

Gates Foundation

Education leads to opportunity. Let's clear the path for more learners.

Education is one of the strongest drivers of lifetime earnings, but millions of learners in the United States are missing out on opportunity because of barriers at key moments on their educational journey.

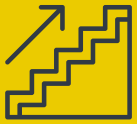
Our education system must empower every learner with the support they need to successfully navigate the moments that are highly predictive of their long-term success. Regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or background, every student should have a clear path to a credential of value – a degree, certificate, or other qualification that represents real, in-demand skills and leads to a good job, higher earnings, and career mobility.

The Gates Foundation's United States Program believes that with focused investment and steady progress, the growth rate of learners aged 18-34 who attain credentials of value by 2045 can be doubled – providing new opportunity for 10 million more learners.*

The research is clear about key moments that move learners toward a credential of value:

- **Completing Algebra 1 by 9th grade** – Students who aren't on track in math by 9th grade are less than half as likely to graduate high school. And more than 6.7 million students in grades 3-8 are already more than one grade level behind in math. If students understand foundational math, it opens doors to advanced math in high school and beyond – giving learners more opportunity and agency about their future.
- **Transitioning from high school into and through college** – A lack of quality, personalized advising is holding too many students back. While the national average student-to-counselor ratio in high schools (195:1–224:1, from 35 reporting states) is below the recommended 250:1 target, progress hasn't reached every student equally. Students at high-caseload schools (400+ students/counselor) see lower rates of college advising, and potential first-generation students remain the least likely to get it. All learners deserve access to clear, timely, and personalized support that helps them make informed decisions, stay on track, and move toward the future they want for themselves.
- **Passing critical first-year college courses** – Many college students are falling behind before they even get started. As many as 30% of college learners receive a D or F grade or withdraw from introductory college courses like calculus, chemistry, and statistics. And we see even higher percentages in students of color and first-generation students. This is not because they can't do the work, but because courses aren't consistently designed to foster motivation and engagement, and professors aren't always equipped with the strategies needed to meet the diverse needs of their learners.
- **Ensuring college credits and prior learning can be transferred and applied toward a credential** – Losing previously earned credit sets learners behind. Federal data show that transfer students lose an average of 43% of their credits – slowing their progress and adding as much as \$5,500 to their student debt. Better systems and tools are critical to delivering better outcomes for learners.

* The 10 million figure reflects both anticipated growth in credentials of value under existing trends and additional gains from interventions that double that rate of growth.



Creating Momentum for Learners

The Gates Foundation's United States Program will focus on improving education systems and identifying effective approaches that help students earn the credentials of value they need to succeed.

That means continuing our long-standing institutional support for K-12 and higher education, while also exploring how emerging technologies can effectively empower teachers and learners at scale. For example:

- Real time support for teachers to provide stronger math instruction, using AI to foster coherence in high-quality curriculum, learning insights, and digital tools and drive deeper student learning
- Personalized, timely advising tools to help students navigate college and career decisions
- Redesigned first-year college courses that help more students learn and engage with the material and pass critical classes
- Connected data platforms and strengthened infrastructure to ensure college credits transfer and count toward degrees



Building and Scaling What Works

As a foundation, we believe in the power of innovation to help people overcome barriers, and that effective and safe uses of AI will continue to have a place in that work. But to meet our goals, we will also need to lean into our decades-long partnerships with K-12 districts and higher education institutions to move the needle for students.

Empowering millions more learners to get a credential of value requires more than just better tools. We need to gather better evidence about what works and better equip institutions to act on that evidence.

That's why the Gates Foundation will continue to invest in:

- Research and shared tools, what we call “public goods,” that help spread best practice – especially those demonstrating how to build strong education-to-career pathways and help colleges and universities better serve their students
- Policy and advocacy that supports scaling proven approaches across the country
- Partnerships across education, technology, and practice to address the barriers and challenges learners and educators face





The Role of AI: Protecting Learners and Supporting Educators

Parents and communities are right to ask hard questions about the appropriate role of AI in education. Too often, tools are adopted without sufficient evidence that they work, with little transparency about how student data is used, or with insufficient attention to child well-being. The Gates Foundation shares these concerns and is committed to making sure that AI tools intended to be used for education must:

- Safeguard student well-being and safety
- Always keep a caring adult in the loop
- Keep data secure and protected
- Gather evidence about how well they work (and for whom)

We're in a moment of rapid technological change and we believe the work we and our partners do over the next few years will help ensure that AI in education bends toward students and educators to meet their needs, not away from them.



The Road Ahead

While the Gates Foundation's closure in 2045 is on the horizon, our focus is on the work ahead. We will continue to collaborate with partners who share our belief in the power of education to change people's lives. And we will put our energy and capital toward solutions that help students recover and accelerate learning, stay on track through key transition points, and build confidence and agency in their education.

Before our doors close, we will open the door to opportunity for millions more learners.