



THRIVING Together:



Embracing Courage Amid Challenges



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Thriving Together: Embracing Courage Amid Challenges



Amid culture wars and a politically charged election year, education equity has faced increasing challenges on the federal, state, and local levels aimed at dismantling previous gains in everything from diversity to the allocation of school resources.

As fierce advocates, it is emotionally tempting to spend time and resources circling back to issues we thought were settled. But strategically, we understand that it takes more courage to continue to press forward fully aware that past gains are not guaranteed and that future equity wins will only happen if we meet the shifts in the current landscape with even greater passion and purpose.

Staying present in the moment means continuing to develop strategies that empower communities and partners with the tools needed to increase political and public will to act on equity issues.

We refuse to lose focus by giving unwarranted energy to those with a misguided nostalgia of yesteryear and an unfounded fear of the future.

This theory of change has been put to the test recently following a [barrage of attacks](#) against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs at colleges nationwide after the Supreme Court banned affirmative action last year. Instead of relitigating the past, we pushed forward by presenting our vision for the future. Working with our partners in Kentucky, we have had [success](#) making the case that DEI efforts by colleges and universities should evolve by [reimagining ways](#) to use evidence-based strategies to support a sense of belonging for students of color to feel fully integrated in academic and social environments on campus.

In our elementary and secondary schools, education equity has also proven to be an ever-evolving journey. As recent laws have been passed that deny students the freedom to learn about race and diverse identities in their curricula, EdTrust has been there to meet the challenge.

While proponents of book bans and the draconian punishment of administrators, teachers, and even librarians for teaching honest history barnstorm school board meetings and state legislatures with full-throated condemnation of so-called “woke” policies, EdTrust helped form coalitions across the country to push out [data](#) showing that facts, not emotion, should drive policy.

As a result, we — alongside our partners, families, and community members — have secured recent wins in states like Maryland, which utilized our

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research to introduce [legislation](#) advancing the narrative that banning inclusion in books is censorship that is unethical, unconstitutional, and un-American. While they parse through every line of Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," we have successfully made the case that not embracing diverse thoughts threatens the ability of future generations to prosper in an increasingly diverse world.

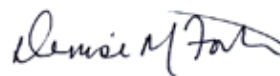
Part of expanding our education equity movement is using social media to drive the narrative. In April, we [hosted](#) a panel of renowned civil rights and education experts around our [award-winning](#) "Can't Be Erased" campaign. Guest speaker Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (MA-07), who has introduced the [Books Save Lives Act](#) that maintains the freedom to read diverse books in libraries is not just right but a civil right, laid out the blueprint of how advocates should embrace current challenges with a fierce commitment to forward-thinking strategies: "These are deeply consequential times.... Admittedly, it is tempting to surrender to a detached resignation of the many injustices, but that is not true of who we have been called to be right now — nor has it ever been."

Increasingly, it has become essential to equate justice with resource equity. It is unthinkable that in 2024 students continue to be denied the necessary resources to achieve excellence. Today's students attend schools that are chronically underfunded and increasingly segregated. And the [proliferation of vouchers](#) and Education Savings Accounts threaten to drain public funds from public schools. While integration

was a focal point of previous generations of advocates — and rightfully so — strategy dictates we add another tool to our toolkit, [making the case](#) for a renewed focus on resource equity and [fair funding](#) for schools.

The theme for this quarterly update is "Thriving Together: Embracing Courage Amid Challenges." In it, we highlight our work to create effective advocacy strategies that move us toward our goal of a just education system where every student can see themselves in their curriculum, experience a sense of belonging, and graduate with the skills needed to live the life of their dreams and solve the world's most complex problems.

Now more than ever, resisting the temptation to get mired in the mud, and instead moving forward with advocacy that is disciplined and strategic is critical to maneuvering the current landscape and giving every student the tools they need to achieve excellence. When we focus on what matters most for students — a well-resourced system that centers them first — and refuse to let others derail our efforts by putting the issues we care about in a spin-cycle, backwards-looking time machine, there is no doubt that we will continue to advance equity for all students.



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

THRIVING TOGETHER: EMBRACING COURAGE AMID CHALLENGES

Our theme for this reporting period is *Thriving Together: Embracing Courage Amid Challenges*. Indeed, these are challenging times, so we are resolved to put students first.

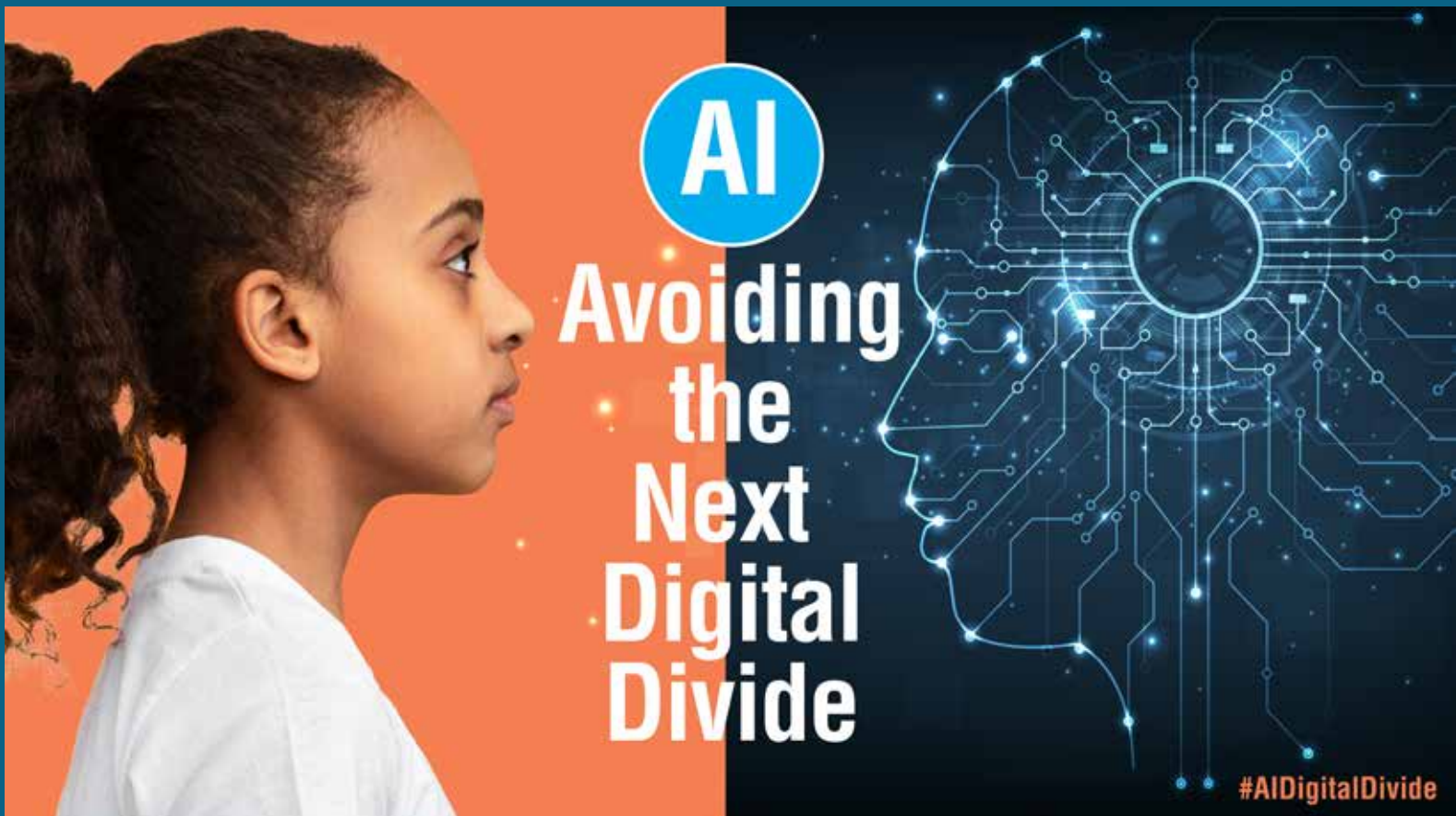
Literacy is one of the pressing crises facing this nation — only 43% of all fourth graders in the U.S. read at or above a proficient level in reading. But it doesn't have to be this way. The great potential of every child can be unleashed if schools teach them to read proficiently by the third grade. In March, we launched a [blog series](#) that sounded the alarm about [literacy](#). We offered solutions grounded in teaching the science of reading and exposing children to racially and culturally diverse curricula. And for Teacher Appreciation Week in May, we published another blog series, "Why I Teach Where I Teach," featuring inspiring, first-person stories of teachers from Title I schools, including the Louisiana Teacher of the Year, Kylie Altier. She [writes](#), "Reading is so much more than words on a page: Reading is confidence. Reading is independence. Reading is freedom."

Teachers are just one of many influential educators who touch children's lives. District leaders also bring out the greatness of our children. Superintendents of color are few in number but mighty in practice. Our [Leading With Excellence](#) video series highlights Black female superintendents from around the country, who represent only 1.4% of school leaders, yet work tirelessly to support their students' mental health and academic success. May was mental health awareness month and also the 70th anniversary

JOIN > The Education Trust AASA THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION
FOR LEADING WITH EXCELLENCE
Nurturing Students' Mental Health
> 05.23.24 > 6:00 PM ET
MODERATOR: ARTHUR JONES II, AASA News producer/reporter
PANELISTS:
DR. ADRIENNE BATTLE, Superintendent, Metro Nashville Public Schools (TN)
DR. LATANYA D. MCQUADE, Superintendent, Prince William County Public Schools (VA)
DR. TIFFANY ANDERSON, Superintendent, Tarrant Public Schools (TX)
DR. TAHIRA DUPREE-CHASE, Superintendent, Henrico County Public Schools (VA)

of *Brown v. Board of Education*. To highlight these issues and how Black female superintendents are managing in these tough times as district leaders, we held the [second of our Leading with Excellence events](#). This discussion focused on nurturing students' mental health and featured a dynamic panel of superintendents, who shared their expertise.

Educators and school leaders must often engage with families and communities to support students' social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD). In April, we released a trio of reports explaining how school leaders can interact more positively with families. One report features the results of a [family survey](#), in which respondents rated schools on how well they engaged with parents and families post-pandemic. The second report outlines changes that policymakers at all levels can make to



improve family and community engagement to foster students' [SEAD](#); and the third report offers guidance on how schools can better communicate the results of federally required [annual assessments](#) with families, so families can be better informed about how their children are doing in school and work with teachers and schools to give students appropriate support. In fact, for the past year, we have been reimagining the [future of statewide assessments](#), so that they can be designed to be more culturally relevant and inclusive, while providing data that will promote equitable learning opportunities and improve outcomes for all students.

Teachers, school leaders, families, advocates, and communities — must all work together to ensure that our nation's students have the resources they need to thrive. This includes understanding the [perils and promises of the use of AI in education](#) for students of color, as highlighted [in this brief](#). On April 19, #AILiteracyDay, our own Nathan Kriha, a P-12



policy analyst, took part in a U.S. Department of Education panel discussion on “The Relevance of AI Literacy,” in which he highlighted the importance of equity in AI. And in March, we hosted a panel discussion on AI at SXSW EDU that explored the ethical ramifications of artificial intelligence and how we can avoid the next [digital divide wave](#).

Speaking of SXSW Edu, EdTrust was well represented as the voice of equity. Various EdTrusters were presenters on panels, including:

- [Brown at 70: Can Separate Ever Be Equal?](#)
- [The 2024 Election & Higher Ed Policy](#)
- [EWA Radio: Considering Concentrated Poverty in K-12 Funding](#)
- [Student-Inclusive Approaches in Higher Education](#)

On the higher ed front, we continue to advocate for equity and making college affordable. We helped

students understand how to apply for financial aid, in light of the botched [Better FAFSA rollout](#), and created a toolkit and a webinar for partners and state advocates. We have also been very vocal on this issue in the media. Wil Del Pilar, Ph.D., senior vice president at EdTrust, co-wrote an op-ed with Kim Cook, CEO of the National College Attainment Network, "[Save FAFSA Blame Game for after We Help Students Navigate the Crisis](#)," and was quoted in several news articles that were featured in the [Washington Post](#), [Diverse: Issues in Higher Education](#), [FOX Business](#), [Politico](#), and [PBS NewsHour](#), among many other outlets. We've also joined our partners in elevating this issue and others.

FAFSA OVERHAUL:
Solutions and Supports for Students

Tuesday, March 26, 2024 | 1:00 PM PT / 4:00 PM ET

A conversation with:

Angelica Solis-Montero Chief Policy Officer, EdLoC	Tyra Mariani EdLoC Member and Senior Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Education, Leading FAFSA College Support Strategy	Sayda Martinez-Alvarado Policy Analyst, Education Trust	Jessie Hernández-Reyes Senior Policy Analyst, Education Trust

The Present and Future of Higher Ed Policy
A briefing for Congressional staffers and education advocates

Jessie Hernández-Reyes Senior Policy Analyst	Michele Shepard Zampini Senior Director of College Affordability	Magin Sanchez Policy Analyst	Diane Cheng Vice President of Research and Policy

9:30 - 10:30 am Tuesday May 14, 2024
Dirksen Senate Office Building Room SD-B48



In April, we released a report, [“Who Deserves State Financial Aid? Exploring the Eligibility Criteria for Students Entering Higher Education.”](#) That report notes how for decades, college tuition costs have been skyrocketing, yet state financial aid has failed to meet the increasing economic needs of college students — leaving many young people with the choice of bridging the financial gap by taking out student loans or not attending college at all. In this report, we explore state financial aid funding and associated program requirements in 10 distinct states: California, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington. In it, we shed light on the 12 key eligibility requirements that often serve as barriers for students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, undocumented students, and justice-impacted students to afford college. This report received media coverage in outlets including: [Inside Higher Ed](#), [Philanthropy News Digest](#), and [Diverse: Issues in Higher Ed](#).

And leading all this fierce advocacy is EdTrust’s president and CEO, Denise Forte, who was —

once again — named one of Washingtonian’s 500 Most Influential People of 2024. Below is a love mention from Education Leaders of Color (EdLoC), of which Denise is a member.

While we look toward the future, we must also learn from the past. May 17 marked the 70th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, yet the challenges that students, educators, and education advocates face today — including segregated and under-resourced schools, cuts to school funding, and politically motivated book bans — are similar to those of 1954 and no less daunting. We must meet the moment with resolve while leaning on each other.



AT A GLANCE

During the last quarter, EdTrust worked with partners and community members to embrace courage amidst challenges.



On The Hill

It has been a tremendously busy spring for federal advocacy at EdTrust. In mid-April, to kick off EdTrust's annual Equity Matters Bootcamp, we orchestrated a Hill Day with state and local partners from across the country to uplift key federal priorities, including federal legislation to expand access to advanced coursework for underserved students. Over 75 advocates and partners from more than nine states participated in the Hill Day. EdTrust was able to successfully schedule more than 30 bipartisan meetings with both House and Senate offices, including three meetings with Members of Congress, as well as staff-level meetings with Leaders Schumer, Jeffries, and the Chairs and Ranking Members of both the House Education and Workforce Committee and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. EdTrust's Hill Day is the largest single-day federal advocacy push we have ever undertaken and was a tremendous success. We have not only seen an increase in cosponsors and support for our key federal priorities, but we have also scheduled numerous follow-ups with offices since then for future partnerships.

Amid planning and navigating EdTrust's Hill Day, we have also been deeply involved in the federal appropriations process. After nearly a year of tense

negotiations between Congress and the White House, Congress passed a Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 spending package that averted cuts to EdTrust's priority programs. In particular, EdTrust played a pivotal role in helping defeat the catastrophic cuts proposed by the House Republican Labor, Health, and Human Services (LHHS), Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, which, if included, would have decimated America's education system and stymied academic recovery efforts for decades. Looking forward, EdTrust is already engaging in the FY25 process and is actively working with House and Senate appropriators to help pass a spending deal that champions educators, students, and families.

Finally, EdTrust was intimately involved in the recent introduction of the Postsecondary Student Success Act by Reps. Melanie Stanbury (D-NM) and Lori Chavez-Dereemer (R-OR). If enacted, this legislation, which includes much-needed student supports, particularly for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds to stay in school and graduate, would strengthen the current Postsecondary Student Success Grant program.

AT EVENTS

Spring 2024 Equity Matters Bootcamp: Advocates in Action

From April 17-19, more than 180 state advocates, national partners, funders, educators, and students from across the country gathered in the nation's capital for EdTrust's annual bootcamp. This year's theme was Protecting Our Students, Protecting Democracy. The nation's public education system and its institutions are grappling with persistent challenges that undermine the very foundation of equitable, safe, and rigorous learning environments that allow students to thrive. These challenges include book bans, changes to curricula that prevent the representation of diverse identities and communities and the teaching of honest history, and the dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

This bootcamp offered a mixture of plenary discussions, breakout sessions, strategic planning opportunities, networking, community building, and resource sharing designed to address these issues and give participants tangible skills and actionable strategies to help them in their advocacy efforts. This convening gave attendees an opportunity to connect 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. Some highlights from our interactive breakout sessions included topics on the landscape of anti-DEI action, school choice,

coalition-building, the anniversary of ***Brown v. Board of Education***, and barriers in traditional and prison higher education settings.

Our bootcamp kicked off with a day on Capitol Hill, with participants from our state teams (CA, TX, LA, TN, NY, KY, MD, MA, and DE) had meetings with members of congress to advocate for the Advanced Coursework Equity Act, as well as uplift key education issues in their states. Afterwards, advocates attended our [Can't Be Erased](#) event, which was a live-streamed rallying call against book bans, censorship, and lack of racial and cultural representation in the books being taught in our nation's schools.

The responses to our event survey were overwhelmingly positive. Said one participant in our survey: "I can't decide between getting to strengthen relationships with our coalition partners and all the insightful ideas from the plenaries and breakout sessions. It was a worthwhile experience, and hoping I get to return next year!"

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 throughout the coming year.

Equity Matters Bootcamp:
Advocates in Action



[Resource Equity in Action: Developing an Advocacy Campaign for Resource Equity](#)

Equitable resource allocation, or resource equity, is key to creating an education system that supports every student. To help advocates push for resource equity in their communities, EdTrust hosted a webinar series in March titled, “Resource Equity in Action: Developing an Advocacy Campaign for Resource Equity.” These trainings covered the three key pieces of successful advocacy campaigns: data analysis, messaging, and impact measurement. EdTrust and partners provided insights on successful resource equity advocacy strategies and introduced new tools to help advocates understand and improve the state of resource equity in their communities.

You can access the materials for all three webinars here:



[Can't Be Erased: An Event to Rally Against Book Bans & Censorship](#)

In April, EdTrust was joined by the nation's leading civil rights voices at our [Can't Be Erased event](#), in DC, for a timely discussion on the rise of book bans, curriculum censorship, and strategies to mitigate ongoing attacks on public education. The event featured two fruitful panel discussions between state and national leaders and student advocates and ended with remarks by [Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley](#) (MA-07), sponsor of the [Books Save Lives Act](#). Other speakers included:

- [Heather Harding](#), Ed.D., executive director, Campaign for Our Shared Future
- [David Johns](#), Ph.D., CEO and executive director, National Black Justice Coalition
- [Preston Mitchum](#), author, attorney, civil rights advocate, and Bravo TV personality currently on “Summer House: Martha’s Vineyard”
- [Meili Powell](#), assistant director, Advocacy & Engagement, EdTrust-Tennessee

- [Kurt Russell](#), 2022 National Teacher of the Year and veteran high school social studies teacher
- [Christopher Bruce](#), political director of the ACLU of Georgia, senior adviser of strategic partnerships of Southern Collective
- Khy'Ryn Jefferson, CEO of The Youth Community of Baton Rouge, student advocate

With more than 100 in-person advocates in attendance and hundreds more online, the event sparked momentum to continue working to preserve the teaching of honest history and diversity of identities and ideas. You can [watch the event here](#).

A promotional banner for the 'Can't Be Erased' event. The top half is black with white and orange text. It says 'JOIN EDTRUST FOR Can't Be Erased' and 'An Event to Rally AGAINST Book Bans and Curriculum Censorship'. Below that, it says 'REGISTER!' in a white box, 'EDTRUST.ORG/BOOKBANS' in an orange box, and '#CantBeErased' in a white box. The bottom half is blue with white text and features four circular headshots of speakers: Brittany Packnett Cunningham, Heather Harding, Preston Mitchum, and Dr. David J. Johns. A vertical orange bar on the right says 'Protecting our STUDENTS Protecting our DEMOCRACY'.



[EdTrust Webinar Trainings and Slides: Helping Students from Mixed-Status Families Complete the FAFSA](#)

As College Decision Day approached and FAFSA delays and errors that affect millions of students still lingered, EdTrust held two trainings on [“Helping Students From Mixed-Status Families Complete the FAFSA”](#) to steer students from mixed-status families through the process of completing the FAFSA step by step. EdTrust also provided detailed guidance on how to use a [newly developed tool](#) to better support students from mixed-status families who are having a hard time filling out the FAFSA.



[Superintendents of Color Leading with Excellence: Nurturing Students' Mental Health](#)

May marks the 70th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was supposed to end racial segregation in public schools. Unfortunately, public schools are still highly segregated today, and there's a dearth of Black educators. Black female superintendents, for example, are few and far between, yet they continue to lead with excellence in the face of many racial barriers and challenges. On May 23, EdTrust, The School Superintendents Association (AASA), and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) cohosted a virtual event, “Superintendents of Color Leading with Excellence,” highlighting the inspiring work that Black female superintendents are doing in their districts. The event featured an impressive panel of Black female superintendents who are working to support their students' mental health and academic success through best practices. We heard from Trey Baker, a student activist who graced us with spoken word. The panel — which featured Adrienne Battle, superintendent of Metro Nashville Public Schools; LaTanya D. McDade, superintendent of Prince William County Public Schools, in Virginia; Tiffany Anderson, superintendent of Topeka, Kansas, Public Schools; and Tahira Dupree-Chase, Superintendent of Westbury Union Free School District, in New York — was moderated by Arthur Jones, II, an ABC News producer/reporter. Nhay Hamlett, superintendent of Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, in North Carolina, gave the closing remarks. [You can watch the event here.](#)

IN THE MEDIA



THE HECHINGER REPORT

- [Black Students Are in Crisis. These School Leaders Are Helping](#), Word in Black (also featured in [Dallas Weekly](#))
- [Poll: Most Massachusetts parents think state should require the 'science of reading' in classrooms](#), Boston Globe
- [Former Teacher Says America Isn't Making a 'Big Enough' Deal About Its Current Literacy Crisis](#), Black Enterprise
- [Student Debt Is Taxing Young People's Mental Health](#), Teen Vogue
- [Colleges should keep prices down](#), The Boston Globe
- [Ayanna Pressley on the 'damning commentary' of book bans](#), POLITICO
- [Texas to give extra credit to teachers who train like doctors in residency programs](#), The Dallas Morning News (also featured in [Governing](#))
- [The Whitewashing of Education — and How to Stop it](#), Word in Black
- [EdTrust Recommends How Schools Can Improve Interactions with Families](#), Diverse Issues in Higher Ed
- [The Child Care Cliff](#), Washington Family Magazine
- ['Transformative': More college programs are slowly coming into prisons](#), Stateline
- [Universities and colleges that need to fill seats start offering a helping hand to student-parents](#) Hechinger Report
- [Racial diversity among college faculty lags behind other professional fields, US report finds](#), Associated Press
- [Keeping Learning Recovery Going When Federal Pandemic Funds Dry Up](#), The 74
- [How creating the new FAFSA unraveled](#), Washington Post (also featured in [New York Folk](#))

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

ON THE BLOG

- [Why Queer Faculty Diversity Matters in Higher Education](#)
- [Marking the 70th Anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education and the Work that Remains](#)
- [Why Districts Should Focus on High-Impact Tutoring Interventions as ESSER Funding Ends](#)
- [Hiding In Plain Sight: How Complex Decoding Challenges Can Block Comprehension for Older Readers](#)
- [Transfer Students Are Key to Building a More Diverse, Better Prepared Teacher Workforce](#)
- [Redefining Access and Support for Students of Color in the UC System](#)
- [The Importance of Embedding Equity into Principal Pipelines](#)
- [3 Things You Need to Know About Ongoing Reading Reform Efforts](#)
- [Breaking Down the Nation's Math Scores](#)
- [Highlighting the Afro in Afro-Latinidad](#)
- [What the Most Recent CRDC Can Tell Us About Student Discipline](#)
- [2024-25 Better FAFSA Advocacy FAQs](#)
- [Fighting for a Better Future for Transgender Youth](#)
- [Focusing on the Intersection of Race, Disability, and Equity](#)
- [Why Education Equity Should Include Climate Justice](#)
- [Federal and State Push for Universal Preschool Is Welcome News for K-12](#)



IN THE STATES



Delaware

In The First State, EdTrust has continued to serve as a key thought partner, policy advisor, and advocacy strategist in supporting the statewide campaign to realize meaningful school funding formula reform. At our recommendation this legislative session, a joint, bipartisan panel of the Delaware House and Senate Education Committees heard from state and national experts about the urgent need for funding reform and to explore various policy options and remedies from similar efforts in other states. In May, Rodel and its partners in the Vision Coalition of Delaware hosted a gubernatorial forum on state education issues in Dover in which all filed candidates for governor participated. As a result of this key community engagement opportunity that centered shared policy priorities of EdTrust and its state-based partners in Delaware, four of the five candidates for governor — three Democrats and one Republican — emphasized the significance of increasing investments and revising the state’s antiquated school funding formula and committed to take action in the inaugural months of their gubernatorial term, if they are elected. EdTrust is also working closely with Rodel on finalizing a legislative proposal to establish a state commission on school funding reform, which is informed by similar efforts led by colleagues in our Maryland, Massachusetts, and Tennessee coalitions.



Kentucky

EdTrust continued its longtime partnership with the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and the Kentucky Equity Coalition this spring and was largely focused on expanding advanced coursework access and defending against far-right attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education. Building upon our co-authored brief on the topic, EdTrust supported the introduction of [SB360](#) by the Kentucky Senate Education Committee chair, which seeks to expand advanced coursework access across the state and implement an automatic enrollment policy for eligible students. Additionally, in collaboration with our state-based partners across the commonwealth, we supported the successful effort to stall the advancement of [HB9](#), harmful legislation that would have eliminated DEI offices and programs in the state’s public colleges and universities. EdTrust is now proactively exploring supplemental advocacy tactics, strategies, and resources to defeat expected attempts to reintroduce this harmful legislation in the next session.



Louisiana

This spring has been an extremely busy and productive one for EdTrust in Louisiana. We advocated for increased funding for early learning, greater literacy support, and programs to support students' mental health and well-being during the state legislative session, strategized ways to combat the literacy crisis, and engaged with our student advocates. In partnership with [Our Voice Nuestra Voz](#), a New Orleans-based advocacy organization, we developed a strategy to support and engage with migrant, immigrant, and undocumented families. In February, during Louisiana's special session on crime, we opposed harsher punitive policies. In partnership with [Daughters Beyond Incarceration](#), we curated a legislative policy and advocacy curriculum for high school students with justice-impacted parents and families. In March, we were invited to the Strive Together Literacy Convening, a two-day conference, to share our literacy coalition's work and the strategies and supports used to enhance it. We also gave a presentation on our literacy and coalition-building efforts at the Teach for America Oklahoma convening, which had more than 100 attendees, including teachers, advocates, administrators, and community members. And we hosted various school-based lunch and learns for more than 75 students, so they could learn more about the legislative process. In April, we launched our Teacher Therapy series, which was attended by more than 100 educators, and we gave them resources and a space to relax and reflect. Lastly, we organized a Youth Day at the Capitol, in partnership with organizations from across the state, to support the leadership development and advocacy of 100 youths at the Louisiana State Capitol



Maryland

EdTrust continues to support the racial justice-centered efforts of the [Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education](#) (MAREE) to pursue key policy priorities at the local, state, and federal levels. During the 2024 Maryland legislative session, MAREE and EdTrust activated advocates across The Free State to deliver expert testimony and submit advocacy letters to legislative committees, the Maryland State Board of Education, the Accountability and Implementation Board (AIB), and other policymaking bodies on critical issues. We celebrated our success in advancing legislation at the statehouse that would strengthen [Grow Your Own educator pathway programs](#), [protect diverse and inclusive books and public access to libraries](#), and [bolster support for and investment in community school models and wraparound services](#). We also led, in coalition with other MAREE affiliate organizations like United We Dream and the University System of Maryland, as well as immigrant student leaders, a push for legislation that would [reduce barriers for undocumented students seeking to access in-state tuition](#). While we were successful this year in passing the House version of this bill, it has yet to clear the Senate, so we look forward to revisiting this campaign for higher education tuition equity in the next legislative session. In the federal space, MAREE advocates who participated in EdTrust's Spring 2024 Bootcamp Day on the Hill successfully secured state delegation co-sponsors for the Advanced Coursework Equity Act, one of our organization's chief legislative priorities on Capitol Hill.



Massachusetts

The ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade is widely recognized as a pivotal indicator for the future academic success of students. Yet, across Massachusetts, less than half of third grade students are meeting critical literacy benchmarks. In response, EdTrust in Massachusetts has launched a year-long literacy campaign. We kicked it off with the release of [an infographic](#) in March that sheds light on the literacy crisis in Massachusetts and its equity implications for students. In addition, we released findings from our latest state parent poll on early literacy, which was conducted by The MassINC Polling Group. To uplift the [poll's findings](#), we held a virtual event, “[Beyond Words: Parent Perceptions on Early Literacy](#),” moderated by Mandy McLaren, a reporter for The Boston Globe’s Great Divide, a reporting effort “dedicated to investigating race, class, and inequality in Boston-area schools.” The event featured a diverse panel of experts, policymakers, practitioners, and field leaders discussing policy solutions to address declining literacy rates and improve student outcomes.

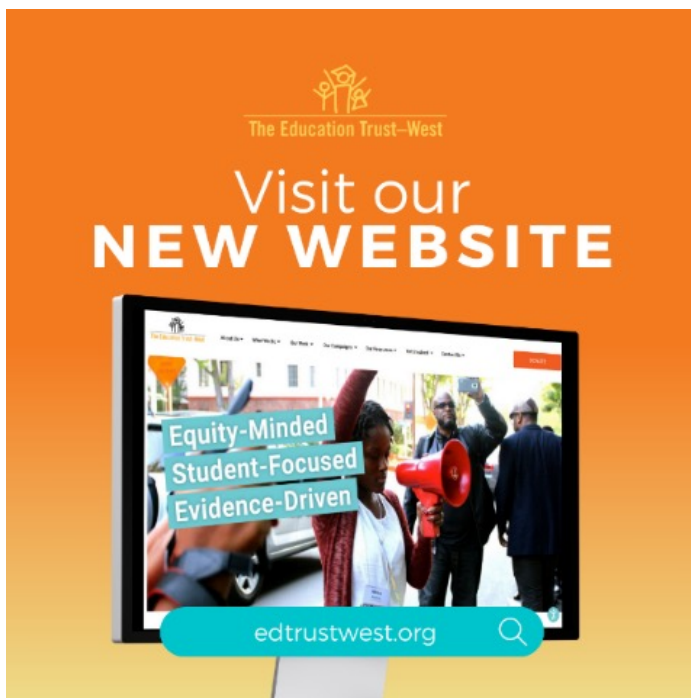
Working alongside our partners from the [Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership](#) (MEEP), we’ve also been advocating for the prioritization of literacy in the FY25 state budget, and we’re delighted to report that our efforts have paid off — the House and Senate included funding for the Governor’s “[Literacy Launch](#)” initiative in their respective versions of the FY25 budget. Over the coming months, we will continue to advocate for pending legislation while working to advance other key components of our campaign.



Texas

As the 2025 legislative year approaches, the Texas team is thrilled to welcome game-changing advocates to our [Student Advisory Council](#), along with three Texans as part of the [third cohort of Justice Fellows](#). Their energy and expertise will build on student-led efforts to ensure that more Texans can access and complete the degrees and credentials they need to pursue their dreams. Following [our latest findings and recommendations](#) based on student and practitioner experiences with Higher Ed Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF), we are developing a policy roadmap to make this vision possible by holistically addressing students’ unmet financial and basic needs. Lastly, we celebrated our inaugural [Educator Advisory Council](#), who are wrapping up a year of sharpening their advocacy skills in action and scored [a recent policy win](#) that makes Texas the first state to recognize teacher residency completers for their more rigorous preparation.

EdTrust-West



EdTrust-West Launches a New Website

Earlier this year, EdTrust-West unveiled a newly redesigned website. While this redesign provided the website with a refreshed, more updated look, it also represented a renewed commitment to our community of advocates who work alongside EdTrust-West to advance educational equity in California. Some of the notable changes to the website include better alignment with our strategic plan and an enhanced user experience. The website highlights our fresh policy priorities and advocacy roadmap for the coming years. We designed the new site to be a dynamic digital platform that will echo our strategic goals and vision. This revamped website ensures that advocates, educators, and stakeholders will find it easier to navigate and access resources that support our shared mission. Visit our newly redesigned website at edtrustwest.org.

Equitable Placement and Student Parents' Communities of Practice

For over 20 years, EdTrust-West has partnered with K-12 school districts across the state to offer technical assistance to transform policies and practices to ensure more equitable experiences and outcomes for students of color and multilingual learners. This year, EdTrust-West was proud to use that learning to create two communities of practice (CoPs) that seek to partner with community colleges to support single mothers and student parents better and provide students with fair access to college-level coursework (also known as remediation reform). Applications for both CoPs are open now and selected cohorts of administrators from community colleges will benefit from coaching, planning, templates, facilitated feedback, tools, and resources so that those colleges can better support students.

Engaging Funders

This spring, EdTrust-West hosted two convenings with our funder partners, one in Los Angeles and one in Oakland. At these convenings, members of EdTrust-West connected with our partners, updated them on our work, and engaged in conversations about the education landscape and the future of our work. Executive director, Dr. Christopher Nellum, gave a presentation based on EdTrust-West's [Impact Report](#) and emerging threats to advancing educational equity, which led to discussions about how to continue our collective work to support California's most vulnerable students. This was a wonderful way to connect with our funding partners and to align on our shared commitment to educational equity in California.

EdTrust-West

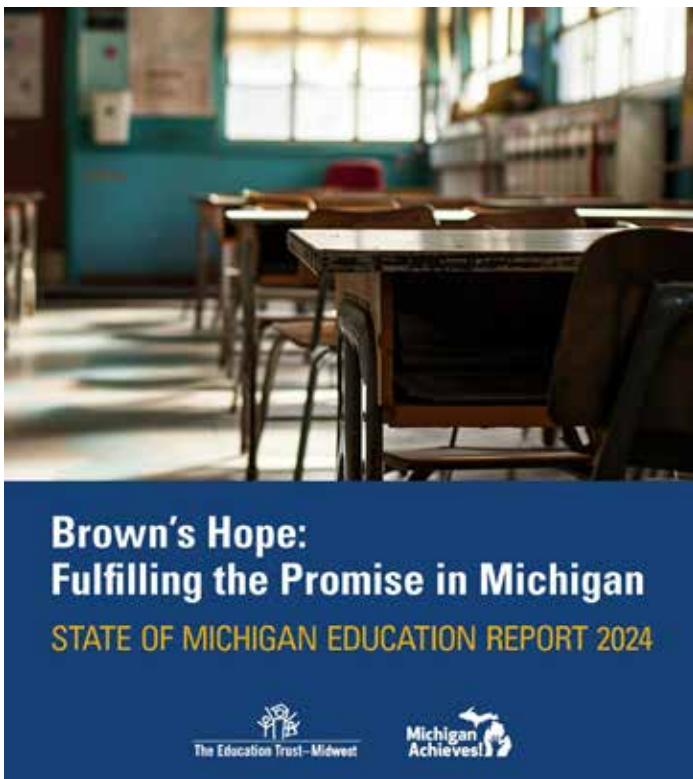


California Advocates Head to Capitol Hill

In April, EdTrust-West's Partnerships and Engagement team had the opportunity to take two FIERCE student fellows, three CORE Collective partners, and two Educator Advisory Council (EAC) members to this year's Equity Matters Bootcamp. These members from our Signature Programs enjoyed participating as session presenters, speaking on panels, and serving as facilitators of a plenary session. In addition, partners and EdTrust-West staff participated in the Capitol Hill Advocacy Day, where they met with staff from the offices of California Reps. Adam Schiff, Pete Aguilar, Mark DeSaulnier, and Sen. Alex Padilla and advocated for the Advanced Coursework Equity Act. The EdTrust-West delegation left bootcamp energized to disrupt the narrative that California is a progressive beacon in education, noted the importance of addressing education policy at the local level, and emphasized the need to share data to build the capacity of local elected officials and community members.

For more information, please visit edtrustwest.org

EdTrust-Midwest



Advocating for Fair Funding to Fulfill the Promise of *Brown v. Board of Education*

Seven decades after the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, EdTrust-Midwest and partners in the [Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity \(MPEO\) coalition](#) launched a new campaign, called [Opportunity for All](#). The campaign not only calls attention to decades of neglect toward Black, Latino students, and students from low-income backgrounds — and the resources and supports their public schools need and deserve — but also to the urgent need to address profound pandemic learning losses, which hit students who are underserved especially hard.

ETM kicked off the campaign the week of the anniversary of the landmark court case through the 2024 State of Michigan Education report, titled [“Brown’s Hope: Fulfilling the Promise in Michigan.”](#)

ETM and coalition members met with numerous members of the media, and held briefings with legislators, stakeholders, and partners.

Among the findings of the report: Michigan students of color continue to face devastating educational inequities in deeply under-resourced public schools. Today, they are far more likely to be enrolled in Michigan public schools with the highest concentrations of poverty, where they are more likely, on average, to have fewer opportunities than their affluent white peers in the state’s wealthiest school districts, according to the report.

The new Opportunity for All campaign includes a publicly accessible [website](#), where Michiganders can compare how much more their local school district would receive if the state invested in students from low-income backgrounds at the same level as Massachusetts, the nation’s leader in education. The campaign’s new website also offers new tools to allow Michiganders to see the difference it would make in their own local school districts if Michigan fully funded its current long-term goals for investing in students from low-income backgrounds.

“At an urgent moment in the lives of Michigan students, this is a strong call to action for state leaders to invest in the very students who have been neglected for decades,” said **Alice Thompson, chair of the education committee** at the Detroit Branch of the NAACP and one of the tri-chairs of the MPEO statewide coalition. “This new campaign gives hope and a direction for change — and provides new data to empower local parents and advocates to work together to advance an investment and pandemic recovery agenda for Michigan’s children,” added Thompson.

EdTrust-Midwest

Amber Arellano, executive director of EdTrust-Midwest and a tri-chair of the MPEO statewide coalition, agreed and went on to explain that “For decades, Michigan did not have a mechanism to address the legacy of racial and socio-economic segregation in our state’s public schools. Today, we do — and we have a responsibility to use it. This month, state legislators can do just that by investing fairly in the state’s new Opportunity Index, a historic new funding change that became law in 2023.”

The report also found that:

- This year nearly half of all Michigan students of color and two-thirds of all Black students in Michigan attend public school in districts with high concentrations of poverty where 73% or more of the students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, compared to only 13% of Michigan’s white students learning in those same school districts.
- Michigan students in districts with the highest concentrations of poverty are much less likely to be in classrooms with highly experienced teachers who are, on average, more likely to be effective. Research shows that teachers are the single most important in-school factor related to student success, highlighting the critical need for effective teachers in all classrooms.

- School funding disparities undermine higher-poverty districts’ capacity to support their students’ educational recovery from the pandemic. Had Michigan returned to its 2006 school funding levels by 2016, [our state would have invested 20% more — or \\$22 billion dollars more — in K-12 public education between 2016 and 2021](#). Unfortunately, high-poverty districts are bearing the brunt of that lack of investment.
- School-aged children across the state have lost roughly half of a grade or more in math and reading since the pandemic’s start.
- In school districts that serve predominantly Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds, such as Kalamazoo and Lansing, [learning losses were dramatically worse](#).
- At the current pace of educational recovery, most students would need an additional five years to catch up in math. And in reading, the situation is even worse: Most Michigan students would need decades to read on grade level, according to [research](#) from the Education Recovery Scorecard.

 EDUCATION RECOVERY
SCORECARD

EdTrust-Midwest

Members of the Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity Advocate for Fair Funding for Students with the Greatest Needs at Second Annual Advocacy Day

Ongoing relationship-building between community members and lawmakers is a key step to ensuring that every Michigan student receives an excellent education. That's why more than 30 MPEO coalition members, led by EdTrust-Midwest, engaged in a day of advocacy in Lansing on April 24 with dozens of legislative members and staff and discussed the need to act now to build upon last year's historic school funding improvements.

Among the recommendations that were discussed: Michigan should commit to fully funding the Opportunity Index — a new funding mechanism that accounts for concentrated poverty in school districts — and increase funding to meet the needs of students from low-income backgrounds, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities.

While the state made historic progress last year — thanks to the leadership of our legislative members who voted for the aforementioned new school funding formula — Michigan continues to underfund students who have long been underserved. Too often, students who live in communities with significant poverty and students with the greatest needs — including students from



low-income backgrounds, students of color, students with disabilities, multilingual learners, and students in rural and geographically isolated areas — do not receive the funding and supports they need to thrive in school and in life.

MPEO is a statewide bipartisan group made up of a diverse spectrum of Michigan's civil rights, business, community-based non-profits, parent organizations, and other sectors — tri-chaired by Amber Arellano, executive director of EdTrust-Midwest; Alice Thompson, chair of the education committee for the Detroit NAACP and the CEO of BFDI Educational Services, Inc.; and Mike Jandernoa, founder and chair of 42 North Partners and chair of the West Michigan Policy Forum Policy Committee.

“As I reflect on how far we've come in just over a year, I am pleased by the tremendous progress we have made on behalf of Michigan's children. Our work has led not only to historic policy changes and funding but has also shifted the conversation from not if but when we will achieve equitable funding for all Michigan's students,” said Thompson. “The level of understanding and commitment among legislators and their staff is so much deeper than a year ago. This, no doubt, can be attributed to our coalition's relentless advocacy for all students, and particularly our most underserved students.”



For more information, please visit midwest.edtrust.org

EdTrust-New York



EdTrust-New York Names a New Executive Director

This quarter was an exciting time at EdTrust-New York. In March, we welcomed [Arlen Benjamin-Gomez as our new executive director](#), and she is already working to advance the organization's progressive policy and advocacy agenda, which focuses on achieving educational equity for all New York students from birth through higher education and into the workforce.

[EdTrust-New York Highlights Lingering Impacts of the Pandemic and Questionable Graduation Data for the Class of 2023](#)

EdTrust-New York continued to call attention to the long-run impacts of the pandemic on K-12 students — including issues such as unfinished learning, lower graduation requirements, lower student engagement, and rising school absenteeism rates, which in the four years since the pandemic shuttered schools, have become pervasive and have hit students of color particularly hard. In March, EdTrust-New York [raised concerns](#) about the accuracy and transparency of the state's graduation outcomes data, which showed that graduation rates have held steady compared to pre-pandemic rates — despite the abrupt transition to remote learning in March 2020, which led many students to disengage, stop attending school, or drop out entirely. The data, which was not disaggregated, is hard to believe, given that New York State Education Department (NYSED) lowered graduation requirements during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years and allowed students scoring as low as 50% on Regents exams to earn a Regents diploma, and may be masking inequities.

[EdTrust-NY Report Sounds 'Warning Bells' on 'The Growing Proficiency Crisis Among New York Students](#)

In May, EdTrust-New York also published a report highlighting the importance of state assessments, which can provide essential information about students' academic performance and uncover inequities that need to be addressed. This report, ["Warning Bells: The Growing Proficiency Crisis Among New York Students."](#) focuses on the 2022-23 New York State Education Department (NYSED) assessments, which revealed alarming disparities in student outcomes for students of color and those from low-income backgrounds.

EdTrust-New York

EdTrust-NY Makes Major Push to Boost FAFSA Completion

Meanwhile, on the higher ed front, EdTrust-New York has been working to increase FAFSA completion, which fell precipitously over the last year. In March, we partnered with organizations across the state to create a [toolkit](#) that high schools can use to help seniors complete the FAFSA. We also launched the 2024 New York FAFSA Completion Challenge — which is part of a broader [statewide campaign](#) to encourage public high schools to increase the proportion of eligible students from low-income backgrounds who complete the FAFSA to qualify for federal and state college financial aid. Based on successful efforts in other states, the [FAFSA Completion Challenge](#) is designed to positively recognize public high schools in the New York Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) Economic Regions that have high completion rates. EdTrust-New York will unveil the 12 winners of the 2024 New York FAFSA Completion Challenge in June at an event that celebrates their dedication to helping students complete the FAFSA, which is an important way for students from low-income backgrounds, students from immigrant households, and first-generation students to access crucial financial aid for higher education. Each winning high school will receive a grant of \$750 to award a scholarship to a graduating high school senior who is preparing to embark on their college journey in the fall.

In April, EdTrust-New York issued a [statement](#) supporting the adoption of the Universal Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) legislation, which would ensure that more high school students have access to the critical funding needed to make pursuing a higher education possible. The proposal, which was included in Gov. Kathy Hochul's FY 2025 budget, contains crucial language allowing students who are unable to complete the FAFSA to opt out and requiring school districts to provide information and additional support to all students on completing other state aid application forms when applicable — including for the New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and New York State DREAM Act, which help students from low-income backgrounds and undocumented students, respectively, obtain grants and scholarships.



EdTrust-New York

EdTrust-New York and Equity Advocates Score a Win for Early Literacy in State Budget, But a New Report Shows There's More Work to Do

In May, The New York Campaign for Early Literacy, which was created by EdTrust-New York, [commended](#) the New York Legislature and Gov. Hochul for backing early literacy and the science of reading in the enacted budget. The new early literacy provisions mark significant progress on early literacy — which has long been a priority for EdTrust-New York — and will align New York with the 45 other states that have already passed legislation supporting evidence-based reading instruction.

EdTrust-New York also [celebrated](#) this and other wins from the newly enacted budget, including investments in K-12 school aid, the expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), and investment in early education initiatives, such as child-care subsidy increases for programs providing care during

nontraditional hours or to children experiencing homelessness; prenatal paid leave; and continuous Medicaid coverage for children under age six.

While all this is welcome news, a new report by EdTrust-New York shows that's there more work to be done to advance early literacy. "The Fight for Control: States, Districts, and New York's Unfulfilled Right to Read" looks at the tensions between New York's local control system of education and the need to ensure that all students are provided with evidence-based literacy instruction. The report also provides examples of leadership from other states with local control systems on key early literacy issues, such as curriculum adoption, professional learning for educators, data collection and transparency, and tutoring, and makes recommendations that New York state leaders should consider in the coming fiscal year to play a stronger role in improving student reading outcomes.

Early Childhood Policy and Advocacy Lab Elevates the Voices of Parents and Caregivers

As the budget process wraps up, Raising NY coalition members and parents from the [Early Childhood Policy and Advocacy Lab](#) — a joint initiative between EdTrust-New York and Raising NY — also continued to advocate not only for young children and their families, but for child-care providers as well. In late April, coalition members and parent advocates testified at a public hearing held by the Child Poverty Reduction Council in New York City on the experiences of individuals and families applying for public benefits. At that hearing, Julissy Acosta, a parent advocate, shared her experiences as a mom and noted that "Every time I have to recertify, I cry because it is such a long, tedious process and I have so much anxiety because of my previous experiences."

Meanwhile, in May, Erica Webster, a foster parent and participant in the Early Childhood Policy and Advocacy Lab, wrote a blog explaining that "[Child care providers are an essential part of a foster child's success](#) " — and [they deserve a permanent wage increase.](#)" Amy Lee Funes, a New York City parent who is also a member of [the Early Childhood Policy and Advocacy Lab](#), [blogged](#) about how the proposed Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) would support her and many other families in New York State.

EdTrust-New York

MEDIA WINS

EdTrust-New York leveraged our longstanding relationships with national, New York City, and New York State media outlets to promote an equity agenda. Here's a sample of our media hits.



[NY graduation rates raise red flag for advocacy group](#)

The Capitol Pressroom

[Including young learners in the push for reading reform](#)

(EdTrust–New York Feature)
The Hechinger Report

[Education Trust-NY previews literacy campaign](#)

(EdTrust–New York exclusive):
Spectrum News “Capitol Tonight” Show

[Pushing for phonics-based reading instruction](#)

Investigative Post

[Education advocates are pressuring state and local leaders to take action to boost literacy rates among students \(Literacy Push\)](#)

POLITICO

[New graduation requirements proposed by NYS education department would "sunset" Regents exams](#)

WMAC Radio

[Back to basics on literacy education](#)

The Capitol Pressroom

[FAFSA applications down 10% statewide after delayed rollout of new form](#)

Newsday

EdTrust-Tennessee



Geared Up and Ready to Lead

EdTrust-Tennessee Convenes Advocates and Students in Tennessee for Annual Day on the Hill

Every year, the EdTrust-Tennessee team convened advocates and students from across the state for our annual Day on the Hill. This year, on March 12, we brought together members of our TN Alliance for Equity in Education and over 50 students to meet with lawmakers, share our [policy priorities](#), and learn more about the legislative process in Tennessee. To prepare for legislative appointments and education committee meetings, we offered a Gearing Up series of webinars and workshops, where education advocates learned more about the education bills filed this session and our [2024 bill tracker](#), how to prepare for meetings with lawmakers, and how to leverage their personal stories and experiences to inform policy solutions.

2024 Ten for Tennessee Awards

A Celebration of the Top 10 Equity-Centered Policy Proposals in Tennessee

As part of our Day on the Hill, we recognize lawmakers who have introduced proposals that advance education equity in Tennessee. The annual event, [Ten for Tennessee](#), brings together lawmakers, partners, and students for an evening of networking and celebration of policy solutions that would improve opportunity and access for students of color, students from lower-income communities, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners. This year, we were especially pleased that one of our Ten for Tennessee bills, [HB2826/SB1726](#), which requires the Tennessee



Department of Education to establish a K-12 conflict resolution program, was enacted.

EdTrust-Tennessee

Policy & Community Speaker Series

Making it Plain: The Key to Advancing Black Student Success in Tennessee

As we wrapped up Black History Month this quarter, we wanted to better understand how to advance Black student success in Tennessee with community-driven policy solutions. We explored national and state trends related to Black student success, education advocates' important role, and policymakers and leaders' considerations about how to ensure Black students in Tennessee are equipped to succeed in school and beyond. Our distinguished speaker was Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D., the national director of Education Innovation and Research for the NAACP and best-selling author of "No BS (Bad Stats): Black People Need People Who Believe in Black People Enough Not to Believe Every Bad Thing They Hear About Black People." Melissa Collins, a Memphis educator who was named the Tennessee Teacher of the Year in 2023, joined Toldson to provide insights about Black student success in her community.

Webinar

Making it Plain:

Advancing Black Student Success in Tennessee

MARCH 1st 1-2pm CST

Featuring
Dr. Ivory A. Toldson
National Director of Education
Innovation and Research | NAACP



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 to embrace courage amid challenges, 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 perpetually 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.

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