

New Learning Guides Explain Why Public Education is a Public Good



School vouchers, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the roles and responsibilities of the U.S. Department of Education are among the topics of a new community education resource created by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and NEPC Fellow T. Jameson Brewer of the University of North Georgia.

Public Schools as a Common Good consists of six free-to-access downloadables that address key subjects related to public education, using a social justice lens. In addition to the topics mentioned above, the six pieces examine why public schools matter, advocating on behalf of public education, and the labeling of public schools with grades and terms such as “failing” or “excellent.” The guides are published by the SPLC as part of its Learning for Justice project.

Written in a nonacademic tone that should be accessible to older high school students and adults, Brewer’s pieces are three- to four-page introductions to complex topics. They define the topic, briefly summarize its history, explain its impact on equity, democracy, and/or social justice, and conclude with questions for reflection and links to additional resources. For those unfamiliar with K12 education policy and philosophy, Brewer draws upon metaphors to help explain ideas. For example, he compares the concept of education as a public good to firefighting—which became a taxpayer-funded service available to all only after “massive failures in approaching the service as a paid, individual commodity.” Those failures led to repeated threats to public safety and property values, as the private firefighting companies hired by the affluent focused exclusively on their clients’ homes as flames decimated entire

city blocks.

The learning guides are part of a broader Learning for Justice initiative that aims to “strengthen democracy and build a more just society.” Other topics addressed include *Resisting Hate in Education* and *Civics for Democracy*.

NEPC Resources on Democracy and Education

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