

IMAGINING LIBERATORY EDUCATION FUTURES OVERVIEW



What if each learner could thrive in ways that mattered to them? KnowledgeWorks' [Imagining Liberatory Education Futures](#) invites people to look ahead 20 years to imagine education systems that are liberatory. Liberatory education systems would prioritize self-determination, human potential and the right to participate in shaping the world. They would support learners in leading their own learning.

Confronting the Status Quo

Our world is undergoing massive shifts driven by accelerating technologies, the climate crisis and the fight for just societies. Yet education systems, like many other societal systems, have been slow to change and have reinforced patterns of inequity and injustice. A student's academic achievement can still be predicted based on ZIP code, skin color and socioeconomic status. That does not have to be the case, and it should not be.

A Shift from Equity to Liberation

Many equity-focused efforts add on to the existing education system to help learners who are struggling. But few are re-inventing the system so that it meets learners' needs by design. Liberatory education systems would treat each learner as valuable and as being capable of leading their own learning in partnership with skilled and caring educators, peers and community members. While examples of liberatory education can be found, liberatory education systems do not yet exist and much work remains to understand how they would work. To bring liberatory education systems into being, we must first imagine what they might look like.

Two Critical Uncertainties

Two critical uncertainties will shape what liberatory education looks like in 20 years.

1. Social Cohesion

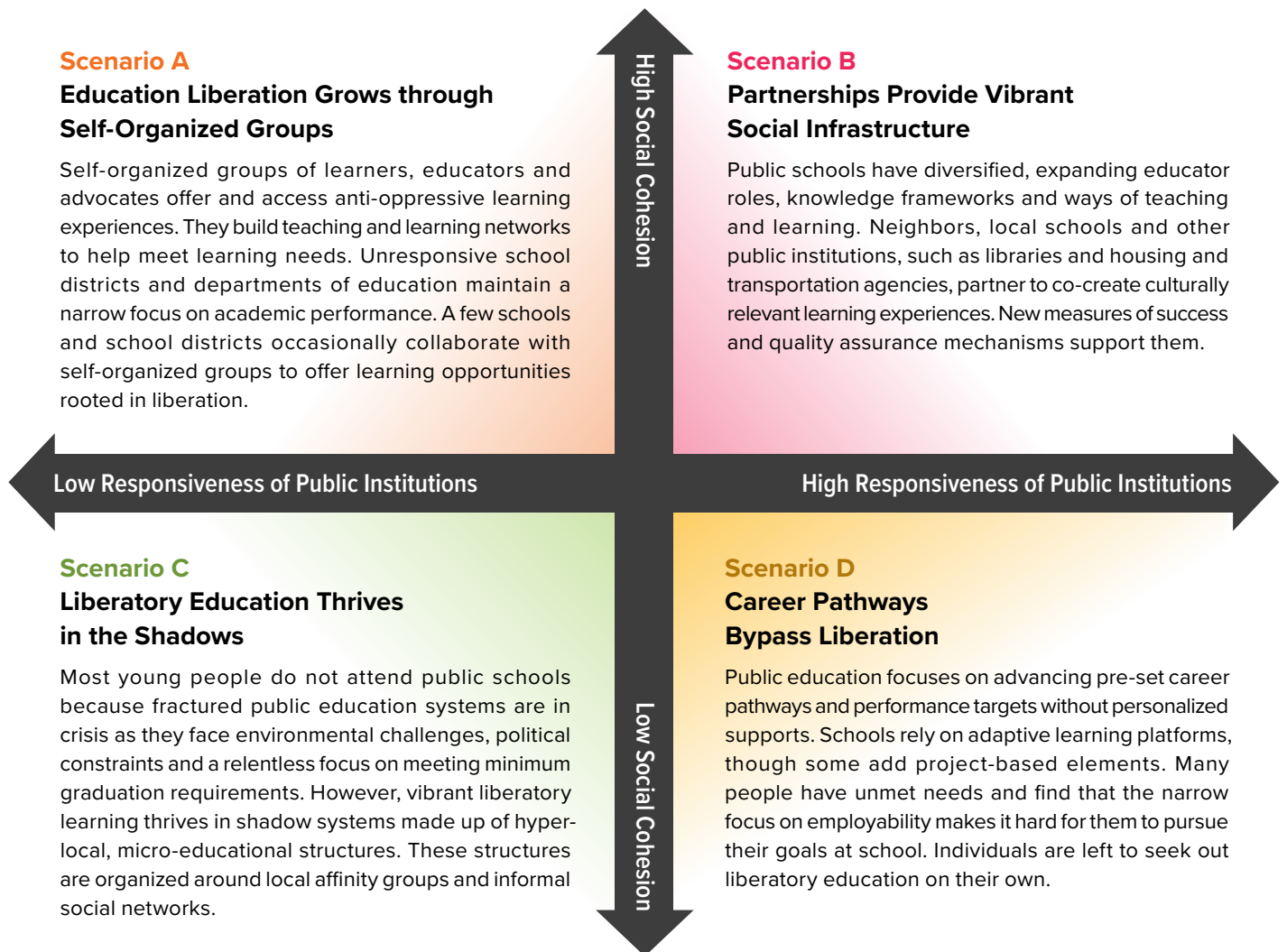
The extent to which people will recognize one another's humanity, foster interconnection and respect, and be willing to work across differences for mutual well-being.


2. Responsiveness of Public Institutions

The extent to which various types of public institutions – backed by public funding and controlled by federal, state, city or county government – will recognize the needs and demands of their constituents and share power in creating solutions.

Imagining Liberatory Education

These critical uncertainties suggest four scenarios for liberatory education. Scenarios are stories about the future that help us imagine how it could be different from today. There is not one ideal future. Different people want different things for the future of education, and the same person might want different things depending on what happens in the broader world. As you read the scenarios for liberatory education, consider what they bring up for you.



 KnowledgeWorks' forecast identifies recent developments that point the way for [each scenario](#).

The Future Starts Now

These scenarios are stories of possibility meant to help us keep the future in mind as we make decisions today. Use the scenario insights below, and develop your own, to guide your next steps.

- Responsive public institutions are important, but **social cohesion is critical for education transformation**. To what extent do people in your community recognize one another's humanity and show willingness to work across differences for mutual well-being?
- Many current educational equity efforts aim to close gaps between groups, but they often do not address the root causes of inequities. **It's not one or the other; it's both, and**. What might a balanced approach between short-term relief and long-term transformation look like in your community?
- School practices continue to harm some learners, in part because of old, persistent stories about race, education and opportunity. **Narratives hold power**. Challenging old narratives and creating new ones can change what people believe and how learning happens. What kinds of stories would help us recognize the full humanity, value and gifts of every learner?

Dismantling the oppressive systems and structures of education is one of the greatest challenges that society and education stakeholders face. It is also the most important. The only way to meet these shared challenges is together.

Explore Further



Read more in KnowledgeWorks' full forecast, [Imagining Liberatory Education Futures](#).



Apply these ideas to your work in the companion toolkit, [Mapping Your Journey into Liberatory Education Futures](#).



Contact us at foresight@knowledgeworks.org to have our professional futurists support you in making sense of future possibilities.

KnowledgeWorks is a national nonprofit organization advancing a future of learning that ensures each student graduates ready for what's next. For more than 20 years, we've been partnering with states, communities and leaders across the country to imagine, build and sustain vibrant learning communities. Through evidence-based practices and a commitment to equitable outcomes, we're creating the future of learning, together. [KnowledgeWorks.org](https://www.knowledgeworks.org)