



The Education Trust

COMBATING THE CULTURE WARS

UPDATE 6/23

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO



THE SCHOOL YEAR MAY BE WINDING DOWN, BUT THE CULTURE WARS ARE RAGING IN SCHOOLHOUSES ACROSS THE COUNTRY,

as politicians look to drive a wedge between parents and families, students, and teachers with reckless attacks on education equity.

The theme for this quarter's update, "Combating the Culture Wars," highlights the important work Ed Trust is doing in many areas, not least of which is our work to press against harmful policies and mindsets that seek to create educational environments that are less racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse and responsive.

This quarter, we have boldly pushed back against these divisive tactics. I recently went on an expansive [media tour](#) and wrote a [blog post](#) about improving students' mental health and creating a more positive and supportive school environment. And in April, I drove this point home when I delivered the keynote address at the BARR Foundation's annual conference.

Parents and caregivers want what education advocates want: schools that foster age-appropriate learning and critical thinking in an environment where all students feel seen and heard. In fact, data shows that nearly nine out of 10 parents are concerned that the increasing politicization of schools will affect the education that their children receive.

As advocates, we cannot let extremist narratives drive bad policies and practices into our nation's classroom. We cannot let dog-whistle narratives overshadow evidence-based strategies that have been proven to close gaps, advance positive relationships, and build bridges.

In the wake of the pandemic, children in the U.S. are hurting. Mental health concerns are at an all-time high. We must continue to speak the truth and be a buffer between our children and the headline-seeking politicians who are attempting to redefine how students see themselves and how others see them.

We will continue encouraging parents, caregivers, and teachers to remain vocal and clear-eyed during these turbulent times.

Let's acknowledge parents' legitimate concerns about the state of education. But let's not allow politicians to use fake outrage to score points with their base and as a cudgel against others. Let's press politicians to stop using the issue of "parental rights" as cover to promote a fanatical agenda in schools that harms students and distracts from the real challenges confronting educators, students, and families. We will keep advocating for *real* parental engagement. We know that schooling works best when families are involved in their children's education. Parents and caregivers need to engage with teachers — and vice versa — to provide the best opportunities for their children. This means valuing the voices of people in marginalized communities, which are often missing or silenced.

Also, teachers need encouragement and resources to properly support children, especially those who have been most impacted by COVID-19. In many cases, teachers will have to learn new skills, and administrators will have to be open to doing things differently to do right by students.

As politicians play games with students' education to score votes, advocates must continue to actively resist legislation and other efforts that erase the stories, obstacles, and triumphs of people from marginalized backgrounds. Ed Trust will continue to work to ensure that honest teaching, honest acceptance, and honest engagement drive the conversation around education equity, race, and gender identity.

Let history be our guide and motivation. Nearly seven decades after the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* put an end to school segregation, our journey is far from over. Much work is still needed to make schools inclusive, safe, and nurturing environments for all students.

The culture wars won't take a break for summer. And neither should we.

Denise Forte

President and CEO of The Education Trust

[@dm_forte](#)

THEORY OF CHANGE

During this reporting period, we continued to execute our theory of change by engaging in the following activities:

Communicates the excellence of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

Forms partnerships and supports coalitions to amplify views of equity-focused organizations and supplement our expertise.



The Education Trust

Advances policies and practices to dismantle the racial and economic barriers embedded in the American education system.

Conducts research on best practices and uses data to increase accountability and transparency.

Elevates the voices of students, parents, families, and educators to ensure those most affected are driving policies.

COMBATING THE CULTURE WARS

JOIN > **FOR A CONVERSATION ON HOW**

Black Women Superintendents ARE LEADING WITH EXCELLENCE

05.10.23
6:00 PM ET

MODERATOR: ARTHUR JONES II,
ABC News Producer/Reporter

PANELISTS:

- DR. SONJA BROOKINS SANTELISES,**
CEO, Baltimore City Public Schools (MD)
- DR. LATONYA M. GOFFNEY,**
Superintendent, Aldine Independent School District (TX)
- DR. MELANIE KAY-WYATT,**
Interim Superintendent, Alexandria City Public Schools (VA)
- DR. KYLA JOHNSON-TRAMMELL,**
Superintendent, Oakland Unified School District (CA)



“I’ve been a superintendent for 15 years, and I’ve never been a part of a panel that focused on Black women’s experience,s” said Dr. LaTonya Goffney at a joint Ed Trust and School Superintendents Association (AASA) event, titled [“Black Women Superintendents Are Leading with Excellence.”](#) Dr. Goffney, who leads the Aldine Independent District in Texas, was one of seven #sistersups who participated in the pioneering discussion about the pressures they face in their work lives and the need to diversify the school leadership pipeline. The other participants included:

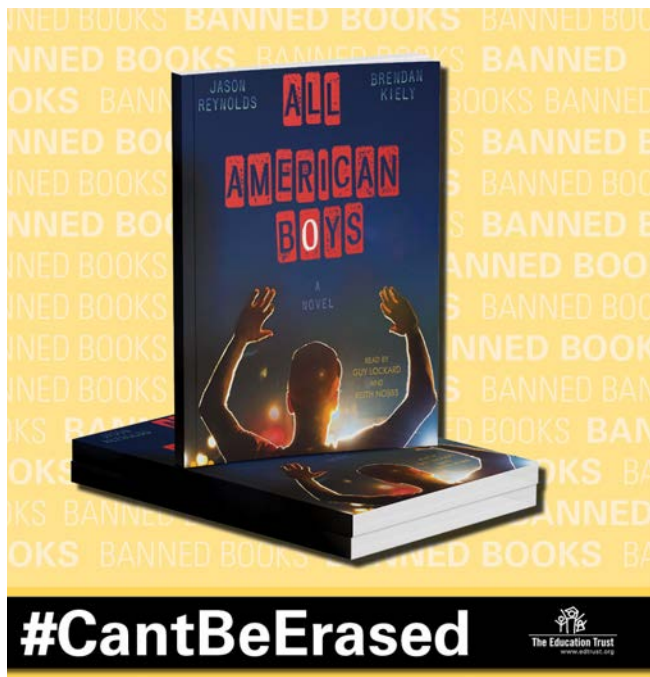
- Dr. Melanie Kay-Wyatt, who was recently named superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools in Virginia
- Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises, formerly of Ed Trust and now in her seventh year as CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools
- Dr. Kyla Johnson-Trammell, superintendent of Oakland Unified School District in California
- Dr. Christina Grant, state superintendent of education for Washington, DC
- Dr. Adrienne Battle, superintendent of Metro Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee
- Dr. Monifa McKnight, superintendent of Montgomery County Schools in Maryland

Only 1.4% of superintendents are Black women, and several of them are the first to occupy that role. In stark contrast, students of color make up more than 50% of the student body in many K-12 districts. Those statistics highlight the need for more representation, so that students can see themselves in the school teachers and school leaders they encounter daily. Research also suggests that White students benefit from diversity too. They showed improved problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity when they



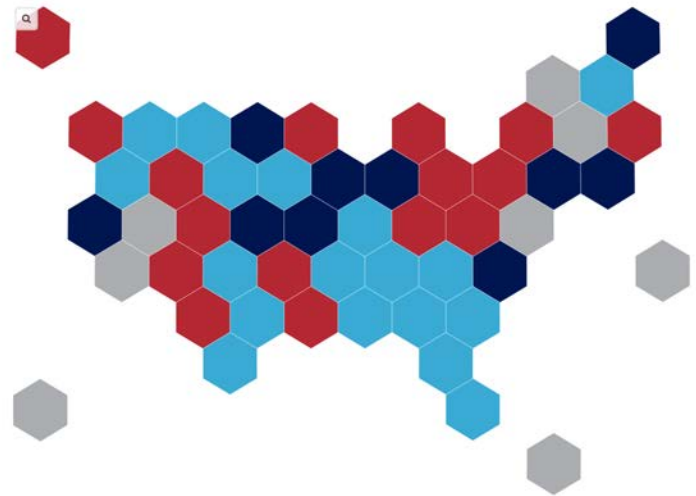
Dr. Monifa McKnight, superintendent of Montgomery County Schools in Maryland, addressing what it means for students to see themselves in leadership.

have teachers and leaders of color. An article in [Scientific American](#) summarized the importance of diversity this way: “Being around people who are different from us makes us more creative, more diligent and harder-working.” The fact that so many Black women are the first or only superintendents in their states reminds us that we have a long way to go to create a school system that fully represents and serves all students; there are still many “firsts” to record.



Today, however, some politicians and people are working fervently to halt such milestones and reverse hard-won equity gains. What started as a seemingly arbitrary critique of a legal theory that few were familiar with or could explain turned into a well-funded, politically motivated, and broader attack on racial equity. Since June 2021, 44 [states have introduced](#) bills or taken some other state-level action to limit the discussion of race, gender, sexuality, and systemic inequities.

The media reports almost daily on how these restrictions — which include censorship and book bans — are playing out in classrooms. [According to PEN America](#), during the first half of the 2022-2023 school year, there were 1,477 instances of individual books banned, an increase of 28% compared to the prior six months of



January–June 2022. In response, we launched our [#CantBeErased](#) social media campaign, which highlights the work of various banned authors and notes that prohibitions on books and what can be taught in classrooms undermine education and are antithetical to democracy and the founding principles of our country. The latest book to come under attack is Amanda Gorman’s “The Hill We Climb,” the poem she recited at President Joe Biden’s inauguration. It only took [one parent’s complaint for a Miami-Dade County school](#) to restrict elementary students’ access to the book.

The restrictions aren’t just on African American history and literature, but also extend to social and emotional learning; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives; LGBTQ+ rights (related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and transgender issues); and more. These attacks are blatant attempts to silence marginalized groups. As such, we have been deliberate about amplifying the voices of equity advocates — giving students, educators, policymakers, and others a platform to talk about what equity looks and feels like in different contexts, why it matters, and why it’s important to have open and honest discussions about it.

Pushing back against bad policies

In March, Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC), chairwoman of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, introduced the controversial Parents Bill of Rights Act, which was inspired by extremist legislation introduced in various statehouses and designed to politicize U.S. schools. This bill is out of sync with what parents really want, which is access to fully resourced schools, prepared and qualified teachers, safe and welcoming places for students to learn, and supports that all students need to thrive. In response to the introduction of this bill, Lynn Jennings, Ph.D., senior director of National and State Partnerships, wrote a strongly worded blog post on [“What Parents Really Want: Less Politicking & More Attention to Students’ Academic & Mental Health Needs,”](#) while Denise wrote an op-ed for The Grio, noting that [“Parental Rights Legislation Without Parental Engagement is Full of Hot Air and Hidden Motives.”](#) Denise also appeared on the Grio TV and SiriusXM.



Elevating Voices

It’s one thing to cite compelling data on the lack of diverse representation in the teacher and school leader workforce and talk about the importance of students being able to see themselves in the adult at the front of the classroom. It’s quite another to hear superintendent Dr. Kay-Wyatt tell the story of a sixth-grade girl who identified with her because of their shared natural hairstyle. Or to hear Dr. Santelises passionately call for a new narrative that instills hope in Baltimore City students and focuses less on their trauma. The unique experiences of these Black women superintendents vividly illustrate why diverse leaders are good for schools and students and serve as models for leading with equity and excellence.

We amplified the voice of [Florida State Sen. Shervin D. Jones via an interview with our own Ameshia Cross, which was shared on TikTok](#) and reached new audiences. Jones has courageously spoken out against the unparalleled assaults on education, equity, and civil rights by Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and others. “It’s not about policies; it’s definitely not about people. It’s about power and how to maintain it,” said Jones. We also used TikTok to promote three facts about honest history and diversity:

[Fact 1: Critical race theory is a college-level course that is in no way taught in K-12 schools.](#)

THE INDOCTRINATION NARRATIVE IS **WRONG**



SHEVRIN D. "SHEV" JONES, SENATOR
Florida, District 34



AMESHIA CROSS
The Education Trust




by and large how black people got a lot of the rights that they actively have

edtrust.org
@EdTrust



The Education Trust

3 FACTS About Honest History & Diversity



The Education Trust



[Fact 2: Most parents across the political spectrum are satisfied with their children's schools and educators and what's taught in classrooms.](#)

[Fact 3: Today's students need to build cultural competency in order to compete in an increasingly global society.](#)

We have used our blog, The Equity Line, as a vehicle for first-person storytelling. Earlier this year, we featured multiple posts on the importance of teaching honest history and the dangers of whitewashing — and not just for Black students, but for White students as well. Blair Wriston [wrote about](#) growing up in Virginia, “blissfully ignorant [about] the history of [his] own state and community.” He said he didn’t learn about the rich history of communities of color until college: “This realization left me not only frustrated at my own White ignorance, but also angry and disheartened for my former classmates of color who were robbed of the opportunity to see themselves in the lessons being taught,” he wrote.

In another blog post, Kayla Higgs, a student at Trinity Washington University, [expressed](#) frustration about never having been taught much Black history outside of slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement. Learning only about these three periods, she wrote — and next to nothing about the contributions of people of color and our nation’s troubled past — “makes it significantly harder to talk about racial discrimination against minority groups in historical and modern contexts and will only put students at a further disadvantage.”

And Phelton Moss, a professorial lecturer at American University, [wrote about](#) how fellow education leaders can respond to anti-black rhetoric, while not shying away from hard conversations about our country’s history, centering justice and equity in their teaching and curricula resources, empowering students and parents with advocacy tools, and mobilizing students to become advocates for their children’s education.

Uplifting our core work

Supporting state- and national-level coalition activities and engaging in and maintaining advocacy partnerships at all levels have been challenging in recent years. But we've remained steadfast in our dedication to building a movement for education equity and racial justice for our students.

One thing we know for certain: Students need inclusive and welcoming environments to thrive. This is the core message behind Ed Trust's work on social, emotional, and academic development. During Mental Health Awareness month, we took this message across the country via a multi-state media tour. Denise Forte, president and CEO, and Wil del Pilar, senior vice president, conducted over 13 TV interviews and 14 radio interviews.



AT A GLANCE

During the last quarter, The Education Trust was busy working alongside partners and community members to grow a movement toward educational justice.

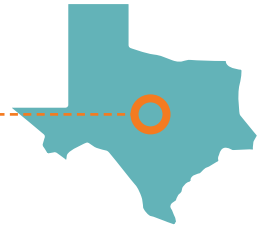
On the Hill:

The Education Trust has been deeply involved in efforts at the federal level to push back against the Parents Bill of Rights. Ed Trust led the writing of a partner letter in March with various education, civil rights, and immigration advocacy organizations [expressing concerns](#) about how this controversial piece of legislation, which passed in the House, would politicize U.S. schools and harm students, teachers, and families. Denise Forte, president and CEO, highlighted the divisive nature of this legislation and the potential harm it could do in a March story [featured in theGrio](#), and noted how certain provisions in the bill would undermine a safe and welcoming learning environment. In response to the Parents Bill of Rights, Ed Trust worked closely with congressional partners on a House resolution that [underscored the importance](#) of fostering a welcoming, supportive, and inclusive school climate that offers students a well-rounded, historically accurate education and empowers parents and students.

Ed Trust continues to play a leading role in the annual budget process. Following the release of the Biden-Harris administration's FY24 budget request, Ed Trust [issued a statement](#) on how the proposed budget would help to address the ongoing challenges impacting students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, including how the budget would help develop and diversify our nation's teacher workforce, address the student mental health crisis, and improve the accessibility and affordability of higher education. The Education Trust continues to work closely with congressional leaders to advance our priorities by providing written testimony to the [House](#) and [Senate](#) Appropriations Committees, uplifting the importance of continued and stronger investments in essential education programs that meet the needs of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.



IN THE STATES



TEXAS

As the end of our regular legislative session approaches, Ed Trust in Texas is working with coalition partners and bringing the voices of underserved community members to state policymakers. Watch these videos of [students](#), [teachers](#), and [parents](#) and track all our advocacy activities on this new [legislative dashboard](#). Texas has two measures for college and career readiness that are creating a double standard. As we continue to push several important policy wins across the finish line, our [latest brief](#) explains the two measures and the resulting outcomes for Harris County students, so that policymakers and advocates can better assess and improve students' readiness to succeed after high school.

LOUISIANA

For the past four months, Ed Trust in Louisiana has worked to expand access and opportunity for students, teachers, and families in Louisiana. We launched AMPLIFY LA, a statewide student leadership academy, which is working to develop the advocacy, organizing, and policy skills of high school students. Students have participated in advocacy at the local and national levels, provided testimony at school board meetings and attended The Team Harmony Student Action Institute and We Have a Dream Rally, [where they joined the last living survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre in petitioning the court not to dismiss their case in search of justice](#). As a part of our [#ForeverATeacher initiative](#), we honored teachers and administrators of color at the Forever A Teacher Awards Ceremony for their dedication to students and families. We remain committed to [advocating for enhanced access and opportunity for students of color in dual enrollment programs](#), while [also uplifting the voices and experiences](#) of Louisiana students.



MASSACHUSETTS



In recent months, momentum has been building in Massachusetts to remove affordability barriers to higher education. In January, in partnership with other advocates, The Education Trust in Massachusetts [hosted a forum on the future of public higher education finance](#). The hybrid event brought together more than 200 education practitioners, policymakers, and leaders for a timely dialogue on how Massachusetts leaders could invest substantial new funding through the Fair Share Amendment to increase college affordability. Following the event, we continued our advocacy efforts with the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) by drafting a budget letter [to the Healey-Driscoll administration](#) with recommendations [for improving higher education affordability](#). The administration's budget proposal reflected many of our requests, including increased funding to expand early college programs, wraparound supports for students attending public higher education institutions, and significant increases in financial aid. In the upcoming months, we will continue to engage in this essential conversation and leverage budget advocacy, so we can meet our vision of ensuring that all students have an opportunity to access postsecondary education without financial burden, as outlined in our most recent report, ["There is No Excellence Without Equity."](#)



WASHINGTON

The Education Trust in Washington made its official in-person debut at the Washington state legislature by providing public testimony in support of [SB 5248](#), a bill that would require school districts in the state to dedicate a portion of their ESSER dollars to provide high-quality tutoring and extended learning programs. In panel remarks, we, alongside [Stand for Children Washington](#) and the [Foundation for Tacoma Students](#), underscored the need to address learning loss, and explained how and why high-quality tutoring and extended learning time are key interventions. A recording of the hearing is available [here](#) (see minutes 14:20-16:10).



MARYLAND

In Maryland, Ed Trust continues to familiarize local communities with what is required in district plans to implement [The Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#) and support them in proposing strong policy recommendations that address specific inequities in their school districts. We have targeted our engagement with equity coalitions and advocates of color in Prince George's County, Montgomery County, and Anne Arundel County. In anticipation of the release of district plans, Ed Trust launched an awareness campaign and engaged with more than 300 different local partners to ensure that they were aware of the process, timeliness, and policy directives that districts must follow to implement their plans.

In February, Ed Trust gave a presentation to a coalition of more than 100 civil rights advocates across the state on the need for advocates to hold districts accountable for equitable implementation and met with leaders of the [Prince George's Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools](#) coalition to discuss policy alignment between the school board and local community advocates. We also hosted 75 members of the [Black and Brown Coalition for Education Excellence and Equity](#) in March to review their district's implementation plan. From this meeting, the coalition generated priorities and key questions for implementation that they shared with the superintendent in a meeting on May 10.



DELAWARE

Over 100 Delawareans attended the Rodel [Vision Coalition's](#) first Equity in Education series event, "Equity in Education: Understanding School Funding, Basics and Beyond," which included educators, students, community-based organization members, policymakers, and elected officials. At the event, notable speakers — such as the state teacher of the year, the senate majority whip, the secretary of education, and experts from Bellwether, Ed Trust, and the Learning Policy Institute — talked about Delaware's funding system; the current funding landscape, including the school funding lawsuit settlement; and how Delaware can more equitably fund schools. For access to the live-stream recording and other shared resources, [click here](#).



KENTUCKY

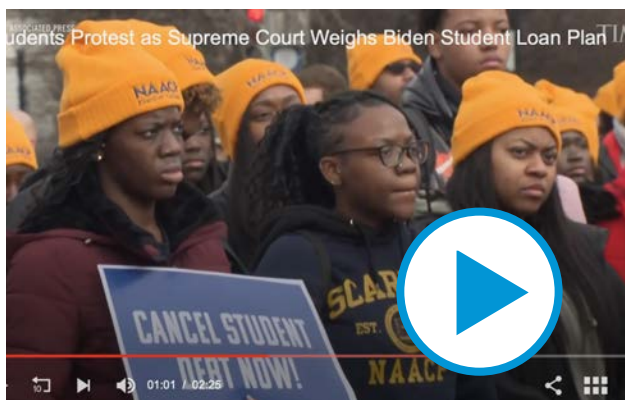
The Education Trust worked closely with the Kentucky Equity Coalition and the Prichard Committee to provide analysis and feedback on bills moving through the state legislature this year. These bills covered topics ranging from parents' rights and CRT to graduation requirements and school discipline (SB5, SB150, HB126, HB538). Additionally, in April, Ed Trust was asked to speak at the state's Symposium on the Importance of Advanced Content about our work and recommendations around advanced coursework and opportunities for Kentucky to improve in this space.

IN THE MEDIA:



This USA Today news article, "[Despite 'teacher shortage,' coming layoffs could put newly hired teachers of color at risk](#)," uses Ed Trust data to showcase tools that states already have in place to combat the problems highlighted in the article. The story cites [data from our Teacher Diversity & Equity webtool](#), which found that "more than half of states have 'grow your own' programs geared to recruiting and training educators from the communities they serve."

In this Time piece, "[How We All Benefit From Student Debt Relief](#)," our data was used to show the impact of student debt on all borrowers, but particularly Black women. Ed Trust's data show that Black women have more debt — an average of \$38,800 in federal loans — after completing undergraduate schooling than any other group.



A US News and World Report article, "[Biden Administration to Governors, School Chiefs: Stop Using Corporal Punishment in Schools](#)," cites our [Joint Letter in Opposition to Corporal Punishment](#), which illustrates that 23 states allow corporal punishment, with 99% of all instances occurring in 10 states — Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, Oklahoma, Georgia, Tennessee, Missouri, Florida and Louisiana — and 75% of all cases occurring in just four states — Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas, and Alabama. Ed Trust data was also used in articles by [EdWeek](#), [K-12 Dive](#), among others.



Forbes **In this op-ed in Forbes**, "[Defunding Diversity: How Academia Is Failing Black Faculty](#)," Ed Trust data was used to make the point that student success is intricately linked to having a diverse faculty.

In this Hechinger Report article, "[How the Promise of Free College Doesn't Always Help Low-Income Students](#),"

Wil Del Pilar, Ph.D., Ed Trust's senior vice president, was quoted as saying that "despite a perception that free college programs are meant for lower-income students, the only students who would qualify are students who aren't eligible for Pell — wealthier students." He also noted that the multitude of free college proposals become "messaging bills a lot of the time."



ON THE BLOG

On The Equity Line blog, we highlight various pressing issues impacting Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds:



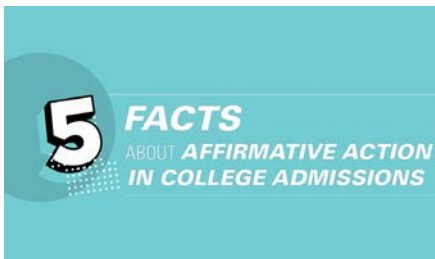
[Addressing Chronic Absenteeism](#)



[Allowing All Undocumented Students to Get Driver's and Professional Licenses Would Help Them Thrive](#)



[The Importance of Equitable and Adequate School Funding for English Learners](#)



[INFOGRAPHIC: 5 Facts About Affirmative Action](#)



[This Preschool Handbook is Essential to Early Learning — So Why Do Some States Want to Ban It?](#)



[Educators Speak Up About How to Teach Climate Change](#)



[Fugees Family: Offering Education Opportunities for Immigrant and Refugee Students](#)



[The Pell Grant Makes College More Affordable — But It's Only a Sliver of the True Cost of Attendance](#)

Equity Matters: Advocating Across All Levels of Government:

More than 180 advocates and leaders from across the country recently gathered in the nation's capital for Ed Trust's Spring 2023 Bootcamp on "Equity Matters: Advocating Across All Levels of Government." This convening gave attendees an opportunity to connect and engage with one another, discuss the challenges and opportunities in today's educational landscape, and leverage the voices and skills of students, parents and caregivers, educators, and advocates. Advocates laid out potential solutions and strategies for reducing the inequities that students and teachers encounter daily and at every level: federal, state, and local.

The [agenda](#) featured plenaries and sessions in which advocates collaborated with each another to develop strategic action plans, so they can work to remove barriers and advance equity in their home states. The sessions covered pressing issues that directly affect students and classrooms — including access to a representative curriculum and advanced coursework, equitable school funding, student well-being — and touched on current events, such as the impending SCOTUS decisions on student debt relief and affirmative action, the rise of censorship, and more.

Before the convening, state advocates from Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas went to Capitol Hill to highlight pressing equity issues in their state, and offered suggestions on how federal funding could best be used in schools where students experienced learning

disruptions, setbacks, and mental-health impacts caused by the pandemic.

The closing plenary on "What's at Stake: A Conversation on the Future of Education" featured a panel discussion with Denise Forte, president and CEO, and the leaders of prominent civil rights and education organizations, such as The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, SchoolHouse Connection, the US Chamber of Commerce, GLSEN, and the National Urban League, followed by a conversation between Denise and Roberto Rodríguez, assistant secretary for planning, evaluation, and policy development at the U.S. Department of Education. One of the takeaways from the panel discussion was the need to hold fast to our North Star of educational equity — even when that necessitates having uncomfortable or difficult conversations with one another and our partners, because understanding different perspectives and reaching a compromise can ultimately benefit all students. The leaders also stressed the need for additional research-based data, so we can measure progress and hold leaders and institutions accountable.

We look forward to using the momentum generated by this bootcamp to bolster our shared advocacy in education equity and continue this important work together with our partners, and prepare for our next bootcamp in October 2023.

**EQUITY
MATTERS:**
ADVOCATES IN ACTION



TNTP/Ed Trust Webinar:

On March 28th, TNTP and The Education Trust — in partnership with 1 Million Teachers of Color (1MTOC) campaign — held their [first quarterly webinar](#) to amplify best practices and policies related to educator diversity and workforce innovation and to build the national narrative around the importance of educator diversity. Panel speakers noted that practitioners and policymakers should focus on three areas of the educator pipeline — quantity, quality, and diversity — to fortify it now and in the future. The conversation also highlighted the importance of developing a solid and sustainable pipeline that begins early in high school, supports educator prep programs in partnership with school districts, and becomes a long-term investment that retains and supports educators of color. All the panelists noted that pushing for access to clear and actionable educator workforce data is an essential first step, so stakeholders can set goals and chart a path forward. This includes school-level information about the racial demographics of the educator workforce and the racial makeup of candidates completing in-state teacher preparation programs.



Data for Equity Webinar Series

Shedding light on inequities — in school funding, access to high-quality educators from diverse backgrounds, advanced coursework, and safe and culturally affirming school environments — starts with access to data. To help advocates call attention to inequities and spur action to address them, The Education Trust hosted a series of three webinars in February 2023: “Equal Is Not Good Enough in School Funding,” “Advocating for Actionable Data on Equitable Access to High-Quality Teachers,” and “Leveraging Data to Fuel COVID Recovery Advocacy Efforts.” These webinars explained why data and transparency are key in the fight for educational equity and provided advocates with updated data sources and tools to aid in this work. The videos and access materials for all three sessions are available [here](#).

Webinar on the Future of Assessments: Centering Equity & the Lived Experiences of Students, Families, & Educators

Ed Trust held a webinar on our new report, [“Future of Assessments: Centering Equity and the Lived Experiences of Students, Families, and Educators.”](#) where we highlighted the report’s findings based on the lived experiences of those closest to assessments and outlined a vision for the future of federal assessment policy. We also dived deeper into the recommendations laid out in this report and noted opportunities to continue the conversation around the future of assessments.



RESEARCH:

As the nation's leaders look to help students recover from unfinished learning, our publications are designed to show decisionmakers how to bolster student outcomes. By exploring practices and policies that work and identifying those that don't, we aim to provide the information and tools necessary to advance educational justice. This quarter, Ed Trust released the following publications:

[5 State Policy Recommendations Fostering STEM Aspirations for Students of Color in Middle School](#)

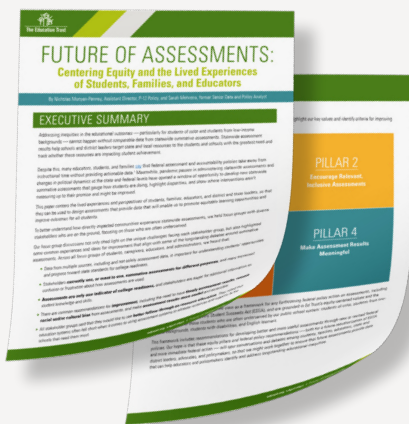
In this [brief](#), we highlight the importance of providing early access to STEM coursework as part of students' social, emotional, and academic development and give five recommendations to state leaders, so they can ensure that all middle school students have access to high-quality, rigorous, relevant math and science courses and that all schools have equitable policies for enrolling more Black and Latino students in advanced coursework.



[Future of Assessments: Centering Equity and the Lived Experiences of Students, Families, and Educators](#)

Addressing inequities in educational outcomes — particularly for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds — cannot happen without comparable data from statewide summative assessments. Statewide assessment results help schools and district leaders target state and local resources to the students and schools with the greatest need and track whether these resources impact student achievement.

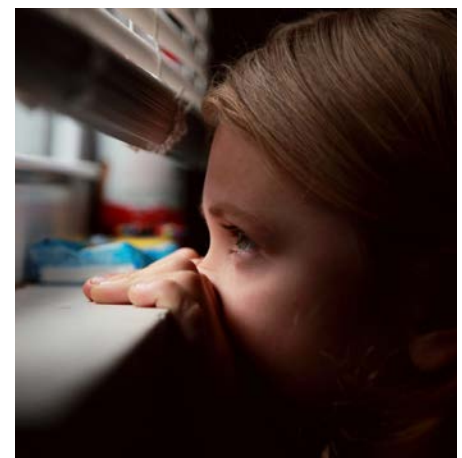
This [report](#) centers on the lived experiences and perspectives of students, families, educators, and district and state leaders, so that they can be used to design assessments that provide data that will enable us to promote equitable learning opportunities and improve student outcomes.



[5 Things for Advocates to Know About Chronic Absenteeism](#)

Rates of absenteeism are rising: 8 million students were chronically absent before the pandemic closed schools, and the pandemic made matters much worse. In the 2020-21 school year, at least 10 million students missed 10% or more school days. In Connecticut, Michigan, California, and Ohio, chronic absenteeism rates surged in 2021-22, according to recent state data, especially for children of color, and doubled nationwide to 16 million students.

[This brief](#) highlights five things that advocates should know about how leaders can address chronic absence.



The Education Trust—West

Building Bridges Summit & Advocacy Day

The Education Trust—West co-hosted a teacher-led summit in Sacramento on “[Building Bridges: Setting the Vision for Sustaining BIPOC Educators in California](#).” The goal of the summit was to develop a shared understanding of the state of the teaching profession from the perspective of educators of color and build a shared vision for state leaders’ roles and responsibilities in sustaining a diverse educator workforce. The room was filled with passionate educators, policymakers, and advocates from across California, who came together to discuss why educators of color and multilingual educators are called to serve and stay in teaching. There were also various rich panel discussions about what is and isn’t working on the ground and in school districts across the state.

The next day, some teachers met with legislative staff in Sacramento to discuss teacher diversity, educator well-being, teacher preparation, high-quality culturally relevant instruction, and school climate. Their voices provided powerful, firsthand accounts of what happens in the classroom and why legislative action is necessary.

The summit and advocacy day that followed were a part of The Education Trust—West’s ongoing work to ensure that, by 2033, the teaching staff in every California school district reflects the racial and linguistic demographics of the county in which they operate.



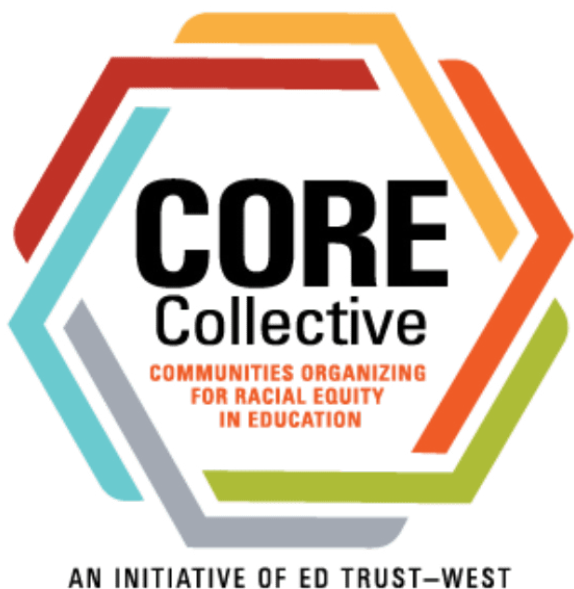
Four Big Bets for Improving K-12 Education Equity

In May, we hosted a webinar called, “Four Big Bets for Improving K-12 Education Equity,” in which more than 40 participants discussed policies that California leaders can implement to improve student success and transform students of color’s K-12 experience.

The four big bets discussed were nurturing multilingualism in California by ensuring schools have more and better-prepared educators with bilingual authorization; keeping the state committed to making ethnic studies a reality by investing in professional development for educators; committing to the promise of Black student success through dedicated funding; and urging California to finally set clear, measurable statewide goals for diversifying the educator workforce and retaining educators of color and multilingual educators. A panel of experts outlined each of these issues, after which participants strategized in breakout groups on ways to make the four big bets a reality.

This was just the start of this important conversation. We plan to release a summary of the conversation, along with proposed strategies for achieving these goals. We are thankful to the 15 partner organizations who participated in the event and are dedicated to making these bets a reality.

The Education Trust—West



CORE Collective

Partnerships have been a crucial part of Ed Trust—West’s work for the past 22 years and have produced some substantial legislative wins for the students of California. While there has been a formal partnership group since 2016, this year, we relaunched our partner work with a new name and a new cohort of community organizations that are doing great work across the state.

The [CORE \(Communities Organizing for Racial Equity in Education\) Collective](#) is made up of eight organizations from across the state serving the students, parents, families, and communities who have been most affected by funding gaps in California’s education budget.

Representatives gathered in Oakland to officially kick off this two-year subgrant partnership aimed at building the power and capacity of these community-based organizations as they receive support from Ed Trust—West in advocating for racially equitable and just policy and systems change in education. We look forward to working collectively with these organizations on behalf of California’s students.

Walking the Talk Committee

As part of Ed Trust—West’s efforts to meaningfully engage all staff in continued learning about the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and liberation, the Walking the Talk committee was formed. This group of staff members plans engaging collective learning events about racial equity for Ed Trust—West. This spring, the committee planned several workshops and outings aimed at deepening the team’s understanding of structural racism within our systems. The workshops covered dismantling anti-Blackness in all systems, how to be gender inclusive, and how to work within systems to effectively manage our time — with a focus on reversing a culture of urgency.

The Walking the Talk committee also organized an educational walking tour of Oakland, which is considered a Black cultural mecca. This tour was led by Oakland natives, who highlighted residents’ work to preserve the history and culture of Black-owned spaces in the neighborhood.

For more information, please visit west.edtrust.org

The Education Trust—Midwest

The Education Trust-Midwest and Partners Press for Historic Fair Funding Proposals in Michigan

The Education Trust—Midwest (ETM) team has been working with diverse, bipartisan partners, advocates, and policymakers from across the state to transform Michigan’s unfair and regressive school funding system, starting with the FY24 budget.

For the first time in Michigan history, state leaders are proposing a much fairer school funding formula — called the Opportunity Index — which was championed by ETM and coalition partners and would consider the concentration of poverty in individual school districts across the state. If passed, the changes could reduce inequities and spur progress for students in a state that has historically had one of the nation’s most unfair and regressive school funding formulas.

In addition to a multipronged legislative and community engagement strategy that included meetings with dozens of policymakers, the ETM team has held many background media briefings, trained dozens of advocates and partners in advocacy, and engaged in successful earned media and digital campaigns.

Recently, ETM publicly released a new fair funding policy brief, “[Eliminating the Opportunity Gaps: Creating a Truly Fair and Equitable Funding System](#).” Our new research notes that Michigan is underfunding students from low-income backgrounds and English learners by an estimated \$5.1 billion annually — compared to leading states and despite what research indicates is needed for those students to succeed.

ETM’s analysis found that Michigan is near the bottom when it comes to providing supplemental funding for both English learners and students from low-income backgrounds, leaving substantial funding gaps between what students receive under Michigan’s funding system and what they truly need. Moreover, Michigan is underfunding students with disabilities by hundreds of millions of dollars annually.

- **Among 28 states with similar funding formulas, Michigan ranks 20th for our low-income funding weight.**

This low ranking highlights the extent to which we are underfunding students from low-income backgrounds, and particularly those students attending school in districts with high concentrations of poverty.

- **Among 31 states with similar funding formulas, Michigan ranks 26th for our English learner funding.**

Compared to states like Maryland, which is phasing in a weight of 85% more, and Georgia, which now allocates 160% more funding to English learners, Michigan is missing the mark.

As noted in a [recent commentary](#), we applaud state policymakers’ commitment to all students and public education in general, but we also urge leaders to make sure the Senate and House budget proposals are the beginning — not the end — of a conversation on fair school funding.

The Education Trust—Midwest

Making Our Voices Heard

Advocacy efforts and commentary pieces by ETM and coalition partners were featured in The Detroit Free Press, Bridge Michigan, Chalkbeat-Detroit, Gongwer, and other media outlets.

- [Opinion: Michigan's education proposals show progress; more is needed](#), by Alice Thompson, Mike Jandernoa, & Amber Arellano, Bridge Michigan
- [Opinion: Michigan is poised to make historic investment in these students](#), by Jose Luis Orozco, Jr., Angela G. Reyes, Anisa Sahoubah, and Adnoris Torres, Detroit Free Press
- **Study: Low Income, English Learners Underfunded By \$5.1B**, Gongwer
- [Michigan Senate lawmakers spar before passing \\$21 billion school aid budget](#), by Lori Higgins, Chalkbeat Detroit



Advocates and Educators Make an Impact in Lansing

In partnership with The Education Trust—Midwest, about 20 [Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity \(MPEO\)](#) members engaged in a day of advocacy on April 19 in Lansing, as part of a multifaceted engagement and advocacy strategy.

Coalition partners and ETM team members met with legislators to [discuss proposals to create a more fair and equitable school funding system](#), especially for the students who are the most underserved in our state — including students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, students living in concentrated poverty and rural areas, and students from low-income backgrounds.

MPEO members delivered firsthand insights from the communities they represent. Their advocacy efforts highlight proposals for a new school funding formula that considers the concentration of poverty in districts, invests significantly more in students with the greatest needs, and delivers promising solutions for impactful change as Michigan's fiscal year 2024 budget begins to take shape. Read the full blog post [here](#).



The Education Trust—Midwest



Additionally, teachers from the [Michigan Teacher Leadership Collaborative](#) — which is co-convened by ETM and Teach Plus Michigan — engaged in a day of advocacy on March 21. Hosted by the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) in Lansing, the event was titled, “Building on Momentum,” and aimed at advocating for equitable policy change in Michigan education.

The team met with 18 policymakers to advocate for universal FAFSA completion, teacher retention efforts, equitable school funding, and more.

Read more [here](#).



“I am delighted and encouraged that our Advocacy Day in Lansing captured the attention and interest of our State Legislators on what they can do now to create an adequate, fair, and equitable education funding system for all students.”

— Alice Thompson, one of the chairs of the MPEO. Thompson also chairs the education committee for the Detroit NAACP and is CEO of BFDI Educational Services, Inc.

For more information, please visit midwest.edtrust.org

The Education Trust—New York



New York faces early literacy crisis: Report calls out systemic barriers and calls for immediate solutions

While New York struggles with an early education literacy crisis, the widespread use of non-evidence-based practices in teaching reading is compounding the problem. While state leaders are aware of the crisis, their inaction is denying the state's earliest learners access to proven resources shown to boost reading skills, according to a report by Ed Trust—New York.

The report, "[A Call to Action: The State of Early Literacy in New York](#)," highlights a disjointed early literacy landscape in New York. It elevates non-evidence-based practices in the teaching of reading and shares recommendations on how state and local leaders can address New York's poor reading outcomes by anchoring reading and literacy instruction in the science of reading, a proven, evidence-based approach.

Read more about how state and local leaders can help solve the early literacy crisis [here](#).

New York City public school leaders commit to improving reading outcomes

New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) are leading the way by publicly committing to improving the early literacy curriculum. The announcement came after Ed Trust—NY published the aforementioned [early literacy report](#). Ed Trust—NY and our partners advocated to make early literacy a priority in NYCPS. Ed Trust—NY will continue to urge state education leaders to follow the city's lead and address the early literacy crisis at the state level.

[Learn more about New York City's historic announcement here.](#)

Changes to New York City public schools' funding formula promote equity

Many New York City public school students will benefit from new changes to the [Fair Student Funding Formula](#), which were proposed by a working group co-chaired by Dr. Dia Bryant, Ed Trust—NY's executive director, and approved by city leaders in May. The Fair Student Funding Formula is the main source of discretionary money for most schools. The formula overhaul increases equity in funding by targeting students experiencing homelessness, recent asylum-seeking students, and students who attend schools that have higher concentrations of students with needs.

Advocacy by Raising NY and partners leads to expansion of state child tax credit

Raising NY and its coalition members have long [been urging](#) state leaders to expand the Empire State Child Tax Credit, and the 2024 New York state budget expands it to include children under 4. This is a win for families with young children — but there is still work to do. Raising NY will keep advocating for expansion of the credit to families with the lowest incomes and immigrant families in the next budget season.

The Education Trust—New York

The pandemic accelerated declining student enrollment in every region of the state

While New York state schools have experienced declining enrollment for much of the past decade, an analysis by EdTrust–NY found that the pandemic accelerated this trend in every region in the state, driving the largest enrollment loss in the nation.

Learn about how state and local education leaders can stem these enrollment declines [here](#).

Model projects cost of providing access to high-quality child care for all New Yorkers

EdTrust–NY, in partnership with Raising NY and Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies, released a cost model that projects that New York would need to invest roughly \$20 billion to make high-quality child care available to all children age 5 and under, while ensuring that providers earn a living wage. The model is a useful tool that can be used to inform advocacy efforts and policy innovations to meet the vast needs of young children and their families in New York state. Learn more [here](#).



Access to advanced coursework in New York State

Analysis finds students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are underrepresented in advanced courses

An analysis by the New York Equity Coalition found that across New York state, the education system continues to deny students of color and students from low-income backgrounds access to rigorous advanced coursework opportunities that will prepare them for success in college and careers. Additionally, the analysis found that there was little change in access to advanced courses between the 2019-20 and 2021-22 school years.

Learn how districts can invest pandemic relief funding to increase equitable access [here](#).

FAFSA completion rate in New York state continues to lag behind pre-pandemic levels

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rate continues to lag pre-pandemic levels, particularly at schools that serve the largest shares of students from low-income backgrounds.

Learn more about the statewide findings [here](#).

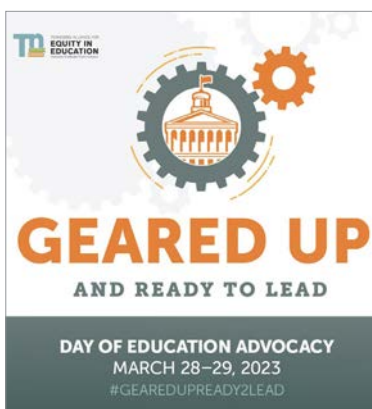
For more information, please visit [newyork.edtrust.org](https://www.newyork.edtrust.org)

The Education Trust–Tennessee



Tennessee Convenes Equity Alliance in “Geared Up and Ready to Lead” Day of Education Advocacy

Nearly 150 education advocates and students from across the state joined Ed Trust–Tennessee at our TN Alliance for Equity in Education Day of Education Advocacy at the Tennessee legislature. We brought over 40 students and nearly 100 adults to the General Assembly on March 29. [Students](#) and partners joined us from Memphis, Clarksville, Nashville, Knoxville, Morristown, and Chattanooga. Nineteen teams conducted over 90 visits with legislators and also watched the Senate Education Committee and the House Education Administration Committee conduct business. We are grateful to all who joined us and to legislative staff and policymakers who took the time to engage and listen to our students and partners.



Ed Trust Tennessee Celebrates the Top 10 Policy Proposals in 2023 With Award Reception

Ten for Tennessee recognizes and celebrates the top 10 policy proposals in 2023 that best advance educational equity and justice in the state. On March 28, legislators and education advocates joined us in recognizing lawmakers for their new ideas or proposed changes to programs and policies that touch the lives of millions of students across the state.

This year, we had significant wins, including expanding access to summer learning camps through increased funding, protecting the teaching of holistic history by requiring public high schools to teach about the Civil Rights Movement, and investing in targeted ninth grade student success supports. While some Ten for Tennessee bills did not move forward, several still have an opportunity to be re-calendared during the second year of the 113th Tennessee General Assembly.

Learn more at <https://edtrust.org/tennessee/ten-for-tennessee/>

The Education Trust–Tennessee



Ed Trust speaks out against bill that would allow teachers to carry guns in Tennessee

A few months ago, a shooter killed three 9-year old students and three adults at The Covenant School in Nashville. This tragedy has not only left Tennesseans mourning for the senseless loss of life in our community, but highlights the need to employ evidence-based strategies to create safer schools, which must include removing guns from schools to protect our children.

In the days following the shooting, a bill was introduced that would have allowed teachers to carry guns in schools. Ed Trust–Tennessee galvanized its network of students and partners across the state to [sign a letter](#) to the House Administration Committee, urging opposition to this proposal. More than 2,000 education advocates from across the state signed the letter.

60% of all Tennessee third graders may be retained under new Tennessee law aimed at addressing interrupted learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

A new law aimed at addressing unfinished learning during the COVID-19 pandemic would retain students based on their performance on the state's annual standardized test, TCAP. The law requires students who do not meet certain TCAP standards to be retested or retained. The law, which was introduced in 2021, went into effect this year, creating challenges in every district in the state.

Since 2021, The Education Trust–Tennessee has published information informing stakeholders about the new policy, and in the last year, we released additional fact sheets, briefs, and webinars to inform others about how this law will impact all students — but especially English learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds. Ed Trust–Tennessee will continue to monitor implementation of the new law and work with education advocates across the state to offer potential policy solutions and recommendations in the upcoming legislative session.



For more information, please visit edtrust.org/tennessee

WITH GRATITUDE

The Education Trust would like to express our deepest gratitude for the support of our mission to advance policies and practices to overcome the racial and economic barriers embedded in the American education system. As attacks on public education abound, generous gifts from donors such as these provide the financial and moral support needed to continue to press for educational equity and justice. We are continually thankful for your support. **Thank you!**

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The Education Trust

Our Mission

The Education Trust is committed to advancing policies and practices to dismantle the racial and economic barriers embedded in the American education system. Through our research and advocacy, EdTrust improves equity in education from preschool through college, engages diverse communities dedicated to education equity and justice, and increases political and public will to build an education system where students will thrive.

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