



THE

POWER

OF ADVOCACY



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

The Power of Advocacy



Let's be frank: It becomes clearer every day that the recent, widespread attacks on public education are rooted in the unfounded fear of demographic change. That's

why I am proud that the EdTrust team, working alongside our partners, has continued to harness the power of advocacy to cut through the noise and demand that students of color and students from low-income backgrounds receive a high-quality education, so they can live the lives of their choosing.

This EdTrust update highlights our continuing mission to advocate for evidence-based strategies that improve student outcomes. In it, we feature many of our reports, media interviews, and training sessions, which call for essential changes that would enable every student to learn at high levels in safe, nurturing, and inclusive learning environments.

In recent months, we have been focused on using data to counter the false narrative that increasing diversity and providing additional support for students who've traditionally been given short shrift comes at the expense of other privileged students.

EdTrust continues to speak out on various educational equity issues. Recently, I testified in front of the United States House Committee on Oversight and Accountability's Health Care and Financial Services Subcommittee for a hearing called "America's Report Card: Oversight of K-12 Public Education." Speaking in a dual capacity as an expert witness and concerned mom, I urged Congress to extend the deadline of using pandemic relief funds, so they can be used to sustain programs such as targeted intensive tutoring and mental health supports, which have been proven to be successful in helping students overcome their unfinished learning and improve their well-being.

With our partners, we have helped shape legislation, including the Advanced Coursework Equity Act, which was reintroduced by Sen. Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX) and would, if enacted, authorize \$800 million in grants to address equity gaps in enrollment and performance in advanced programs and courses. EdTrust supports this bill because we know that having access to advanced coursework and STEM education are essential for students' long-term success. In fact, EdTrust has long championed increasing access to advanced coursework for Black and Latino students, who are often shut out of these classes.

We have also been active in states across the country. In Michigan, for example, we had a historic win for equitable funding, securing more than \$200 million in FY24 for students from low-income backgrounds who need the most support from our schools. In California, we documented our impact over a three-year period, including securing more than \$85 million for math and science professional development for educators, making EdTrust-West a powerful equity advocate in California. In New York, we successfully advocated to expand access to child-care subsidies. In Tennessee, we launched a [regional strategy to improve school funding across the South](#). In Texas, we worked to secure a [funding overhaul for community colleges across the state](#).

As we advance our work in 2024, we will continue to raise our voices and shine a light on inequities in our education system that prevent too many students from reaching their full academic potential. Unfortunately, there is more work to do. Florida is pulling 1,600 books — including dictionaries — from public school libraries. Colleges and universities are dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. The list goes on.

But as fierce change agents, we are up to the challenge. We will continue to be a force for good and use the power of advocacy to create a brighter, more just, and equitable future for students.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise Forte". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Denise Forte

President & CEO of EdTrust

 [@Denise_EdTrust](#)

THEORY OF CHANGE

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

Communicating the excellence of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds

Conducting research on best practices and uses data to increase accountability and transparency



The Education Trust

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

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

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

THE POWER OF ADVOCACY

“Beneath [statistics] lies a tension between hope and frustration that characterizes current attitudes about education at every level.... The public will demand that educational and political leaders act forcefully and effectively on these issues ... This unity, however, can be achieved only if we avoid the unproductive tendency of some to search for scapegoats among the victims.”

—A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform

THIS PASSAGE FROM THE SEMINAL 1983 WHITE HOUSE-COMMISSIONED REPORT RINGS AS TRUE TODAY AS WHEN IT WAS WRITTEN FOUR DECADES AGO.

For students, parents, and teachers, the quest for a high-quality education continues to be an amalgamation of hope and frustration — progress made, progress thwarted, and even progress rolled back by those who insist on maintaining the status quo.

Lately, extreme right-wing actors have launched a well-funded misinformation and disinformation media campaign to justify undermining our public schools and marginalizing students of color, LGBTQ+ people, and those most impacted by systemic inequities. If left unchecked, these fears and lies will destroy racial and gender identity freedoms, funding equity, academic standards, and mental health supports that are proven to advance students who’ve long been underserved.

However, the power of advocacy is allowing more voices to be heard to spotlight inequities and push back against dangerous, racist, and homophobic rhetoric. And EdTrust continues to speak up for our nation’s most underserved students, who are demanding their right to the pursuit of happiness — because this is the bedrock of our democracy.

Harnessing the Power of Student & Parent Voice

In Louisiana, EdTrust, partnering with the Baton Rouge Alliance for Students, created the [Baton Rouge Youth Voice Initiative](#), which engages students in conversations about improving their education system. Louisiana state director Tramelle Howard said, “If we want to see change, we must hear directly from students because they have the direct experience and can change hearts, minds, and ideas quicker than adults.”

Meanwhile, EdTrust in Texas was instrumental in informing a state commission created to make recommendations on community college finance. In a state where 70% of first- and second-year college students go to a public two-year institution, EdTrust helped form a [student advisory council](#) to advocate for policy solutions. After 18 months of coordinated advocacy, House Bill 8 was passed. The result: nearly \$700 million in additional investment for community colleges and increases to need-based financial aid programs. “Less than 30% of eligible students in Texas were receiving state aid,” said Jonathan Feinstein, Texas state director. “Now, the goal is to reach closer to 70%.”



Also using the power of student voice, EdTrust interviewed Black, Latino, and Asian American college students at PWIs to inform a [recent report](#) on campus racial climate. Many of the interviewees are dismayed by the lack of diversity on their campuses. “When I realized there was no Black person or a Black professor in the STEM field at my school, I was like, ‘I can’t do this,’” said one Black student. While DEI programs are being stripped from college campuses, this report shows that colleges need to make greater efforts to create inclusive campus environments, not fewer.

Additionally, EdTrust helps parents and teachers be more effective advocates. In December, EdTrust president & CEO Denise Forte was a guest on the PTA’s [“Notes from the Backpack” podcast](#), where she encouraged parents and teachers to push back on recent censorship efforts.

Advocating for Honest History and Rigorous & Relevant Curriculum

Continuing our pushback against racial and cultural erasure, our [Can’t Be Erased social media campaign](#) highlights the importance of protecting access to books by Black, Latino, Native, and LGBTQ+ authors, and protesting

censorship of classroom discussions about the history of racism in the U.S. The campaign proved so effective, it won an [Anthem Award](#) in the Community Voices category.

Curriculum standards remain a key issue. When the National Assessment Governing Board solicited comments on updates to the 2028 NAEP Science Assessment Framework, which hadn’t been updated since 2005, EdTrust voiced concerns about the centering of White experiences as the norm. As a result, the board instituted [changes](#) to make the framework more equitable.

EdTrust also released a new [report](#), “Opportunities Denied: High-Achieving Black and Latino Students Lack Access to Advanced Math,” which highlighted inequities in high school coursework. And on the Hill, we successfully helped shape the reintroduction of the [Advanced Coursework Equity Act](#).

The bottom line: Until our society stops blaming students of color for racial disparities in education, EdTrust will continue to use the power of advocacy to build a better road to student success.

AT A GLANCE

During the last quarter, EdTrust worked alongside partners and community members to harness the power of advocacy



ON THE HILL

EdTrust has remained deeply engaged on a host of federal priorities this quarter. We continue to play a leading role in helping advance a federal budget that prioritizes public schools and invests in educators, students, and their families. As such, we are monitoring the House FY24 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, which, if enacted, would result in [catastrophic](#) funding cuts to essential educational programs.

Last November, EdTrust drafted a [letter](#) signed by more than 50 national and state partners to members of Congress expressing our strong opposition to the House Republican proposal, which would decimate America's education system. [We are pleased to see that our efforts](#) to date have helped defeat the advancement of this proposal.

[Another area of emphasis](#) has been ensuring that the remaining funds allocated to the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund by the American Rescue Plan Act are used to support students and address unfinished learning.

In December, we convened a meeting with partners and the U.S. Department of Education to discuss how stakeholders and ED can work together to

support academic recovery and accelerated learning in the final nine months of ESSER fund availability. During a meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary Adam Schott, we uplifted EdTrust's ESSER work, including our social media campaign and webinars with state partners, and listened to what concrete steps EdTrust could take to support states and districts. We received great feedback from ED representatives and [will remain heavily engaged](#) in this work well into 2024.

Then, on January 30, Denise Forte testified in front of the United States House Committee on Oversight and Accountability's Health Care and Financial Services Subcommittee for a hearing called "America's Report Card: Oversight of K-12 Public Education." Here, she raised concerns about the looming deadline of the end of ESSER relief funds, pushed for more culturally representative and supportive learning environments, and stressed the need for evidence-based strategies to address unfinished learning. Watch [here](#).

We will continue to stay deeply involved in the federal funding battle over the coming months.

IN THE STATES



DELAWARE

Here, the much-anticipated American Institutes for Research (AIR) [school funding recommendations report](#) was released, which recommended up to \$1 billion in increased education funding and a shift to a modernized, more equitable student-weighted funding formula. EdTrust led strategy sessions with Rodel, Bellwether, and the ACLU of Delaware to discuss ways to engage advocates around these funding reform recommendations. We also supported Rodel in developing advocacy trainings around school funding for various stakeholders and a statewide community engagement campaign during the state's legislative session. Additionally, EdTrust and Rodel have been providing support and advocating for legislation to expand and clarify streamlined access to in-state tuition and public scholarships for undocumented Delawareans.



KENTUCKY

EdTrust has supported the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in developing resources that advocate for increased access to advanced coursework for Black, Latino, and students from low-income backgrounds in Kentucky. EdTrust's recently released [advanced coursework brief](#), co-authored with Prichard, outlines actionable recommendations that Kentucky state leaders can take to promote rigorous and college credit-bearing opportunities for students. Chief among these are automatic enrollment policies, which ensure that students with qualifying test scores are automatically enrolled in the next advanced course. Prichard highlighted the benefits of these policies in a recent [op-ed](#) in the Louisville Courier Journal. Additionally, EdTrust continues to provide strategic thought partnership and advocacy expertise for the Kentucky Equity Coalition, which is considering various tactics to oppose a [newly introduced anti-DEI higher ed bill](#) in the state legislature.



LOUISIANA

EdTrust in Louisiana has been working to expand its footprint by engaging with stakeholders. In November, we examined the state of education in Louisiana during a four-day landscape analysis meeting, which was hosted by EdTrust in Louisiana and featured strategy sessions with educators, state representatives, and the superintendent of Caddo Parish schools.

We have continued to partner with East Baton Rouge (EBR) Parish School System and advise the district's leaders and superintendents on ways to continue engaging with students. Alongside EBR's superintendent, we also recently celebrated precedented student gains for Tara High School ninth graders ,who ranked [highest](#) in the nation for on-track improvement, and the continued expansion of dual enrollment in the district.

This reporting period, we hosted workshops on our student voice work at the New Orleans College & Career Attainment Network's ([NOLACCAN](#)) Life After High School conference and at the STRIVE Together Literacy Convening, where we also presented on our [early literacy campaign](#). Our Amplify LA student advocates also attended the [Louisiana YMCA Youth Legislature Conference](#), a statewide meeting attended by more than 300 students from across the state who are tasked with assuming government roles to debate issues of local and state importance and write their own legislation. From this experience, students gained firsthand knowledge of the democratic process and developed leadership and presiding skills.

We also created an [inspiring video](#) that shines a spotlight on some of the amazing work happening at schools across Louisiana. This video premiered in January the Champions Gala, which was hosted by EdTrust in Louisiana at the Manship Theater in Baton Rouge.



MARYLAND

EdTrust continues to support the Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE) — a coalition of education advocacy, civil rights, and community-based organizations — in pushing for equitable funding and academic outcomes for all Black and Latino students. We coordinated a retreat to refresh MAREE's policy agenda and legislative priorities for 2024, which focus on fully funding the [Blueprint for Maryland's Future](#), and are finalizing a new coalition website and online resources to help advocates understand and act on state- and district-level decision-making around implementation of the landmark law.

Also, the coalition has increasingly engaged with the Maryland Legislative Black Caucus, the country's largest group of Black elected officials at the state level. At a more localized level, EdTrust has continued to provide strategic thought partnership and technical assistance to the [Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence](#) in Montgomery County. In November, we provided support and data analysis for the coalition's inaugural community forum on improving student literacy, which had over 800 attendees from across the county.



TEXAS

Following an unprecedented fourth special session that ended with no education savings accounts and no additional funding for public education, despite record state revenues, the growing EdTrust in Texas team is hard at work advancing [P-12](#) and [higher education](#) recommendations to elevate the biggest challenges and opportunities for lawmakers to tackle in the next legislative session. We continue to amplify the voices of [student leaders like Ángel García Donjuán](#) and [classroom educators like Erika DeLaRosa](#) at all levels of change, while bringing forward [data-centered research on the impact of federal relief funds](#) and leading [student-focused advocacy efforts in Houston](#).



MASSACHUSETTS

In response to the growing focus on college and career readiness in the Commonwealth, EdTrust in Massachusetts team has been advocating for policy changes to ensure that all students have equitable access to high-quality postsecondary opportunities and uplifting the perspectives of students, families, and local leaders in the process. In October, in partnership with the [Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education \(MBAE\)](#) and [Latinos for Education](#), we released “[Lifting Our Communities: Building Education Pathways to Economic Opportunity for All](#),” a joint report that highlights the inequities in college and career pathways that features interviews with Black and Latino business and education leaders and students from across Greater Boston, details their personal experiences and professional insights, and offers solutions and a framework to address systemic challenges.

In November, we released the results of our [latest statewide poll](#) of Massachusetts parents with students in grades 6-12, which was conducted by [The MassINC Polling Group](#) and focused on parental insights about college and career readiness. To discuss possible policy solutions to address the issues uncovered in the poll, we hosted a virtual event highlighting the polls' key findings. Over 150 people attended the event, which featured a panel discussion between a college student and state advocates. Additionally, the commissioner of higher education, Noe Ortega, and a top official at the [Rhode Island Department of Education \(RIDE\)](#) shared promising practices and lessons learned from Rhode Island's efforts to better connect students to career exploration, education opportunities, and college preparation programs.

In January, we were invited by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education to testify at their public hearing on college affordability. At the meeting, we joined three other partners from our Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) coalition to share our policy recommendations for ensuring that the public higher education system in Massachusetts is truly equitable and affordable.

EVENTS

Over two days in October, advocates from different states gathered for EdTrust's virtual event, "ESSER Funding Sustainability Workshop: Preparing for the Fiscal Cliff," which featured guest speakers from Education Resource Strategies (ERS), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR). The presenters noted that high-need school districts could suffer the greatest financial losses when COVID-relief (ESSER) funding expires, which means students attending schools in these districts could face additional educational barriers. The good news is that state and school district leaders can reduce the negative impact on students' learning recovery if they act now. To hear more about how to turn ESSER fiscal cliffs into downward staircases that lead to sustainability for long-term investments in students' learning and educational futures, check out the recordings below.

DAY ONE
Webinar Recording



DAY TWO
Webinar Recording



In January, EdTrust, TeachPlus, the National Urban League, All4Ed, the National Center for Learning Disabilities, and UnidosUS co-hosted a workshop for district leaders and other school community stakeholders to learn practical strategies to advocate for fair funding in their school communities. The "Equity Beyond ESSER" workshop brought together district leaders and advocates from across the country to discuss how to sustain important investments when COVID-19 relief funding disappears. The calls to action for advocates included: attending relevant public hearings on districts' budgets and submitting public comments, when possible; scrutinizing publicly available district and school budget documents; reviewing school closure and consolidation proposals through an equity lens; and talking to media to help shape the narrative about what students still need.



IN THE MEDIA

[Texas' school ratings remain in limbo as the state and school districts fight over how strict the grading should be](#), **Texas Tribune (also featured in The 74 and 28 other outlets), 01/16/24**

"This decision leaves local school system leaders, community members, and families without one of their only tools for understanding school performance and advocating for essential programs and resources specifically designed to lift up their most underserved students," said Jonathan Feinstein, director of EdTrust in Texas.

[Should Black parents worry about a 4-day school week?](#), **AFRO News 12/31/23**

"These are students who rely on school supports and additional educational services, students that really need to build strong relationships with teachers," [William] Rodick says. "So, taking an additional day of contact, we can imagine that's going to have negative consequences on certain student groups."

[Advanced High School Math Classes a Game Changer, But Not All High Achievers Have Access](#), **The 74 (also featured in 1 other outlet), 12/10/23**

"We know that it is so important for students to feel engaged and that their learning experiences are relevant," said Ivy Smith Morgan, EdTrust's director for P-12 research and data analytics. "What this conjures for me is the anecdotes about students who are so smart but stop paying attention in class because they are not challenged. They are not getting the opportunities that align with their ability."

[How Schools Can Diversify Math Course-Taking](#), **EdWeek, 12/07/23**

"When schools have algebra or advanced math in middle school, they need to make sure students can access that equitably," said Kristen Hengtgen, a senior P-12 policy analyst at EdTrust, a research and advocacy group. "Our bigger concern is, so often when students are identified for advanced math opportunities ... inequities inevitably happen around what teachers and counselors think of which students can be successful in the class."

[Some who took out parent PLUS loans to send their kids to college expect to die with debt](#), **USA Today (also featured in 22 other outlets), 12/03/23**

"It evolved into a space where you saw more Black borrowers and more middle-income borrowers using the parent PLUS loan as a resource," said Brittani Williams, a scholar and advocate [formerly] with EdTrust, who co-authored a report earlier this year on Parent PLUS and Black borrowers. "And I use that term very loosely because I think that resources should be helpful."

[Southern States Should Take Lead Role in Solving School Funding Crisis](#), **Forbes, 11/22/23**

"A brief from EdTrust and Education Resource Strategies (ERS) provides guidance for school district and state leaders to help them make data-informed, equitable decisions as they navigate this school year and the years following the fiscal cliff. It encourages community input, collaboration with school staff, students and families, data-driven outcomes, and a focus on students with the most need."

[Millions could benefit from a new way out of student loan default, NPR \(also featured in 11 other outlets\), 11/21/23](#)

“Black borrowers in particular have extremely high default rates because they have fewer financial resources to pay for college,” says Victoria Jackson, with EdTrust, a nonprofit that advocates for equity in education.”

[Even equal education funding is not enough, Washington Post, 11/14/23](#)

“No one is arguing that progress hasn’t been made, but to suggest that funding gaps are practically gone simply defies what the data shows. EdTrust’s research finds that high-poverty districts receive about \$800 less per student annually than wealthier districts, and districts serving the most students of color receive about \$2,700 less per student than those that serve the fewest.”

[SCOTUS affirmative action ruling was ‘blow’ to Black students, but it put ‘spotlight’ on HBCUs: Advocates, ABC News \(also featured in 30 other outlets\), 10/24/23](#)

“[Former] higher education research analyst Gabriel Montague said in a statement that ending affirmative action as it has historically been used could prompt Black students to instead seek schools where they will be ‘comfortable in their diversity’ while still ‘weighing options of affordability and career goals.’ Montague is the author of ‘Segregation Forever,’ an analysis from the advocacy group EdTrust of the underrepresentation of Black students at elite schools.”

[EdTrust Report Says Anti-DEI Policies On College Campuses Are Making Students Of Color Feel Unwelcome, Black Enterprise \(also featured in 2 other outlets\), 10/21/23](#)

“Despite numerous pledges to address campus diversity from university leadership, many students of color continue to report feelings of isolation, have limited support, and don’t trust campus leadership to appropriately resolve or address racial incidents,” [Jessie] Hernandez-Reyes said in a statement. “University leadership must act to address poor campus racial culture, as research consistently shows that students of color’s experiences on college campuses significantly affect their sense of belonging, perseverance, and graduation rates.”

For more media coverage, see our [In the News section](#) on edtrust.org.

ON THE BLOG

[The Literacy Crisis in the U.S. is Deeply Concerning—and Totally Preventable](#)

[The New Gainful Employment Rule Set to Protect Black Borrowers From Predatory Colleges](#)

[The Power of Advocacy](#)

[2022 PISA Results Are in, and the Results Are Grim—but There Are Ways for U.S. Students to Succeed in a Global Economy](#)

[Why Education Equity Is So Important, Right Now](#)

[How FAFSA Delays Will Impact College-Going Decisions of Low-Income Students and Students of Color](#)

[How Education Creates a Pathway for Formerly Incarcerated People's Reintegration](#)

[Could the Emerging Use of A.I. in Schools be the Next Digital Divide?](#)

[For Students to Feel Welcome at College, PWIs Need More DEI efforts—not Less](#)

[Policy and Mindsets Must Change to Truly Prepare Students for College & Career Success](#)



EdTrust-West



Lessons Learned from 10 Years of Equitable Funding in California

At the beginning of November 2023, EdTrust-West released “[More to Be Done: California’s Local Control Funding Formula After a Decade](#),” a report analyzing some of the successes and failures of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in the 10 years since its adoption. Demonstrating how LCFF funds have failed to close racial equity gaps, “More to Be Done” identifies four key shortcomings that limit the formula’s potential and four equity principles education leaders should follow to improve LCFF.

The report urges state leaders and education equity champions to have crucial conversations that lead to tangible action to address LCFF’s limitations and calls for legislative hearings. To galvanize fellow advocates and state leaders around a shared path to fix LCFF, EdTrust-West and partners from the LCFF Equity Coalition also recently hosted a series of legislative briefings in Sacramento. The briefings covered the historical context of LCFF, relevant policy windows, and challenges facing California in its path to improve LCFF. As 2024’s legislative session takes shape, EdTrust-West will continue to push for legislative briefings and concrete changes that better leverage the funding formula to advance racial equity for California’s students.

Coming Together to Better Support Parenting Students

This past fall, in partnership with workforce advocacy organization California Competes, EdTrust-West launched The California Alliance for Student Parent Success, a network of parenting students, education leaders, and advocates committed to developing and implementing solutions to address the barriers impacting student parents’ postsecondary success. The goal of the alliance is to shift policies, practices, and resources to support student parents as they navigate higher education.

In December, the Alliance sent an executive summary of a parenting students policy agenda to legislators and other leaders throughout the state to kick off legislative advocacy around better supporting the estimated 10% or more of California college students who are parents. Together, EdTrust-West and California Competes will launch the Alliance website, a hub for policy information, resources, and advocacy efforts that also houses the full Alliance Policy Agenda to guide California’s state, institutional, and campus leaders in designing and implementing better policies and practices on campuses and in programs around the state to better serve parenting students.

The CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE *for*
STUDENT PARENT SUCCESS

EdTrust-West

Showcasing Impact, Sharing Data and Wins

In November, EdTrust-West released its second-ever “[Impact Report](#),” which looks at the organization’s impact over a three-year period. The report showcases the wide range of activities the organization focuses on, sharing data on online and media reach, reports and resources created and shared with advocates, as well as hours spent briefing state leaders and in action planning with partners in community advocacy meetings around the state. It highlights successes from the past three years, including EdTrust-West’s successful efforts to secure over \$30 billion in state investments in equitable programs and policies and high success rate (75%) of turning many of the organization’s priority legislative proposals into law. In addition, the report gives funders and other stakeholders more information on EdTrust-West’s approach to power building and coalition work and highlights the recent big wins the organization has secured for California’s Black, Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native students.



Connecting Educational Justice to Larger Struggles for Freedom

In November, the EdTrust-West team traveled to the Equal Justice Initiative’s Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, for a multi-day retreat. The trip gave the team an opportunity to reflect, discuss the continuing struggle for racial justice and education equity, and consider ways to improve the organization’s work.

Leading with Excellence

In January, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced that he appointed Dr. Christopher Nellum, executive director of EdTrust-West, to the California Cradle-to-Career Data System Governing Board. According to California’s official website, the California Cradle-to-Career Data System is a statewide longitudinal data system that provides tools to help students reach their goals and delivers information on education and workforce outcomes.

For more information, please visit west.edtrust.org

EdTrust-Midwest

EdTrust-Midwest Showcases 10+ Years of Impact

In February, EdTrust–Midwest (ETM) issued its new [“Impact Report”](#) celebrating policy wins over the past three years — including a success rate of 76% when it comes to advancing the organization’s legislative priorities — and advocacy on behalf of students who are underserved.

Since ETM’s inception more than a decade ago, we have stayed steadfast in the belief that addressing systemic problems in our schools that lead to opportunity gaps is the key to transforming America’s and Michigan’s education system. The report shows how ETM has built a movement in Michigan by leading and supporting efforts to ensure that all Michigan students — especially Black and Latino students and children from low-income backgrounds — have access to a high-quality public education.

Working alongside a growing number of committed partners, ETM has played a pivotal role in creating crucial statewide policy changes and supporting equity-driven practices. ETM’s efforts have opened doors to inspiring conversations with leaders in state government, K-12 education, business, civil rights, philanthropy, nonprofit and grassroots spaces.

“We’ve been honored to help build leaders’ and advocates’ knowledge about effective strategies to close opportunity gaps,” said Amber Arellano, executive director of EdTrust-Midwest. “We’ve taken bold action leading to transformational policy changes; formed effective and durable equity-centered coalitions; researched and spearheaded high-leverage strategies from top education states; and led major public engagement campaigns. We are proud to have served as a leading voice for educational equity in thousands of conversations.”

Highlighted impact includes:

- With help from partners, ETM secured more than \$200 million in FY24 for students from low-income backgrounds who need the most support from our schools.
- ETM’s geographic and organizational reach, and that of its coalition partners, stretch across 28 counties, 214 local school districts, 219 charter schools in Michigan. Our work touches more than one million students.
- ETM holds hundreds of meetings with policy leaders annually — and we held more than 50 in fall 2023 alone.
- Since its founding in 2010, ETM has assembled 160+ coalitions and partners.
- Over the last decade or so, ETM has issued more than 140 policy briefs, reports, and public testimonies focused on best practices in leading states and advocating for all Michigan students, but especially those who are underserved.

“EdTrust-Midwest holds a unique position in Michigan’s K-12 ecosystem — they take a nonpartisan, data-driven approach, with a laser focus on improving outcomes for Michigan students. ALL children deserve strong schools to set them up for successful, fulfilling lives, and we appreciate EdTrust-Midwest’s unwavering leadership in research and advocacy to build support for policy changes to close existing opportunity gaps.”

—KAYLA RONEY SMITH,
PORTFOLIO MANAGER, BALLMER
GROUP — SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

EdTrust-Midwest



Our vision:

Michigan will be a national leader in public education, where all children achieve at high levels, regardless of race, gender, disability, family income, native language or geography.

EdTrust-Midwest and Advocates Score Key Equity-Centered Wins in Recommendations of Gov. Whitmer's Population Council

Following sustained equity-centered advocacy efforts by EdTrust-Midwest and its partners, Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's Growing Michigan Together Council included [several key transformational education recommendations in its final report](#), released in December, including a recommendation to fully fund the state's new [Opportunity Index](#) — a school funding mechanism that will drive greater state investment in students from low-income backgrounds. ETM and partners in the [Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity coalition](#) (MPEO coalition) were leading champions of the Opportunity Index, which was approved by the legislature in June. Thanks to that historic vote, Michigan is now one of the first 10 states in the nation, among those with similar funding systems, to use an index for concentration of poverty in its school funding formula.

The council's work is noteworthy and reflects the culmination of more than three years of efforts to align business leaders, teacher unions, superintendents, equity leaders led by ETM, legislative leaders, and the Whitmer administration on the total dollars needed to fund P-12 public education adequately and fairly in the state. Next steps will include the development of more detailed revenue generation strategies.

Arellano was appointed to pre-K-12 education work group of the council, a statewide bipartisan group of leaders charged with making important recommendations for the future of the state. Alice Thompson, who along with Arellano is one of the three chairs of the MPEO coalition, also was appointed to the education workgroup. Thompson also chairs the education committee for the Detroit NAACP and is CEO of BFDI Educational Services, Inc.

EdTrust-Midwest

“We are proud to have worked alongside our colleagues on the P-12 workgroup to advocate for key equity-centered recommendations, like full funding of the Opportunity Index, as well as far greater funding to support the needs of English learners and full funding for the needs of students with disabilities,” Arellano said. “While there’s much more to do, it’s gratifying and encouraging to see so many stakeholders who collectively agree that Michigan needs to address the longstanding inequities in education, so that all students have the opportunity for an excellent public education.”

In the immediate term, the Opportunity Index will drive more than \$950 million toward the public education of students who qualify for “at-risk” funding in the FY24 state school budget, or more than \$200 million above the FY23 state budget. However, the index is not yet fully funded. As now written in state statute, the state funding mechanism sets new long-term goals for investing in Michigan’s students who qualify for “at-risk” funding that, upon full implementation, will invest more than \$2.9 billion annually in these students.

In its recommendations, the Growing Michigan Together Council called for designing a new funding formula for the next generation of P-12 schools that is adequate, equitable and efficient and aligned to the strategy for K-12.



Other recommendations, championed by EdTrust-Midwest and the MPEO, include:

- Fully funding special education and English learner programs for students across the state and requiring that funding be used for the target groups and strategies intended.
- Providing additional funding to meet the broader needs of students from low-income backgrounds and schools with high concentrations of students in poverty by fully implementing the new Opportunity Index.
- Guaranteeing that all students, including those in remote and high-poverty areas, have access to the full set of services they need to thrive, such as English language support, extracurriculars, and higher-level classes.
- Providing districts with stable funding, so that they can strategically plan for the long term, without disruptions from short-term shifts in enrollment.

For more information, please visit midwest.edtrust.org

EdTrust-New York

Raising New York's 2024 Policy Priorities

The Raising New York coalition, convened by EdTrust-NY, sent a letter to Gov. Kathy Hochul detailing the [coalition's 2024 policy priorities](#). More than 30 organizations signed on to the letter urging New York State to prioritize policies that expand access to high-quality and affordable childcare for all families. This can be done — in large part — by strengthening the child-care workforce; reducing child poverty through equitable systems, policies, and programs such as the Child Tax Credit; and increasing access to high-quality health and developmental care for all young children and mothers.

Celebrating Progress on Educator Diversity in New York State

Although there is still work to do in New York to enhance educator diversity, it is necessary to acknowledge and learn from the progress made across the state in offering increased hiring, professional-development, and advancement opportunities for teachers and school leaders from diverse backgrounds. Our [report on educator diversity](#), released in January 2024 — highlights how the New York State Education Department (NYSED), local school districts, institutions of higher education, schools, and advocates are working toward improving educator diversity.



New York State Public School Enrollment Trends in 2022-23

Our [new analysis](#) of NY state public school final enrollment data for the 2022-2023 school year finds that while enrollment continues to trend down and public schools have lost many students, the declines are slowing from their pandemic highs. Statewide and in the largest school districts, enrollment losses were greatest in the 2020-2021 school year, but largely reverted to their pre-pandemic levels this past school year. While state and district leadership should prepare for the fiscal implications of continued enrollment declines and the end of ESSER funding in 2024, the slowdown in enrollment losses is an important milestone and worth watching.

EdTrust-NY Statement on Gov. Hochul's 2024 State of the State Address Literacy Proposal

In January, the governor announced the "Back to Basics" plan to improve reading proficiency in New York as part of her 2024 State of the State. We believe the governor's proposal will help to ensure that districts across the state are providing evidence-based literacy instruction to all students, while also helping provide educators with the training and resources to implement these changes in the classroom.

EdTrust-New York

EdTrust-NY Policy Agenda 2024

For students, children, and families across New York State — particularly those of color and from low-income backgrounds — the 2024 legislative session presents a crucial opportunity to strengthen our educational system by providing all children with the resources and skills necessary for future success. Those include holistic support for children and families beginning at birth; evidence-based instruction in reading and math beginning in elementary school; and robust pathways to postsecondary opportunities beginning in middle school. As a statewide leader in the fight for educational equity, we are prioritizing statewide legislation and policies for the upcoming legislative session.

EdTrust-NY Launches the New York Campaign for Early Literacy

[The New York Campaign for Early Literacy](#), convened by EdTrust-New York, launched in January. The campaign is a statewide movement designed to harness the collective voices of individuals and civil rights, education, parent, nonprofit, and business organizations to improve student reading outcomes. The campaign seeks policy changes at the state and local levels that promote the use of evidence-based instruction aligned with the science of reading.



EdTrust-NY After-School Early Literacy Report

The New York Campaign for Early Literacy includes several early childhood partners and the NYS Network for Youth Success, which advocates for after school, summer, and extended day programs. The network released its report on the role that after school programs have in increasing early literacy in a webinar in February. According to a poll of 800 public school parents in New York, 94% of parents favor having additional reading instruction in summer and afterschool programs and want additional support to help develop their child's reading skills. The report highlights states, like Arkansas, that have successfully used federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers to provide academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children. In Arkansas, students at schools with these centers improved their performance on statewide assessments by 75%.

EdTrust-NY and Raising NY Release Cost Model Reports and Fiscal Analysis

In February, [The Raising NY coalition](#), which was convened by EdTrust-NY, partnered with [Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies](#) to create cost estimation models for the child-care and home visiting systems and conduct a fiscal analysis of the entire early childhood system. This winter, EdTrust-NY soft launched the models at a meeting with members of the governor's office, division of budget, relevant state agencies, and policymakers before releasing them to the public. Decision-makers can use the models to influence investments in the child-care and home-visiting workforces.

EdTrust-New York

Media Wins

We leveraged our longstanding relationships with media outlets across New York State to promote an equity agenda. Here is a sample of our media hits.

[EdTrust-NY alarmed by state test results](#) – The Capitol Pressroom

“We are concerned by the overall numbers, so we had less than half of all students across the state proficient in reading and a little more than half proficient in math,” said Jeff Smink, interim executive director of EdTrust-New York. “Those numbers are much lower when you look at students of color and low-income backgrounds.”

[Poor attendance fuels low reading scores](#) – Investigative Post

“95% of all kids can learn to read if they get the right instruction,” said Jeff Smink, interim executive director of EdTrust-New York. “There’s nothing wrong with kids...It’s just a matter of getting them the tools, the resources, empowering their families.”



[Gov. Hochul proposes statewide phonics-based reading program, following NYC](#) – NY Daily News

“Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is one of the most important indicators of future student success,” said Jeff Smink, interim executive director of EdTrust-New York. “Students who do not are four times more likely to drop out of school.”

[Student test scores, timing of their release draw criticism from advocates](#) – Newsday

“Releasing this important statewide data over six months after the tests have been administered dilutes the value of assessments, making it difficult for schools to use the data to inform instruction and target resources to students most in need of support,” said Jeff Smink, interim executive director of EdTrust-New York. “It also limits the ability of parents and caregivers, and other education stakeholders to fully understand their school’s performance and hold state and district leaders accountable for student outcomes.”

EdTrust-New York

[LITERACY PUSH: Education advocates are pressuring state and local leaders to take action to boost literacy rates among students](#) - POLITICO

The New York Campaign for Early Literacy — a new statewide movement of nearly 80 organizations and individuals representing children and families, including parents, students, educators and nonprofits — plans to raise awareness about the statewide literacy crisis and push for policy changes to ensure more students can read on grade level by the end of third grade.

Hochul recently unveiled a plan to revamp reading instruction in schools, including \$10 million to train 20,000 teachers in the science of reading, an approach that involves teaching kids phonics and how to sound out words.

But advocates and lawmakers want the governor to go a step further: sign legislation sponsored by Assemblymember Robert Carroll (D-Brooklyn) and Hoylman-Sigal that would require the state Education Department to give schools guidance to establish literacy curricula and teacher training based on the science of reading.

“Reading is a civil and human right, and all children can learn to read with the right support,” Jeff Smink, interim executive director of EdTrust-New York, which launched the campaign today at the Capitol, said in a statement.

For more information, please visit newyork.edtrust.org

EdTrust-Tennessee

Tennessee Launches Regional Strategy to Improve School Funding Across the South

School funding is an important dimension that unlocks equitable learning for all students. EdTrust-Tennessee championed legislation in 2022 that led to a comprehensive overhaul of the state's K-12 funding formula. This revamp is a key step toward ensuring that every child has the educational resources and access to high-quality teaching they need to succeed. Applying lessons learned from advocating for equitable funding reform in Tennessee, the EdTrust-Tennessee team has launched a [regional strategy](#) to improve school funding across the South.

Today, [more than a third of the nation's public school students attend schools in the South](#). Notably, more than half of the country's Black student population attends schools in the region, which also has a burgeoning Latino student population.

Yet, while the South — the people, its economy, its landscape — is changing for the better, Southerners know that there is still more work to be done to transform the region into a place where every student, and person, for that matter, can thrive.

- [4 out of 10 Southern states* rank in the bottom 10 states for per-student expenditures](#)
- [4 out of 10 Southern states* rank in the bottom 10 states for average teacher salaries](#)
- [6 out of 10 Southern states* have the highest child-poverty rates in the country](#)

Learn more at fundsouthernschools.org

[A New Promise: Ensuring Equitable Financial Aid Design for College Students in Tennessee](#)

EdTrust-Tennessee published a new report last fall, "[A New Promise: Ensuring Equitable Financial Aid Design for College Students in Tennessee](#)." In the report, EdTrust makes policy recommendations for how to improve financial aid systems to ensure that more students from low-income backgrounds are making it to and through college in Tennessee. For Tennessee's students from low-income backgrounds, the rising cost of attending college — inclusive of tuition, fees, books, and living expenses — threatens to undermine equal opportunity and the promise of higher education. Rising tuition and fees, combined with skyrocketing living expenses, disproportionately impact students who are unable to count on financial support from their families.

EdTrust-Tennessee released the report at an event featuring a panel conversation moderated by Dr. Kenyatta Lovett, principal at the Education Strategy Group; and Dr. Will Doyle, a professor at Peabody College at Vanderbilt University; State Rep. Harold M. Love, Jr.; Amy Moreland, assistant vice chancellor for policy and strategy at the Tennessee Board of Regents; Bob Obrohta, executive director of the Tennessee College Access and Success Network; and Samantha Gutter, an independent consultant formerly with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

EdTrust-Tennessee

FAQ Guide for Undocumented Students in Tennessee to Navigate College Options

We believe that every child — regardless of their age, gender, identity, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or citizenship status — deserves to have an excellent education. We advocate for all students to be able to reach their postsecondary and career dreams. But for undocumented students in Tennessee who are thinking about going to college, it can be difficult to access information and resources about how to make that dream a reality. To help undocumented and DACA students in Tennessee, we published an [FAQ](#) to help them attain their postsecondary and career dreams.

EdTrust-Tennessee Unveils 2024 Policy Agenda Alongside a Coalition of 85 Partner Organizations

During this reporting period, EdTrust-Tennessee convened [The Tennessee Alliance for Equity in Education](#), a coalition of more than 85 partner organizations across the state who share a unifying belief that our schools and postsecondary institutions can create pathways to a more just Tennessee. Through research, engagement, and advocacy, the alliance works to expand opportunity and attainment from preschool through postsecondary education by engaging diverse communities and stakeholders to increase the public will to act on issues that impact educational justice. In preparation for the 113th Tennessee General Assembly, the alliance released its [policy priorities for 2024](#). [The shared Policy Agenda](#) will anchor our advocacy on education legislation that is proposed this year and will guide us as we take positions and activate partners, and serve as a shared language and set of priorities.



For more information, please visit edtrust.org/tennessee

WITH GRATITUDE

EdTrust 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 we continue our work to Save Students to Save Democracy, 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

EdTrust 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.

To view this copy online, please visit edtrust.org/ed-trust-updates.



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