

**A STEM Education Coalition analysis of the *Learning Agenda Playbook*, published by the U.S. Department of Education on September 9, 2026**

**Summarily, the *Playbook* is...**

A part of the Trump Administration's goal to return education to the states is to help states identify educational priorities and to use evidence and resources most effectively in addressing those priorities. Such is the function of the *Learning Agenda Playbook*. Touted as a field-tested framework co-developed alongside seven pilot co-developer states – Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, New Hampshire, Tennessee, Utah and Wisconsin – the *Playbook* is envisioned to smooth out the variability across states while driving state-level innovation, when the centralized leadership of the Department of Education is diminished by the Trump Administration. Regardless of the inevitability of that objective, the explicit goal of the *Playbook* is to help assure strong and consistent outcomes for learners across states in their expanded roles of self-management. States may choose areas of focus based on their unique needs and context, for example early reading, rural teacher retention, absenteeism, mathematics reform, or technology integration. The *Playbook* is made up of components including step-by-step facilitation guides, team-building considerations, worksheets and slides, prioritization exercises, case studies, and other aids to help state education agencies set goals, measure progress and make financial investments in their initiatives. The STEM Education Coalition recognizes in this document and the decentralized educational leadership shift it represents as an opportunity to advance our common goal of quality STEM for all. Through an SEA lens, Coalition members may be in position to advocate for or lead in the prioritization of STEM education as a strategic imperative for a state. Through a service lens, Coalition members may be in position to contribute guidance, products, resources, or research evidence to SEAs in accordance with Step 5 of the *Playbook* – Action Plans.

The *Playbook* is a product of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education in collaboration with the National Comprehensive Center, working alongside eight state educational agencies.

**Gameplan of the *Playbook***

Experienced strategic planning facilitators will recognize a number of familiar facets of the *Playbook*, though its function, the *Learning Agenda*, is to queue up a prepared and influential advocacy body for a pre-established strategy, as opposed to originating strategies and priorities. The six Steps toward a learning agenda are:

- 1) Align Priorities: How to establish a team and timeline, and how to identify candidate priorities based on existent SEA goals and objectives.
- 2) Prepare Communications and Constituent Engagement: How to develop a communications plan that draws from and informs constituent groups in a fashion that evolves alongside work progress.
- 3) Identify Key Knowledge Gaps: Examine existent logic, assumptions, and evidence base to determine what is yet not known so that an action plan can zoom in on critical discovery.
- 4) Develop Learning Questions to Drive Decisions: Evidence accumulation via research, evaluation, data analysis, performance measurement and other means to arrive at “actionable questions” to fill in knowledge gaps.
- 5) Implement an Action Plan: Consisting of activities that generate evidence for filling in knowledge gaps of learning questions, the Plan includes specific Who, What, When and How around each activity.
- 6) Accelerate Learning Into Action. Teams interpret accumulated new evidence, communicate the results, and informed decisions on accomplishing priorities.

The entire process is supported by a **Facilitators Toolbox** that includes timeline examples, templates for tracking progress, and other resources. Rounding out the *Playbook*, eight brief **Case Studies** of pilot states each identify their leadership teams, the challenge(s) they honed in on, and “quick wins” they achieved.

## **STEM Education Coalition opportunities**

The roll-out of the Department of Education’s *Learning Agenda Playbook* and the broader federal-to-state policy shift underway are invitations for STEM education leaders at the state and local levels to advance STEM priorities. Widely shared imperatives spanning school-workplace partnerships, community-driven problem-solving, and technology/AI application reside firmly in the STEM wheelhouse. As lead teams and constituencies assemble at the state level around the *Learning Agenda Playbook*, the STEM Education Coalition is poised to help assure that our members are on the field, not in the bleachers. And as planners pinpoint priorities dependent on data, teaching tools, and student experiences, the Coalition will help connect members to markets.

## **U.S. Department of Education Press Release:**

<https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-launches-learning-agenda-playbook-support-state-education-leaders-and-improve-student-outcomes>

*No AI was used in the generation of this memo*

**Learning Agenda Playbook:**

<https://compcenternetwork.org/resource/362/learning-agenda-playbook>

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