interests to compromise "holistic safety and learning best practices."

## **Strong growth in funding anticipated for a range of priorities.**

Among the 39 issue areas tracked in the 2025 Grantmakers for Education benchmarking survey across early learning, K-12 education, postsecondary education and workforce/career pathways and beyond classrooms and schools, all but one (standards/assessments) showed more funders planning to increase than decrease support over the next two years. For example, roughly half of respondents that currently fund economic and social mobility, intersections between education and other systems (e.g., health, legal/justice, housing, employment), narrative change and the use of technology for learning (including artificial intelligence) are predicting that they will increase their funding. Interestingly, all of these priorities focus beyond classrooms and schools and address aspects of the broader ecosystem that supports learners. Within K-12 education, roughly two-fifths of respondents funding civic engagement/civics education, public school finance/resource inequities and literacy/reading schools anticipated raising their levels of support over the next two years. Similar shares of early learning funders and postsecondary workforce development funders also anticipate growing their support.

# The Role of Technology

**Q Given the rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and commensurate adoption of AI by learners, has your organization made any education grants that include a focus on AI?**

**A** We do not have an AI portfolio or an intentional investment strategy around “technology.” But technology is embedded in many of our investments because it’s part of the world we live in. Many of the programs we support use technology platforms either for teachers or for students.

However, we do support work around digital citizenship. It’s not so much about the technology as a platform but about how you think as a citizen, as a digital citizen in the world. You have technology as a tool and a language and a means of communication, and it requires a different way of thinking about how we engage with and evaluate what we’re encountering.

**Q In what ways has technology been helpful in advancing your priorities?**

**A** As a funder supporting multilingual learning, technology presents itself as a very efficient way of mediating the communication between multilingual families and across families and districts. For example, we have several grantees that have used technology as a means of instant translation and for connecting communications with the curriculum being used in the classroom.

**Q Education funders appear to be both excited about the potential for technology, and especially AI, but also fearful of its unintended consequences. Is there anything education funders should be doing now?**

**A** I worry that foundations are too slow compared to the pace of advances we are seeing on a daily basis. One question that I have is whether foundations are evolving fast enough in their thinking. I’m not saying rush, but we are sometimes not prone to innovation. How do we ensure that we keep pace with the needs of the world? Every technology has its challenges. But I think that it’s worth trying to explore how we can control or manage or understand the technology before the technology advances on us.

## 2 Trends in Philanthropic Practice in Education

Grantmakers for Education benchmarking studies have historically tracked three areas of cross-cutting philanthropic practice, which include supporting public policy-related activities, advancing education equity and establishing and maintaining collaborative relationships. The 2025 edition of the benchmarking report offers an updated examination of education funder engagement in these areas of practice.

### Public Policy

Policymakers at all levels regularly scrutinize the U.S. education system, critiquing its high costs and inconsistent performance. The opportunity to “reform” a highly decentralized system that touches the lives of all Americans can prove appealing to government officials and those seeking office, regardless of political affiliation. The Obama administration, for example, offered numerous competitions, incentives and other initiatives intended to improve educational outcomes. The new presidential administration has adopted a markedly different approach to compel the U.S. educational system to align with its priorities and achieve its education reform goals. Arguably, the federal leadership in education policy has changed course from equity-guided goals to those that prioritize market-based strategies.

In this dramatically changed policy environment, respondents to the latest benchmarking survey ranked federal education policies as the top factor—tied with anti-diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives—they believe will negatively impact education over the next five years. Federal education leadership also ranked as the top negative factor in the 2018 survey but did not appear among the top negative (or positive) factors in the 2023 survey.

Very few respondents to the latest benchmarking survey consider the federal policy environment to be favorable. Just 1% of respondents rated it very favorable and 13% moderately favorable to their organizations’ current priorities—similar to shares reported in Grantmakers for Education’s 2018-2019 benchmarking study. By comparison, close to half (47%) of respondents to the 2023 survey rated the federal policy environment as moderately or very favorable. One respondent predicted that, “The next few years are going to be a wild and probably challenging ride. It feels like we are just starting to dig out of the hole our students fell into during the pandemic. I fear this incoming...administration is going to do serious damage, and student achievement will once again regress.”

Consistent with this finding, survey responses suggest the trend since the latter half of the Obama era toward focusing on state and local policy efforts has been reinforced. Among respondents, a small majority reported a moderately or very favorable policy environment at the state level (54%), while two out of three (65%) considered the policy environment at the local level to be at least moderately favorable.

Among respondents to the 2025 survey, close to three quarters (72%) indicate that they fund policy advocacy, and nearly half (47%) expect to increase this funding over the next two years. Just over half (51%) reported supporting narrative change, up from



38% in the 2023 survey. This suggests that some education funders are exploring new strategies for moving public opinion, which will ultimately factor into public policy considerations.

Survey respondents identified a number of specific public policy-related activities they intend to prioritize in response to the changed policy environment. One respondent anticipates their organization will “lean into supporting partners who work with immigrant

**This suggests that some education funders are exploring new strategies for moving public opinion, which will ultimately factor into public policy considerations.**

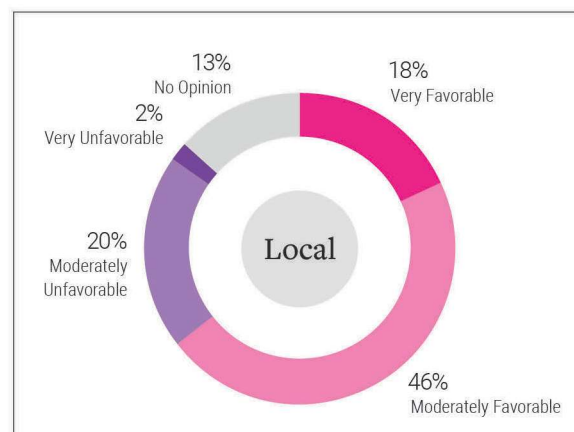
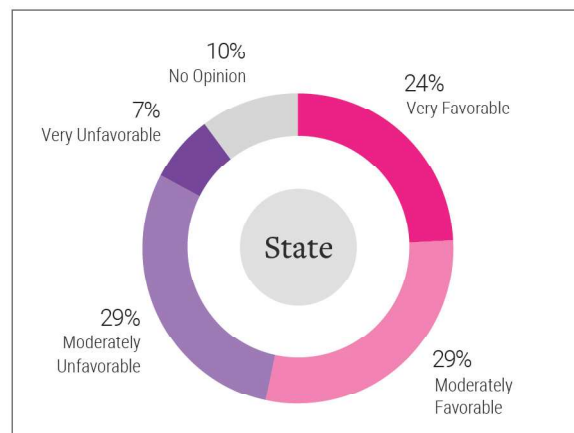
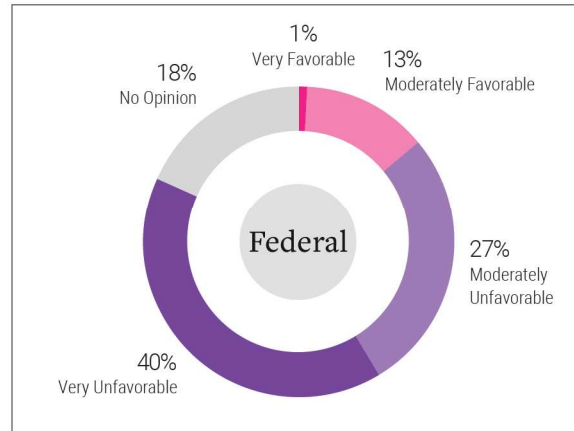
and other marginalized groups [and] support state policymakers to defend current policies.” Another referenced “ensuring communities of color are leading educational policy change and having the resources and capacity to follow through on those policies.” More generally, a respondent emphasized that with the change in administration there will be “a greater burden on educators and supporters of education...to advocate (even harder) for its worthiness of investment.”

## Education Equity

*Findings presented in Section 1 affirmed the funding community’s continuing commitment to advancing education equity based on the latest benchmarking survey. Who they are supporting and how they are providing this support is the focus of the following analysis.*

A substantial majority of respondents to Grantmakers for Education’s 2025 benchmarking survey (82%) indicated having a focus on funding one or more historically underserved populations—regardless of whether they consider their organization to be equity focused. This was down from the 93% share reported in the 2023 survey, although it remained well above the 71% share recorded in the 2018 survey. Going back further, in Grantmakers for Education’s first benchmarking study, published in 2008, the authors noted that respondents explicitly “expressed an urgent need to address persistent racial/ethnic achievement gaps.”

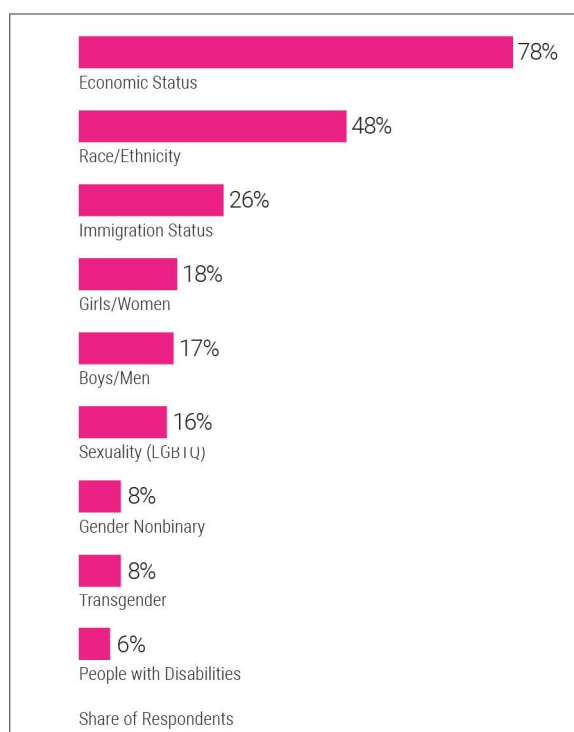
### Favorability of Policy Environment to Supporting Education Policies Consistent with Your Organization’s Current Priorities



Of the specific populations survey respondents support, individuals facing economic disadvantages were most often the focus of respondents (78%), while close to half of respondents (48%) indicated that at least some of their education funding focuses explicitly on ethnic and racial groups. However, both of these shares were lower than those reported in the 2023 survey.

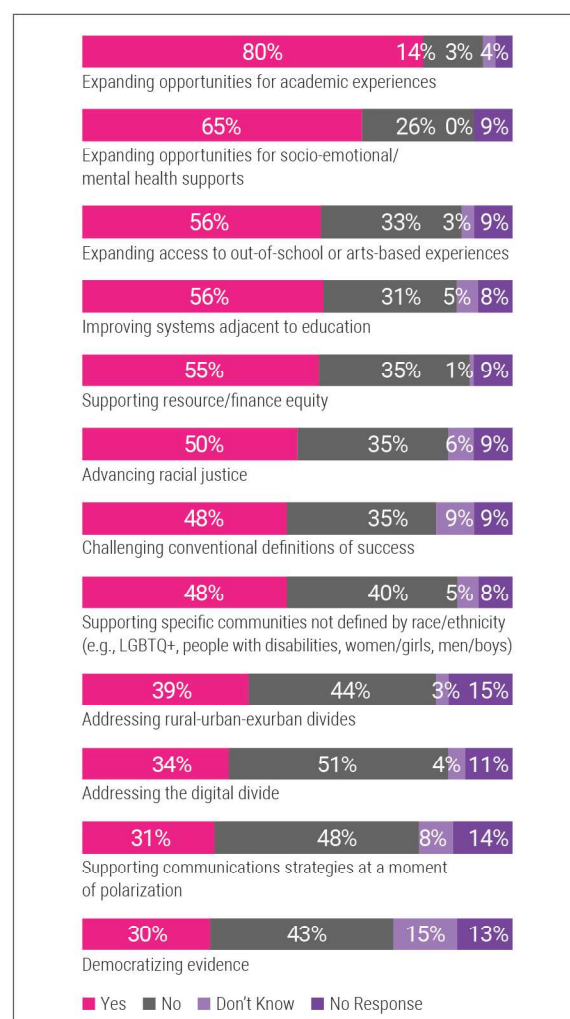
Among those respondents investing in activities that align with increasing educational equity, the largest shares provide support for expanding opportunities for academic experiences (80%) and for socio-emotional/mental health supports (65%). Yet, even among priorities aligned with education equity that account for smaller shares of funders, support is still substantial. For example, three out of ten respondents provide support for communications strategies at a moment of polarization and democratizing evidence, while almost four out of ten specifically address rural-urban-exurban educational divides.

### Population Focus of Education Funding



Whereas funders were once concerned with the demographic representation of their own organizational leadership as well as that of their grantee partners, very few education funders have written policies specifying thresholds for racial/ethnic and gender representation of individuals either within their own operations or among their grantees. For example, less than 10% of respondents have written policies establishing targets for diversity among their own staff and board or applicant/grantee staff or boards. The absence of these specific targets suggests that most equity-focused education funders prioritize advancing equity within educational systems broadly and may be less focused on advancing equity within their own institutions and the organizations they fund.

### Investment in Educational Equity\*



\*Among a total of 80 respondents to this question, 25 indicated that they do not support education equity and three responded "Don't know." However, most of these respondents marked "Yes" to at least one of the educational equity approaches identified.

# Advancing Equity in the Current Environment

**Q Over the past few years, many education funders invested in efforts to advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in their grantmaking, as well as their operations. What have we learned from this experience?**

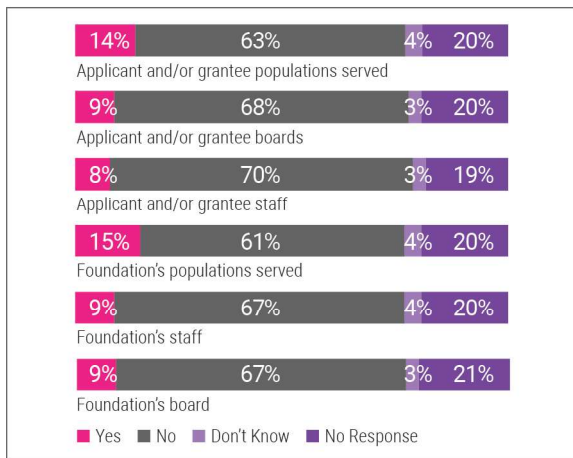
**A** I was trained by a special education teacher. And so my way of thinking about the world was to think about each and every child and then design for whoever the most vulnerable kid in my class was, design my systems around them, differentiate around them. And that's stuck with the way that I think we need to design high school to career pathways. It is deeply equity oriented, and we can continue to do it without actually saying that word "equity." In our collaborations with other funders, we've intentionally grounded our work in more neutral language so it's inviting to a large swath of funders along different dimensions, while staying clear in our shared values around high-quality education experiences for all students.

**Q After embracing DEI in recent years, federal policy has recently shifted to a framing of DEI initiatives as compromising merit-based achievement. How might those seeking to advance equity move forward most effectively in this environment?**

**A** Our focus on education in a majority non-white state naturally gives us opportunities to work on diversity, equity and inclusion without having to say "diversity, equity and inclusion." We haven't explicitly used DEI language even though we're absolutely working on that. Our vision for healthy systems is that when working correctly, they should take care of every person within them. We need systems that will actually take care of all kids. I think it has positioned us in a decent place to react to the current situation. What I'm probably most worried about is that the cities in our state are easy targets. One-in-five public school students in the state are multilingual learners, and many of their families are newcomers and a big target for this administration. They're the kids and families that I'm most worried about and others like our LGBTQ+ kids.

**A** We are lucky to have leadership who are still saying to all staff that diversity, equity, inclusion and justice are core of how we do our work. So, the nature of the work isn't changing. We want to make sure that there's community and individual level impact, and that we work in partnership with community—those closest to the challenges have the solutions. There is not a compromise to merit when we aim for more opportunities for communities to have teachers be representative of their community. We're using that language now rather than just the shorthanded of "teacher diversity" to better articulate how we want to expand opportunity for aspiring teachers. That's part of how we've been navigating this, by making sure it doesn't sound like we're excluding and signaling that it is about having more opportunity. That also resonates for grantee partners, because I think it's how they're also trying to navigate this environment.

## Written Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy Specifying Thresholds for Representation of Diverse Individuals



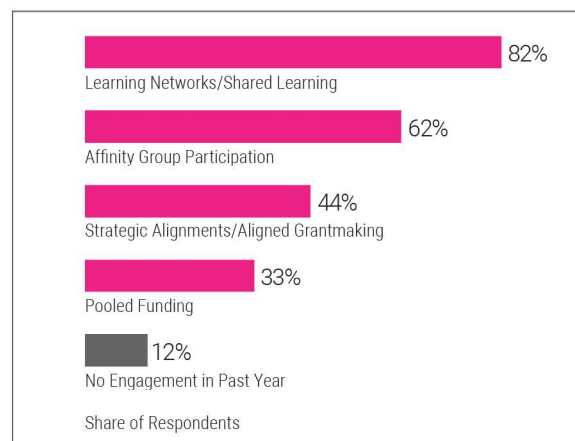
## Collaboration

Consistent with prior benchmarking surveys, the vast majority of respondents (89%) indicate engaging in collaborative efforts with other funders—primarily through learning networks and affinity group participation. Nonetheless, just over half (51%) reported engaging in aligned and/or pooled funding, which generally requires deeper and more consistent collaborative engagement by funders. However, for close to half of respondents (45%), these collaborations represent a very small fraction of their overall education funding (i.e., less than 5%).

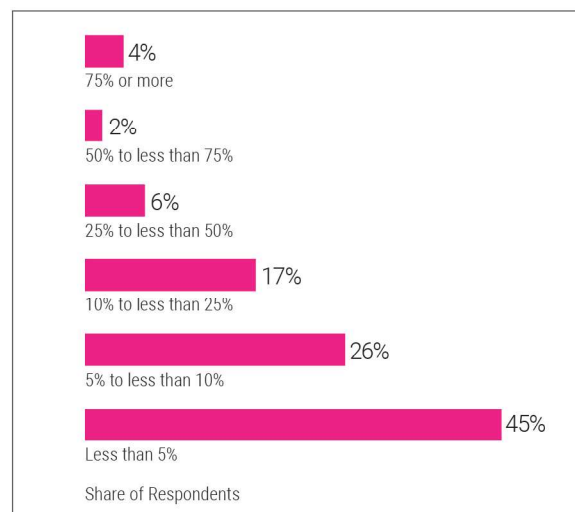
Survey respondents identified a range of factors essential for building a successful collaboration. “Funders must remove ego and ‘turf’ mentality and have a clear, shared vision of work to be conducted and...mission and goals of the collaborative early on,” offered one respondent. Another emphasized the need for “mutual respect, trust, candor and willingness to be as flexible as possible on grant and strategy guidelines.” Also cited as being helpful was having a paid “backbone” consultant to coordinate day-to-day activities of the collaborative.

Even with these elements in place, funder collaboration can be extremely challenging. One respondent concluded that, “It’s hard to have successful collaborations on some issues where a few foundations are seen as dominant.” For smaller funders, “the cost of admission to the collaboration has to be realistic. As a small funder, we can’t spend a lot on affinity groups/collaborations.” More broadly, a respondent remarked that, “The reality is that successful formal collaboration is very rare because people/organizations have preexisting priorities and very few have a mandate to subordinate their organization’s goals to a collective.”

## Education-Related Formal Collaborative Efforts During the Past Year



## Share of Education Funding Representing Aligned and/or Pooled Funding in the Past Year



# 3

## Trends in Education Giving

Grantmakers for Education continues its focus on understanding grantmaking in four areas of the education continuum: early learning, K-12 education, postsecondary education and workforce/career pathways and education initiatives that extend beyond school walls. A majority of respondents fund in more than one of these focus areas, with nearly all respondents targeting at least some of their education support to K-12 education. The following sections highlight overall findings and document key issues identified by respondents.

### Early Learning



#### OUTLOOK

Funder recognition of the critical importance of early learning has grown steadily in recent years and will likely continue to grow in coming years.

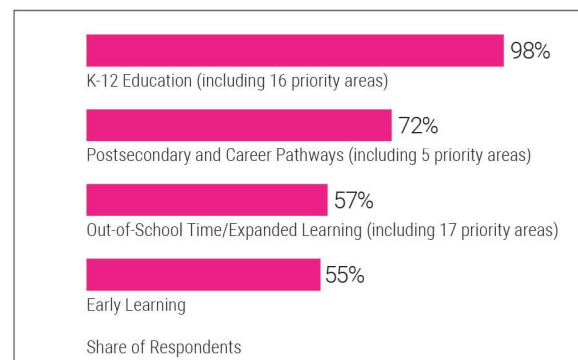
#### MORE FUNDERS INVEST IN EARLY LEARNING

More than half of respondents (55%) indicated that they provide funding for early childhood education. This share was up from 47% in the 2023 survey and 33% in the 2018 survey. Early learning also ranked second among the factors respondents identified as having the greatest potential for a positive impact on education over the next five years. By comparison, early childhood education did not appear among the top 10 positive factors identified in the 2023 survey.

Increasing numbers of funders have begun supporting early learning because, as one respondent noted, it “ensures young people are better prepared to enter the K-12 system and thrive.” While the role of early childhood education has been repeatedly

validated, in the period 2005 to 2022, approximately 60% of children in low-income households did not attend preschool. Disparities in access by race and ethnicity also persist, establishing patterns that are then reinforced in later educational environments. “We are working to address gaps in the systems, as well as work on early intervention,” concluded another respondent. “For those reasons, we believe we can have the greatest long-term impact through investments in the early childhood.”

#### 2025 Funding for Early Learning, K-12 Education, Out-of-School Time and Postsecondary Education





# The Case for Early Childhood Education

**Q Early childhood education (ECE) has always been an important priority for education funders. Why might it be of especially strong importance now?**

**A** There's a ton of evidence that investment in very young children—which really means investment in parents, educators and the other caregivers who support them—will disproportionately enhance their lifelong development. A one-year child development grant means billions of new neural connections just within a single child. As the federal landscape shifts, it's particularly important for funders to come together locally and nationally. At a national level, we have to stand up to threats against the Department of Education, Medicaid, Head Start and other critical programs that support underserved young children. Locally, relatively small grants can shore up early education providers, allowing funders to meaningfully “stand in the gap” no matter how the political winds are blowing.

**Q How have approaches to ECE been evolving in recent years?**

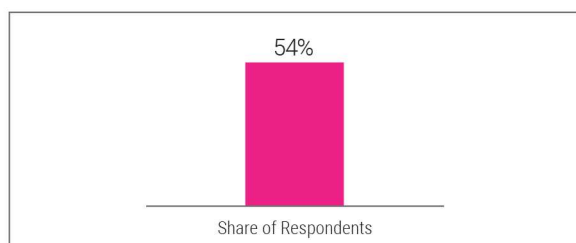
**A** Early childhood approaches have been working to more explicitly integrate racial equity and inclusion of children with disabilities into their programs. This is work we have funded across many different curricular approaches and something funders will need to champion as anti-DEI efforts continue at the federal level. Funders may need to consider actions outside of our typical lanes, including supporting lawsuits, stepping up advocacy within our C3 and C4 parameters, direct engagement with media and actively supporting partners to engage in grassroots mobilization. For example, we are encouraging our partners to participate in the National Day Without Childcare, and we will amplify their efforts through media outreach.

**Q The COVID-19 pandemic impacted all aspects of the educator workforce, especially in the ECE field. Have programs rebounded from the staffing shortages of the pandemic?**

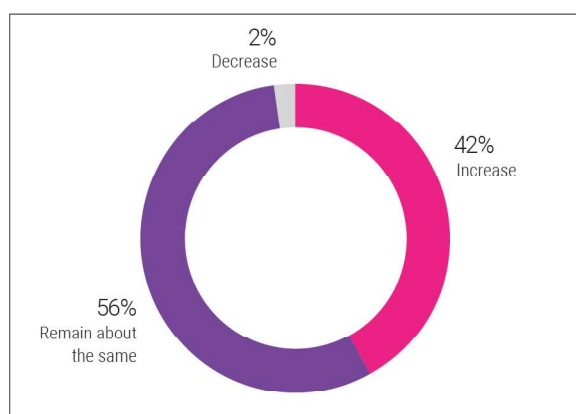
**A** I wish we could say that programs have rebounded, but that would paint too rosy a picture. Programs that survived the pandemic did so with fewer educators, and those that remained were even more stressed than they had been before the pandemic, when burnout was already an enormous problem. I had a conversation recently with two incredible leaders of “ideal” learning programs. Both acknowledged this moment is incredibly hard but also expressed that their programs are built for resilience, and that's all about strong relationships and socioemotional development. Anecdotally, we have heard that programs like these do a much better job of retaining teachers because the work environment is less stressful and more supportive of their development. In these ideal learning programs, human development is supported across the lifespan.

Several respondents identified early childhood education as being one of the most underfunded education priorities, often due to political factors. One respondent observed that from their perspective early learning has “been batted around by the culture wars in our political context.” Another respondent tied the political challenge to the cost of quality programs saying, “There is an ongoing tension between access and quality...investing in upskilling and compensation to the level needed to sustain current early childhood access has a high price tag that has not been feasible to talk about politically.” Challenges in funding may also reflect a misunderstanding of early learning “as baby-sitting [and] not as a critical time for development,” posited a third respondent.

### 2025 Funding for Early Learning



### Anticipated Change in Early Learning Funding Over the Next Two Years



## K-12 Education



### OUTLOOK

In an uncertain political environment, civic engagement will benefit from increased support.



### OUTLOOK

Funders will continue to prioritize teacher training and development to strengthen the workforce and better prepare for 21st Century learners.



### OUTLOOK

School choice support will hold steady but is unlikely to grow as a priority among education funders.

## TEACHER PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT REPRESENTS A TOP PRIORITY

Reflecting the essential role of teachers in the educational process, as well as the ongoing shortage of qualified teachers, close to two-thirds (64%) of funders for K-12 education supported teacher preparation and development—surpassing all other K-12 priorities. One-third of these funders (33%) anticipate increasing their support for this priority over the next two years. “I believe that teacher preparation and development has the greatest potential for long-term impact based on the continuous feedback we’ve received from both scholars and practitioners,” said one respondent.

Respondents identified the teacher shortage as one of the top 10 factors or trends with a potential negative impact on education over the next five years and cited a variety of causes. “The idea that schools and students are failing [has been] weaponized to the extent that we are struggling to attract highly qualified young people into the teaching profession,” observed one respondent. Another noted that, when “speaking with other local funders, they have reported the most underfunded areas in education to be teacher and school staff certification and development...Funders have historically primarily focused on the students

rather than the teachers and adults providing education.” To address this shortage, respondents suggested approaches such as “removing barriers to teacher licensure for educators of color” and developing “homegrown teacher programs, [as] rural areas cannot get folks to move” there.

Ensuring that teacher training can serve evolving learner needs also represented a priority for respondents. “The profession and how we train teachers to teach will need to change to meet the current needs of students and prepare them for the careers and futures of tomorrow,” concluded one respondent. This was in line with another respondent who remarked, “teacher preparation programs need to evolve to better equip teachers for current students’ social context: social media, misinformation [and] mental health.”

### SCIENCE OF READING INCREASES SUPPORT FOR LITERACY/READING SKILLS

In the 2025 survey, three out of five respondents (60%) indicated providing support for reading and other literacy skills, up from 53% in the 2023 survey. Moreover, a substantial share of these funders (41%) anticipate increasing their support for this priority over the next two years. According to respondents, Literacy/Science of Reading ranked among the top potentially positive factors impacting education over the next five years, suggesting this is a major contributor to the upward trend. As one respondent said, “Science of reading—it’s time we teach kids to read by third grade.” Interestingly, improving student literacy was also flagged as a top priority for education funders in the original 2008 benchmarking study.

### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT/CIVICS EDUCATION ATTRACTS MORE INVESTMENT

Reflecting years of increasing politicization of the educational system, funders appear to be supporting efforts to shore up educational and other civic institutions. The share of respondents supporting civic engagement in their education strategies rose from 39% to 46% between the 2023 and 2025 surveys,

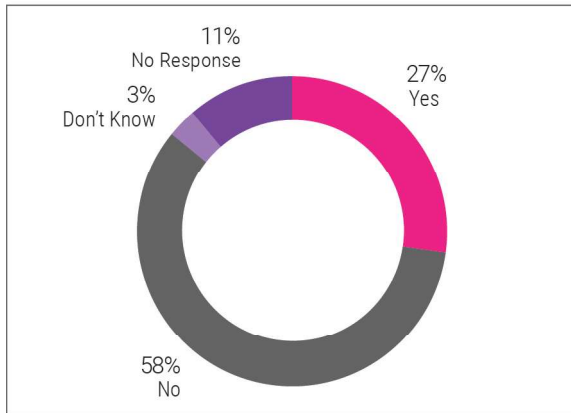
Interestingly, improving student literacy was also flagged as a top priority for education funders in the original 2008 benchmarking study.

and 44% of these respondents expect to increase their funding. “Our focus on civics education [prepares] young people with the knowledge, skills, dispositions and agency to actively participate in their communities and uphold democratic principles,” commented one respondent. “These tandem areas of investment hold promise to prepare young people to be meaningfully engaged in society.” Another respondent was more pointed in their concern that, “The current political landscape of the U.S., [including] rhetoric of divisiveness and positions/stances of nationalism, are fundamentally detrimental to growth, knowledge-sharing and engaged citizenship...an important outcome of public education.”

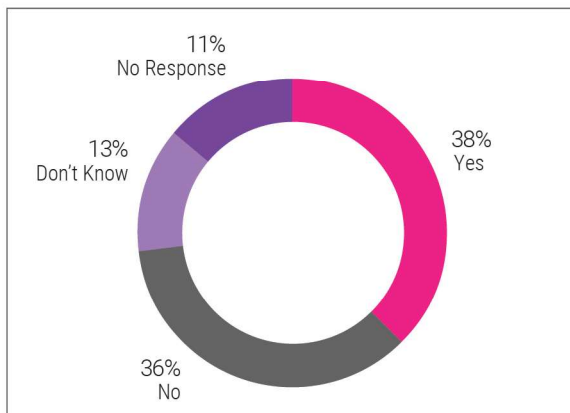
### DEFINITIONS OF SYSTEM REDESIGN AND TRANSFORMATION VARY WIDELY

Among respondents to the 2025 survey, close to half (46%) indicate providing support for education system redesign or system transformation. Yet how education funders are defining and distinguishing between these terms suggest a lack of unanimity on their meanings and implications. Based on open-ended responses, definitions of systems redesign included “moving away from an industrialized model” to “profound reshaping of standards, curricula, assessments and coursework” to “removing barriers through change in policy or practice for the purpose of increasing student success.” Definitions of system transformation ranged from “policy changes/funding shifts that align with a future desired state” to “collective impact bringing all the parties to the table (K-12, [higher education], workforce, non-profits)” to “rather than merely redesigning a system of education, transformation is a complete overhaul and reimagining of a system of education.” Perhaps reflecting the lack of definitional consensus or clarity among funders, one respondent concluded that these are “overused terms that lack the specificity to be helpful.”

### Does your organization fund education system redesign?



### Does your organization fund education system transformation?



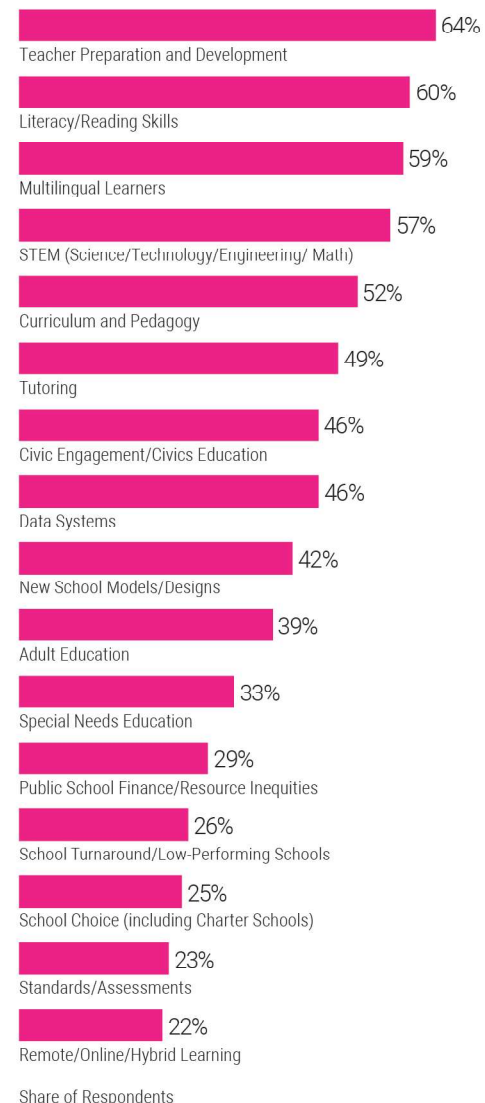
### TUTORING SHOWS MARKED JUMP IN SUPPORT

Reflecting a strong focus on personalized learning, almost half of respondents to the 2025 survey (49%) indicated providing support for tutoring, up dramatically from 29% in the 2023 survey. This may reflect in part the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learners, which resulted in widespread learning loss, especially for historically under-resourced communities. Interestingly, while tutoring has typically been guided by educators, several respondents expressed enthusiasm for the potential for AI to provide personalized tutoring support. “This could help close achievement gaps and ensure no student gets left behind or held back,” posited a respondent.

### SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL CHOICE REMAINS UNCHANGED

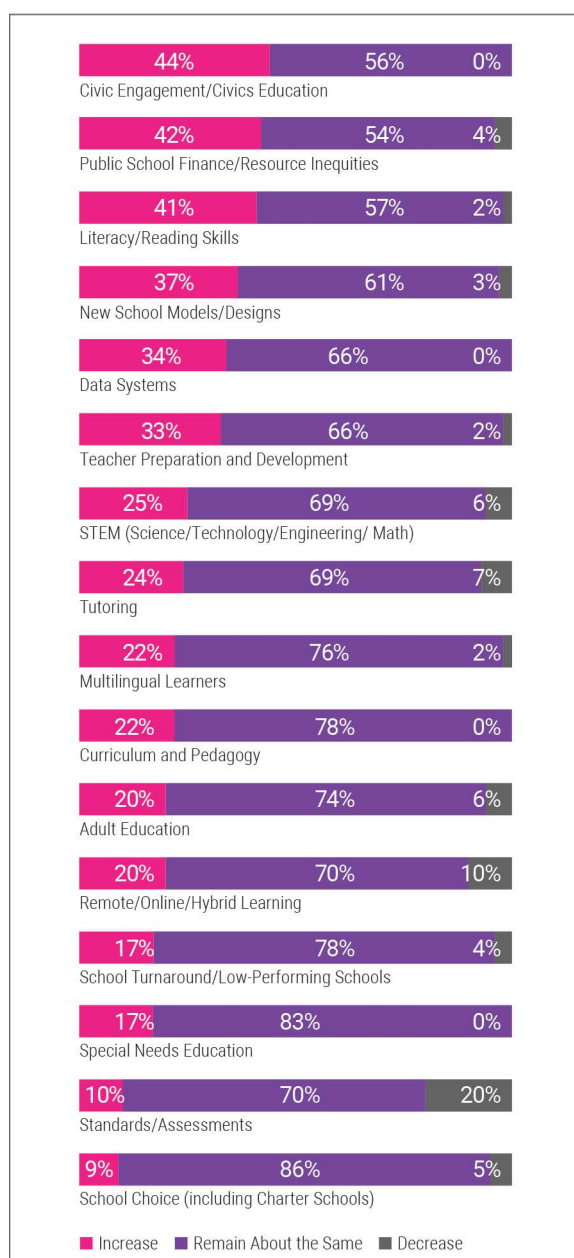
Despite continued policymaker and public attention to efforts to allow increased government support and public funding for charter schools and school vouchers, only a modest and stable share of education funders support these efforts. While close to half of respondents to the first Grantmakers for Education benchmarking survey in 2008 funded charter schools, in the latest survey one-quarter of respondents (25%) reported supporting school choice, including charter schools, unchanged from the 2023

### 2025 Funding for K-12 Education



survey. And among these respondents only 9% anticipated increasing their funding over the next two years. Nonetheless, for these funders, their commitment to school choice remains strong. As one respondent remarked, “Charter schools can provide higher academic outcomes for low-income students and are open to all students.”

### Anticipated Change in K-12 Education Funding Over the Next Two Years



On the other side, school privatization ranked among the top factors respondents identified as having a negative potential impact on education over the past five years. One respondent expressed that they are “very concerned about funding for public schools [in our state], which are experiencing higher concentrations of economically disadvantaged students coupled with serious political pressure to expand choice vouchers that will undermine enrollment at traditional schools and in all likelihood resegregate schools.” Another respondent worried that “universal vouchers will redefine what public education will be. It will become a system of those who couldn’t get out...Instead of no child left behind, it will be ‘these are those left behind.’”

### Postsecondary Education and Workforce/Career Pathways



#### OUTLOOK

Postsecondary funders continue to prioritize workforce/career pathways, and support is likely to continue growing in coming years.

### FUNDERS STAND BY COMMITMENT TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ACCESS AND COMPLETION

Recognizing the well-documented benefits of postsecondary education on lifetime financial outcomes and wellbeing, two out of three respondents to the 2025 benchmarking survey (65%) reported funding postsecondary access for historically marginalized students. Despite the 2023 Supreme Court ruling against the use of race-based affirmative action in admissions decisions and the threat of attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives by the new presidential administration, this share was up from 58% in the 2023 survey. One respondent observed that this funding is critical for “expand[ing] access to equitable learning opportunities for students who exist at the intersection of education and economic insecurity.”



Another major impediment to matriculating to postsecondary education is cost. Overall, two out of five respondents funding for postsecondary and career pathways (40%) focus on affordability and improving the financial aid process. “I believe that affordability of the four-year university experience is perhaps the most critical education need right now,” concluded one respondent. “While many students are enrolling directly into two-year colleges, many do it for affordability reasons due to the high price of a four-year degree.” Another made the case for increasing financial aid for low-income students to “bridge the gap between what they can afford to pay for college and what they are expected to pay for college. For example, rural students tend to live in educational deserts that require them to leave home to obtain a degree, which means they are more likely to incur more non-tuition expenses than their urban peers and need increased financial support.”

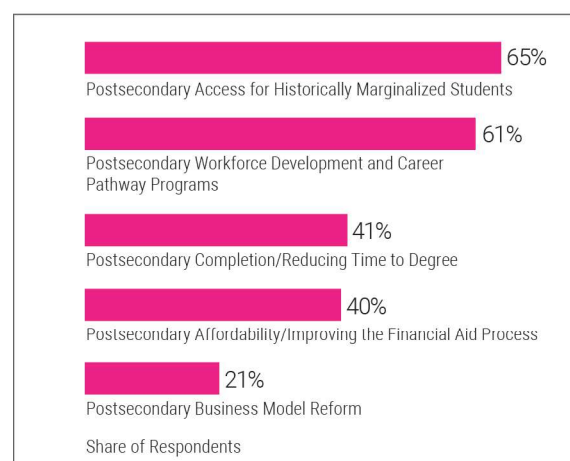
Finally, postsecondary degrees become valuable upon graduation, and just over two out of five respondents (41%) specifically support postsecondary completion and reducing the time it takes to complete a degree. Moreover, almost one-third (31%) of these respondents expected to increase their funding for this priority over the next two years.

### ESTABLISHING CAREER PATHWAYS RANKS AMONG TOP FUNDER PRIORITIES

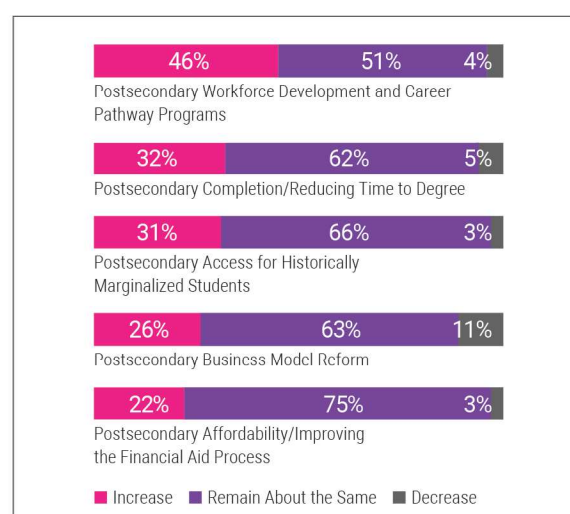
Among respondents to the latest benchmarking survey, three out of five (61%) funded workforce development and career pathway programs, up from 55% in the 2023 survey. Supporting pathways for careers after college also ranked among the top factors respondents identified as having a positive potential impact on education over the next five years. As one respondent remarked, “We believe our investments in postsecondary pathways will sustain ripple effects on job security, class, intergenerational financial health [and] allowing under-resourced students to be supported in achieving a livable wage...”

Over the next two years, close to half (46%) of respondents that fund postsecondary workforce development and career pathway programs anticipate increasing their funding for this priority. This far surpassed the shares reported for other postsecondary education priorities and appears to reflect a growing appreciation among education funders for how learners are embedded within and need to be connected to and supported by larger systems. Consistent with this observation, one respondent noted how they have “witnessed an evolution from

### 2025 Funding for Postsecondary and Career Pathways



### Anticipated Change in Postsecondary and Career Pathways Funding Over the Next Two Years



college access to success, and more recently, to career preparation and launch...We are pleased to see more partners focusing on the entire education pipeline, support young people as they transition into their first careers.”

## Beyond Classrooms and Schools



### OUTLOOK

A majority of funders recognize that student success in the classroom requires families and communities that also thrive.



### OUTLOOK

Student voice is increasingly seen as an essential element of educational decision making.

## WHOLE LEARNER APPROACHES RETAIN STRONG SUPPORT

Since the mid-2010s, education funders have increasingly reported embracing whole learner approaches to supporting the nation’s K-12 students. Overall, more than four out of five 2025 survey respondents (83%) provide funding for one or more priorities consistent with the whole learner approach. As noted earlier (see Section 1), the share of funders supporting family and community engagement alone jumped from 60% to 70%, while the share of funders targeting community schools and wraparound supports grew slightly to 62% and support for health, including mental health, held roughly steady.

The only exception to the overall growth in support for the whole learner approach was the share of funders supporting social and emotional learning, which decreased from 62% in the 2023 survey to 54% in the 2025 survey. This occurred despite several respondents explicitly emphasizing the need for more investment including: “Kids are still catching up from pandemic social regressions, [and] our school staff will be more effective when they are trained and

supported in supporting the needs of students”; “Social, emotional and mental health support is still under the radar as a factor in school success”; and “Social emotional learning in rural communities [is] underfunded due to the limited number of funders in rural areas.”

## STUDENT VOICE GROWS IN IMPORTANCE

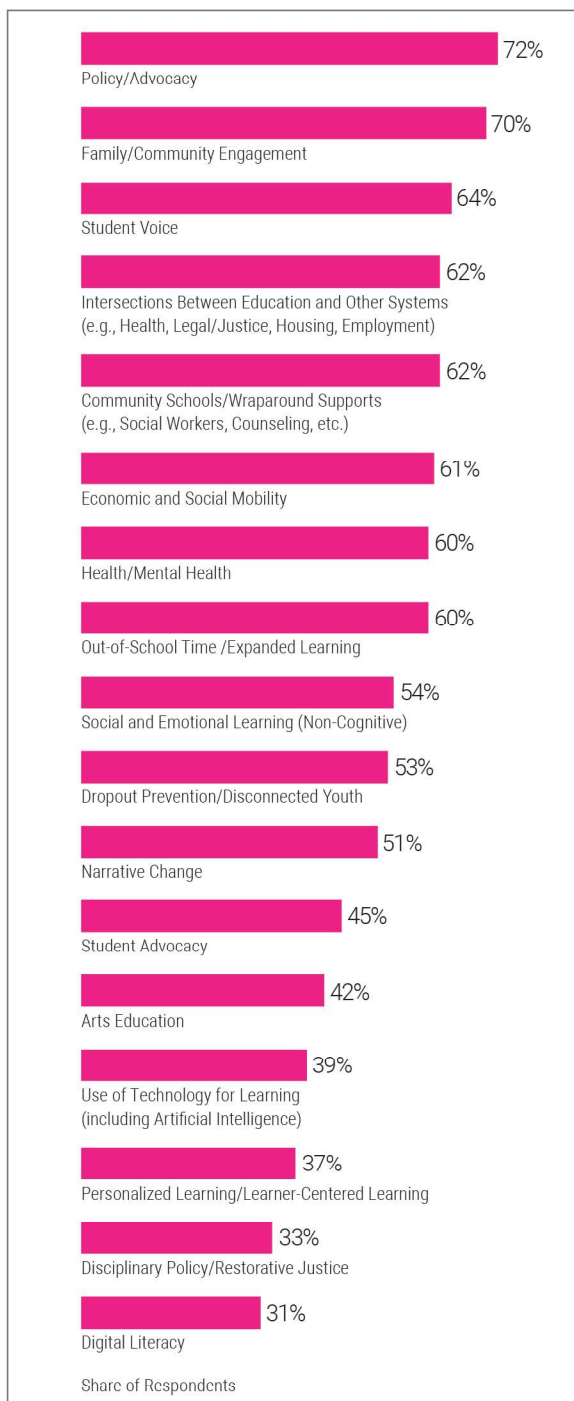
Funders’ commitment to actively engaging student perspectives in educational decisionmaking has continued to climb in recent years. In the 2025 survey, nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) indicated that they provide support for student voice initiatives, up from 57% in the 2023 survey. Close to one-third of these funders (31%) expect to increase their funding for this priority over the next two years. One respondent explicitly called out the need for “school environments that are student voice inclusive.”

Student voice can be equally important at the post-secondary level. “Much of higher education financing and policy is set at the federal level, and affordability remains a key challenge...We are hearing from a number of policy partners that including student voice/advocacy in policy efforts is more important than ever now.”

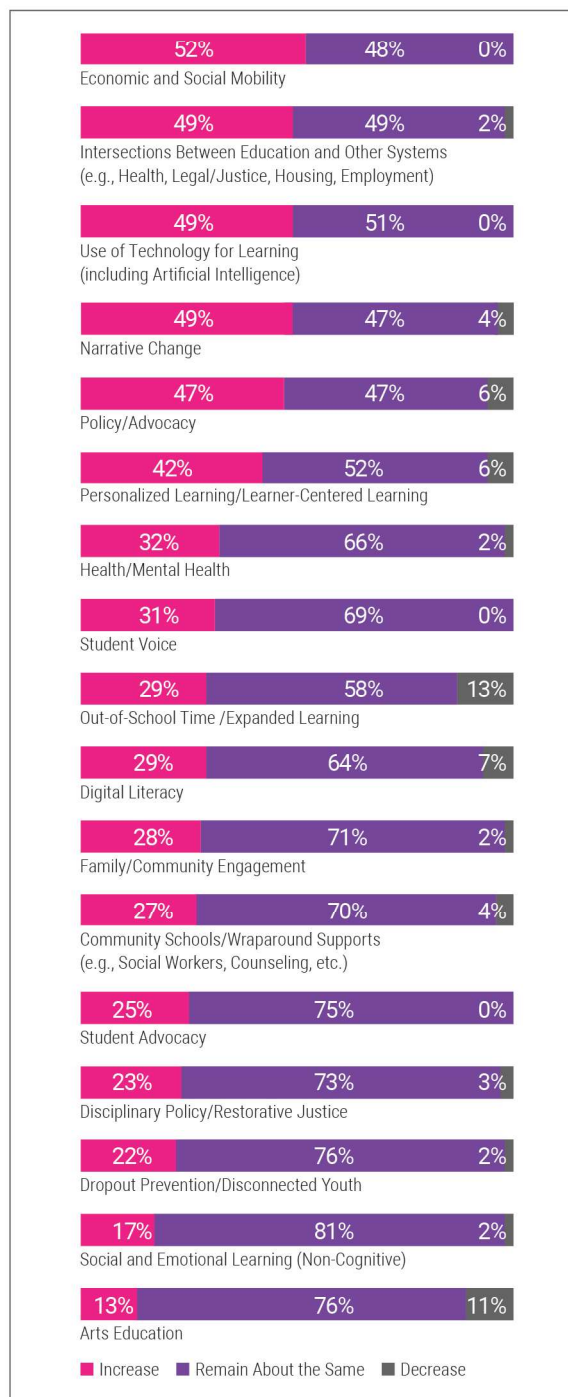
## PERSONALIZED LEARNING SHOWS MIXED SUPPORT

In the 2025 benchmarking survey, 37% of respondents reported providing support for personalized learning and learner-centered instruction. This share was down notably from the 48% share recorded in the 2023 survey. Nonetheless, among those funders supporting personalized learning, more than two out of five (42%) expect to increase their support. Moreover, as noted in the analysis of support for K-12 education, the share of respondents supporting tutoring—a form of personalized learning—jumped from 29% to 49% between 2023 and 2025.

## 2025 Funding Beyond Classrooms and Schools



## Anticipated Change in Funding Beyond Classrooms and Schools Over the Next Two Years



## **FUNDERS RAMP UP FUNDING FOR NARRATIVE CHANGE**

Ensuring strong, ongoing support for education requires consistent bipartisan political support and actively countering efforts to politicize and divide public opinion on education. Evidence from the latest survey suggests that funders are increasingly embracing the importance of narrative change in countering divisive rhetoric and policies. Overall, just over half (51%) of respondents to the 2025 survey reported providing support for narrative change, up markedly from 38% in the 2023 survey. Almost half of these respondents (49%) anticipate increasing their support for narrative change over the next two years. One respondent noted that “the data is there” on the value of narrative change work, but “shifting mindsets is work that is often undervalued.” (For additional perspective on the role of narrative change in education, see the Funder Q&A on The Potential of Narrative Change.)

## **MORE FUNDERS FOCUS ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME**

Three out of five respondents to the 2025 survey (60%) provide support for mentoring, enrichment and recreational activities occurring outside of regular school hours, up from 54% in the 2023 survey. Actual grant dollars supporting out-of-school time (OST) will likely grow over the next two years, with 29% of these funders anticipating higher levels of giving and a far lower 13% projecting a decrease in support. “80% of a child’s time is spent outside of school,” noted one respondent, “and OST has the flexibility that public school days may not.”

# The Potential of Narrative Change

**Q The concept of narrative change—reframing concepts and experiences in ways that enable fresh perspectives and insights—has received increased attention in recent years. To what extent is narrative change a priority for your organization?**

**A** Our narrative strategy focuses on supporting the infrastructure for narrative change that will activate support for an equitable and accessible multilingual education system. We are focused on both the supply and demand: Narratives should support the systems-change we need to see in our education system to increase the number of multilingual education programs and number of multilingual educators. In addition, narratives also need to build demand among parents for these programs. It can't be just one or the other.

An essential way to do this is through narrative change—telling our stories and making the case for why MLL is beneficial for all learners, and especially MLLs. And through our narrative change work we're setting the terms of the conversation. Because if we're only responding to the opposition, as good and accurate as our responses may be, we're unintentionally reinforcing their narratives. By creating a different narrative framework, we don't give energy to theirs.

**Q How closely does narrative change align with public policy-related activities?**

**A** The time to advocate is right now, and we feel like narrative change more than ever is the type of work that's needed. An executive order just made English the official language of the United States. There's an English-dominant mindset, combined with the fact that many multilingual learners are immigrants and often students of color. On the surface, the issue is about multilingualism. But once you get deeper into it, it's about racism and immigration and equity of resources.

What is giving me hope is that this is long-term work, longer than one administration. So, the new narrative we're developing can contribute toward different outcomes in the future. This type of narrative change work has the ability to influence public policy in such a vast and diverse way locally, statewide and nation-wide.

**Q From your perspective, which aspects of the current education system are most in need of narrative change? Where are the greatest disconnects between public perceptions and your understanding of what is happening?**

**A** The biggest challenge in education is the "zero sum" mindset, where people feel that a focus on one group, like multilingual learners, means a loss for another group. It can be perceived as, if we do this for the multilingual learners, maybe other student groups aren't getting this. Narrative change can help shift us from a zero-sum mindset to one of solidarity and abundance. But it requires education equity advocates to come together, realizing we are stronger together. A gain for one group should be seen as a gain for all groups. How can foundations support this type of solidarity across advocates?

What I think is problematic is for 50 foundations to be doing narrative change that's not talking to each other. There's a lot of interest among funders in narrative change, so we need to figure out how we can all come together to ensure coherence and alignment with the narrative work. Regardless of what a foundation's narrative focus is, I think it will often come back to racism and equity of resources so there's an opportunity to use narrative as a way to bring foundations and advocates together in a deeper way.

We support many organizations focused beyond multilingual learners. We want to include organizations concerned with racial justice or education justice or immigration or other adjacent topics so they can all talk together and figure out how we shift our narratives toward solidarity and abundance.



## 4

# Looking Ahead: The Right to Full and Fair Education

Prior editions of *Trends in Education Philanthropy* included an extensive series of questions for education funders to consider touching on topics ranging from how to combat false dichotomies between academic learning and social and emotional development to what can philanthropy learn from other sectors? While all of the questions posed continue to be worthy of consideration, one seems particularly salient to the current moment:

*How can funders empower learners, families, communities, system leaders and policymakers to protect the right all students have to receive an education that prepares them to be fully informed and meaningful contributors to society?*

Education in the United States has long represented an opportunity ladder, a space for inquiry and human development, a source of innovation and a beacon of self-actualization, achievement, agency and mobility. The educational system at all levels has also perpetuated inequity as long as it has existed—a fact that several editions of this report have shown most education funders recognize and are seeking to redress.

There is a great deal on the line for learners of all ages and education leaders at all levels. How equity can advance in a political environment marked by attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion, sanitizing of the uglier elements of the nation's history in curricula and even plans to track down undocumented learners at their schools remains to be seen. The experience of learners across the 50 states and individual communities within those states may diverge even more reflecting these factors, as well as differing levels of investment in public schools versus private schooling arrangements, unequal levels of protection for students with disabilities,

LGBTQ+ individuals, immigrant learners and other historically vulnerable communities, the introduction of religion into curricula and a range of other factors. To imagine, resource and shape a future where a civil rights agenda for education is universally embraced, philanthropy must work alongside young people, families, communities, system leaders, policymakers and other education partners.

**There is a great deal on the line for learners of all ages and education leaders at all levels.**

The education funding community cannot be passive during this unprecedented time and expect to be satisfied with the shape of the educational system when the next Grantmakers for Education benchmarking survey arrives. Whether working in collaboration with others or individually, education funders must actively make the case to policymakers and the public for why an educational system that reflects the experiences of all learners and provides the means for them to achieve excellence is a fundamental right and essential to the success of our nation.

Education funders are influenced by demographic and cultural shifts, new technologies, innovative approaches to enhancing education and their longstanding desire to ensure that all people have the opportunity to learn, lead and live to their full potential. How funders respond using all of the means at their disposal—grants, policy engagement, convening and collaboration and more—will be the essential question to explore going forward. *For those who may be seeking a partner in this endeavor, Grantmakers for Education is here to work alongside you.*

# Reflection Questions

- The education funding community has yet to coalesce around a specific strategy for strengthening learners' support systems. Could there be greater and more sustained impact in this effort if the many disconnecting investments shared tactics and approaches?
- Will an increased willingness among funders to follow the lead of communities in determining how best to strengthen the support system surrounding learners ultimately lead to greater willingness to support the priorities of educators in those communities?
- How can funders most effectively advance education equity in the current environment? Will their efforts need to evolve in this context to have impact? And will changing the terms used to describe equity-related activities assist or impede longstanding efforts to advance education equity?
- Technology has long shown mixed impacts in learning environments, with MOOCs and other forms of remote learning arguably underperforming expectations. How might AI be different and what are the efforts education funders can invest in now to ensure this new technology proves both useful to learners and educators and is in no way harmful to learning environments?
- Often discussed is the tension between the efficiency aims and equity ideals that educators and funders surface in their considerations of the benefits of AI and other generative technologies in teaching and learning. How can education funders ensure that equity and efficiency can mutually serve as pillars in this work?
- Will the current environment make your organization more or less likely to support education-related public policy activities? How committed would your organization be to supporting policy engagement without the potential for clearly defined impact?
- In what ways is or could your organization be public policy aware and/or engaged separate from funding public policy or advocacy-related activities? What could be the implications of this type of engagement for your organization's long-term grantmaking goals?
- Which area(s) of education giving deserve greater examination in the near-term?
- What other dimensions of philanthropic practice in education that should be studied or examined moving forward, in addition to practice related to public policy, education equity and collaboration?
- Given trends in collaboration that lean away from pooled funds, is more formal funding collaboration a worthwhile pursuit to meaningfully and successfully address the needs of today's learners and learning systems?

## APPENDIX A:

# Methodology

*Trends in Education Philanthropy: Benchmarking 2025* provides timely analyses and insights on the current and future priorities of U.S. education funders. The findings in this report are based on survey responses representing a cross-section of U.S. education funders. Respondents included 97 grantmaking organizations, 55 of which are members of Grantmakers for Education. The organization conducted this online-only survey from late-December 2024 through mid-February 2025, with most participants responding in early to mid-January. It was distributed to 240 Grantmakers for Education members (23% response rate) and 469 other education funders identified by the organization (9% response rate).

Consistent with all prior Grantmakers for Education benchmarking surveys, respondents to the 2025 survey account for only a small fraction of the thousands of U.S. foundation, corporate and other private funders of education and do not constitute a representative sample. Therefore, findings may be suggestive of trends but should not be considered conclusive. In addition, the survey closed within the first weeks of the new presidential administration, and most respondents completed their surveys before that time. Therefore, findings are reflective of expectations and anticipations of the potential impact of the executive branch on education and philanthropy.

Of the 97 organizations responding to the 2025 Grantmakers for Education benchmarking survey, 49 organizations (51%) also responded to the 2023 survey. Comparisons with earlier benchmarking studies are generally limited to broad trends, with occasional references to changes in shares of funders. As the size and composition of survey samples has changed with each study, distributions presented in each benchmarking study are in general not directly comparable.

## RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

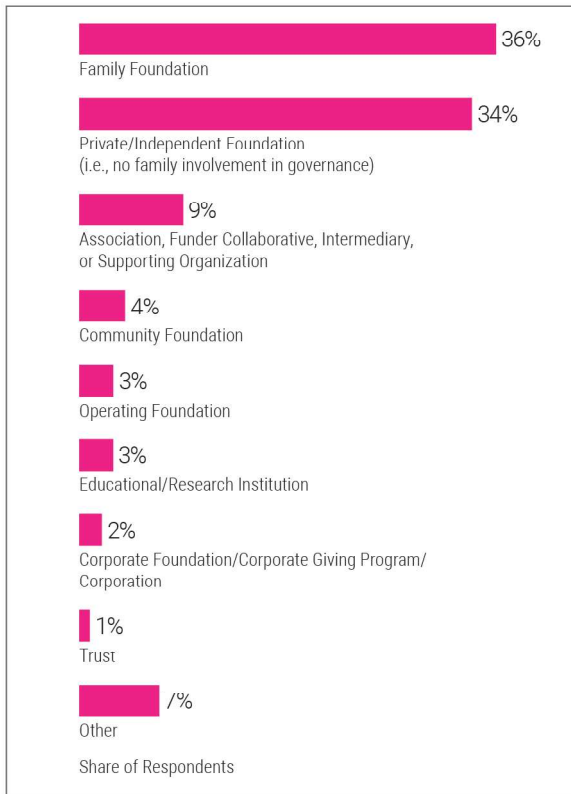
Seven out of ten 2025 benchmarking survey respondents (70%) identify as family or private/independent foundations. A majority of respondents (63%) fund at the local level, while just over two-fifths (42%) fund at the state and national level. More than one-quarter of respondents (29%) explicitly fund in large, urban communities, while less than one-quarter (24%) focus on rural communities. By recipient focus, the largest share of respondents funds elementary/secondary educational institutions, followed by postsecondary educational institutions and early learning organizations.

The 84 respondents who included information on their grants budgets provided education funding totaling just over \$690 million in their latest fiscal year. More than two-fifths of respondents (43%) gave 75% of their total funding for education-related priorities. The median amount awarded for education by Grantmakers for Education members was \$5 million, compared to \$2 million for non-member respondents.

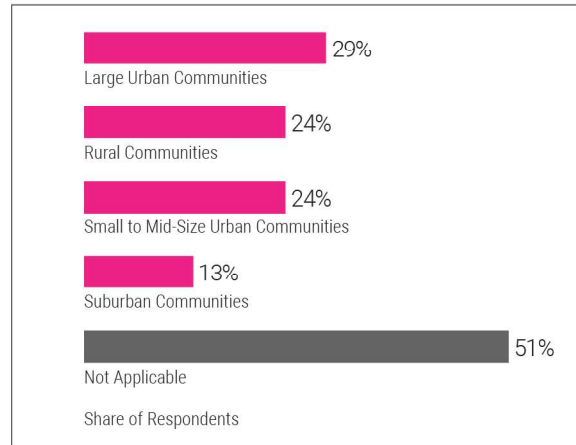
## ISSUE AREAS TRACKED

The 2025 benchmarking survey tracked education funding across 39 specific issue areas. Grantmakers for Education consolidated or dropped a few categories of funding included in the previous 2023 survey, reflecting the evolving priorities of education funders. The organization also added several issue areas to the 2025 survey to capture new and more nuanced directions in the field, such as Economic and Social Mobility.

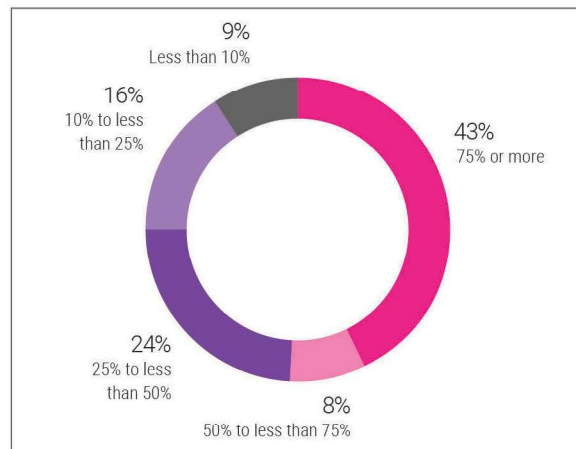
## Type of Education Funder



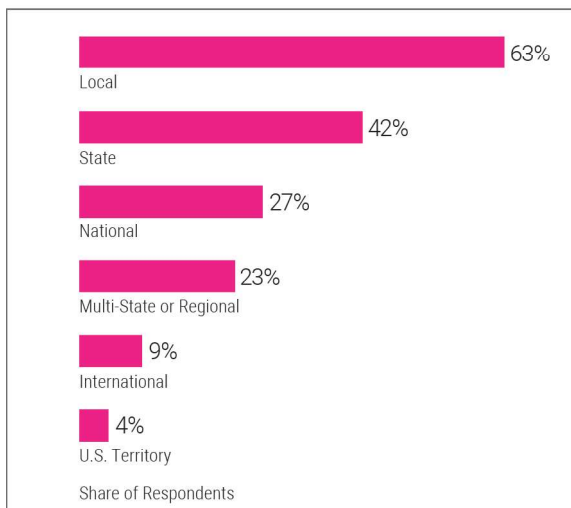
## Community Focus of Education Funding



## Share of Total Grants Budget Supporting Education



## Geographic Focus of Education Funding

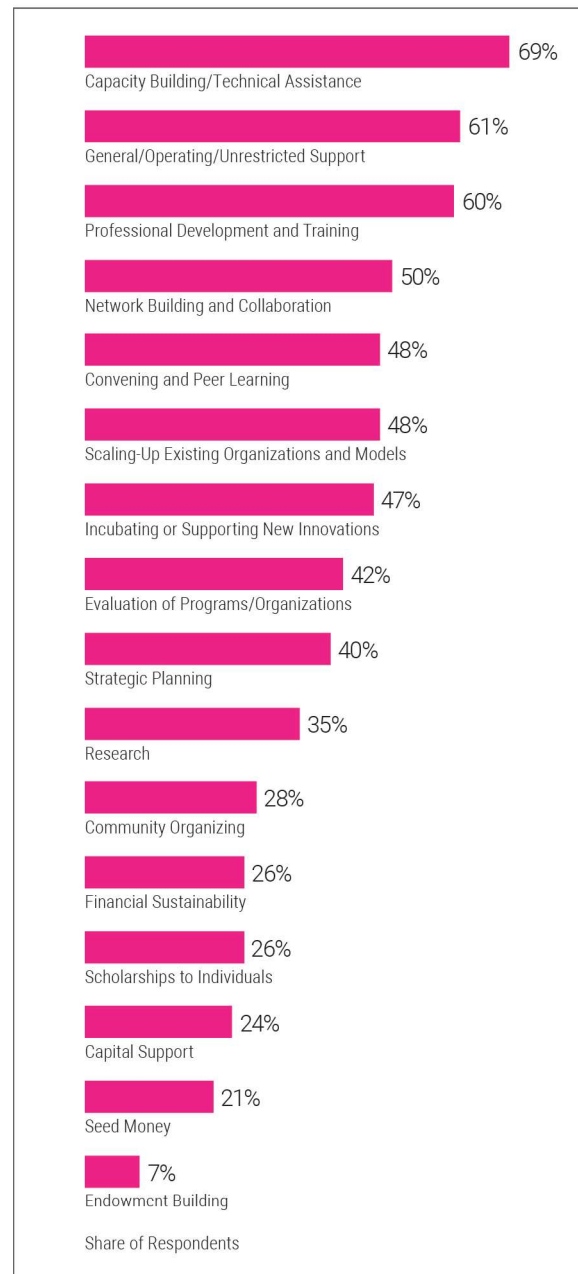


## APPENDIX B:

# Education Funders' Field-Building Strategies

Field-building strategies reported by respondents to the 2025 benchmarking survey largely mirror those recorded in the 2023 survey, with support for capacity building, general/operating/unrestricted and professional development and training ranking at the top of both lists. Strategies showing the biggest increases in share of respondents providing support during this period included incubating or supporting new innovations (up from 39% to 47%), communications and narrative change (up from 30% to 35%) and financial sustainability (up from 22% to 26%).

## Strategy Focus of Education Funding







## CONTRIBUTORS

### REPORT AUTHOR

**Steven Lawrence**  
Independent Consultant

### GRANTMAKERS FOR EDUCATION CONTRIBUTORS

**Nicole Rodriguez Leach**  
Executive Director

**Rebecca Smith**  
Communications Director

Grantmakers for Education is the nation's largest community of education philanthropists. The organization's members make up a diverse network of almost 300 public, private and community foundations, and others, that support public education. Working in partnership with our members, we pursue systemic approaches to equity and racial justice in education in order to make a positive impact on learners everywhere. We are a hub for new connections and ideas, a compass to help members navigate their work, a spur for collective action and a champion for positive change in education. For more information or to learn about membership, please contact us at [information@edfunders.org](mailto:information@edfunders.org).

Copyright ©2025 Grantmakers for Education