



# Grow, Nurture, Thrive



**CULTIVATING A SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE**



**SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FROM PRE-K TO COLLEGE**

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

## *Sowing Seeds, Cultivating Connections*



**IN HER BEST-SELLING BOOK, “BRAVING THE WILDERNESS: THE QUEST FOR TRUE BELONGING AND THE COURAGE TO STAND ALONE,”** author Brené Brown describes the toll that today’s divisive political

culture is taking on the collective soul of American society.

“When a group or community doesn’t tolerate dissent and disagreement, it forgoes any experience of inextricable connection. There is no true belonging, only an unspoken treaty to hate the same people. This fuels our spiritual crisis of disconnection.”

As another academic year gets underway, our schools are in the midst of a “crisis of disconnection,” and there’s a growing chasm between proponents of education equity and those who fear that education is a zero-sum game and that gains for some students come at the expense of other students.

Our theme for this quarterly report is “Sow, Nurture, Thrive: Cultivating a Supportive and Inclusive School Environment from Pre-K to College.” It highlights The Education Trust’s recent advocacy work and efforts over the last three months to sound the alarm about how contentious political rhetoric affects schools and hurts students, particularly students of color and students from under-resourced communities.

Attacks on honest teaching, race-conscious books, gender identity, and diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI) programs and practices are undermining education and turning school classrooms, which should be supportive or inclusive places, into hostile environments. And conflicts over social-emotional learning and race in the curriculum are negatively impacting students’ academic growth, mental health, and well-being. Rates of depression, thoughts of suicide, and suicide attempts among students are at historic levels.

Advocates must continue to push for the creation of learning environments where students feel seen and heard and demand that federal, state, and local administrators and policymakers follow the data, invest in and employ evidence-based strategies, and hire, teach, and train educators with an eye toward equity. Advocates must also remind some

parents and families that advancing education equity and supporting an inclusive school environment won’t detract from their children’s educational experience or result in fewer learning opportunities for their children. In fact, it will have the opposite effect. Lastly, advocates must urge politicians to stop fearmongering and start putting our country’s children, democracy, and future prosperity before their own desire to win elections.

During the last three months, we have mobilized teachers, students, parents and families, and community members to advocate for culturally affirming learning environments that reflect the students and communities they serve. But there is still much work to do.

Toxic rhetoric and division have spread to local school board meetings and the highest court in the land. In the summer, the U.S. Supreme Court ignored the plight of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds with two rulings that delivered blows to new and long-held federal education equity efforts. The court’s decisions to strike down President Joe Biden’s debt relief plan and rollback affirmative action in college admissions (and, with it, a half-century of precedent) ignore persistent gaps in opportunity, achievement, wealth, employment, and wages that are due to systemic racism and takes away tools that would help level the playing field.

While it is disheartening that the Supreme Court keeps issuing unpopular rulings that re-erect barriers and make it more difficult for students from historically underserved backgrounds to afford and attend college, as equity advocates, we will not be deterred. We have been galvanizing our partners to continue to press all levels of the government and all institutions of higher learning to maintain their commitment to equity.

As we continue to expand this equity movement, we will keep working to build connections and empathy in this polarized time, so that we can create positive and welcoming school environments in which all students can achieve at the highest level and thrive.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Denise Forte".

**Denise Forte**

President and CEO of The Education Trust



# THEORY OF CHANGE

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

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

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



**The Education Trust**

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

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

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



# Sow, Nurture, Thrive

*"The question is not whether we can afford to invest in every child; it is whether we can afford not to."*

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN, AMERICAN ACTIVIST FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS.

THE BACK-TO-SCHOOL SEASON IS THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME of the year for education advocates. We feel hopeful as we watch students nationwide returning to classrooms, bright-eyed and ready to take on the academic challenges ahead. They come to schoolhouses and colleges with aspirations about what they want to be when they grow up, visions of what life will look like after they graduate with a valuable diploma in hand, and images of what their lives will look like when they finally achieve success.



As parents, family members, and Ed Trust staff, we dream of a world in which our own kids and the students for whom we advocate can matriculate in our nation's schools and get all the resources they need to pursue the life of their choosing. We want students to attend schools where they are supported, where lessons reflect the ethnic and cultural representation of the multicultural world they live in, where their teachers and faculty reflect our nation's rich diversity, and where there are resources to improve students' mental health. We want students to take rigorous courses that prepare them for life after high school or college. Simply put, we want students to be in learning environments where they feel safe, supported, and have a sense of belonging.



Unfortunately, many P-12 schools, colleges, and universities fail to provide this kind of environment, and students suffer as a result. Meanwhile, one needs to look no further than recent news articles to see that race-related harassment and hostility are on the rise in schools and making matters worse. At one [Florida elementary school](#), teachers told a group of Black elementary schoolers that "having lower grades gave them a higher chance of going to jail, getting shot, or getting killed." At [one Texas high school](#), a young Black student was suspended because school officials said his dreadlocks violated the dress and grooming code. A teacher at a [Virginia middle school](#) prohibited Latino students from speaking Spanish. [A community college in Ohio](#) was recently forced to implement reforms after an investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice found that the school targeted Black students for searches and surveillance and disciplined students of color more harshly than their White peers, often for the same or lesser offenses.



Stories like these — and the many more that aren't reported — prompt us to act. That's why our theme for this quarter is Sow, Nurture, Thrive: Cultivating Inclusion from Pre-K to College. We want to sow policies and practices that effect change. We want to nurture our relationships with partners, students, and those from impacted communities and work together to press for equity and justice so we can create the learning environments that, as research shows, students need to thrive. Here is a snapshot of what schools and universities are against and how Ed Trust addresses these complex issues.



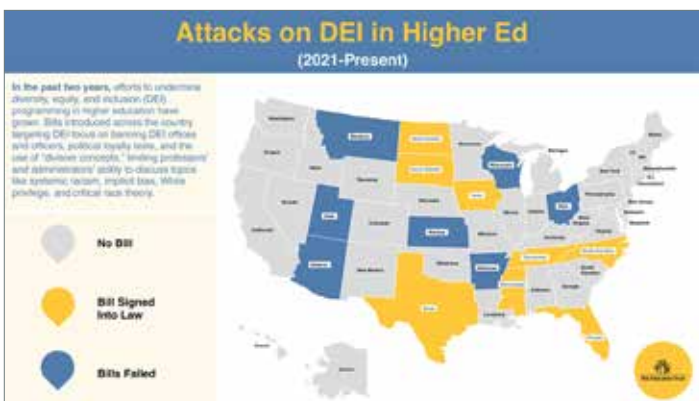
# Attacks on DEI, and Inclusive Education



AS MANY SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES are navigating the complexities of integrating inclusive curricula that reflect the diversity of their student body and prepare students to be global citizens, some extreme conservatives and political opportunists, are taking aim at educational efforts to promote inclusivity, address systemic inequities, and respect the diverse perspectives of students of color. [According to an Education Week analysis](#), since January 2021, 44 states have introduced bills or taken other steps that would limit classroom discussions about racism and sexism.

At the same time, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives at colleges and universities are under attack. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling against affirmative action and race-conscious admissions policies, many states are preemptively eliminating programs and initiatives targeted at students of color. [A new map](#) created by Ed Trust's higher education team shows that eight states have approved anti-DEI laws in the past two years, and another seven states have introduced bills that failed to pass.

With that in mind and to help ensure that the curricula taught in P-12 schools reflect people of various backgrounds, we released a new report, "[The Search for More Complex Racial and Ethnic Representation](#)," along with a [Tool for Representational Balance in Books](#) to help curriculum designers — as well as librarians, educators, and families — evaluate how different people, cultures, and topics are portrayed in books and address imbalances. The report examined racial and ethnic representation in the books used in U.S. schools and found that White authors and characters vastly outnumbered authors and characters of other races and ethnicities. The report also noted that when people of color were featured, they tended to be depicted in limited ways. Almost half of the people of color centered in these books were one-dimensional, portrayed negatively, or lacked agency. When books featured groups or cultures of color, they often used stereotypes, disconnected culture from individual people, or portrayed those groups as less than or unequal to others. And, when historical and social topics were included, they were almost always sanitized, told from a single perspective, or disconnected from the structural realities that help students make sense of the reading. The report, which builds on Ed Trust's [#CantBeErased](#) campaign against book bans in schools, received widespread coverage in media outlets, including [District Administration](#), Politico, [Education Week](#), [Fox 5 in DC](#), Chicago's Radio WVON, [Diverse Issues in Higher Education](#), and more.



## WHY WE NEED MORE (NOT LESS) COMPLEX RACIAL AND ETHNIC REPRESENTATION IN GRADE SCHOOL BOOKS



JOIN ED TRUST'S TWITTER SPACE

Oct 5 2023 @ 12pm ET

@edtrust

#CantBeErased



## IN COMMEMORATION OF NATIONAL BANNED BOOKS WEEK

Ed Trust hosted a Twitter Space on October 5 led by the report's authors, [Tanji Reed Marshall, Ph.D.](#), and [William Rodick, Ph.D.](#), and featuring speakers such as [Heather Harding, Ed.D.](#), executive director for the Campaign for Our Shared Future; [Anjali Adukia](#), an assistant professor in the Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago; and [Tasslyn Magnusson](#), program consultant, Freedom to Read, PEN America.

ON THE HIGHER ED SIDE, we released [“‘Segregation Forever?': The Continued Underrepresentation of Black Undergraduates at the Nation's 122 Most Selective Private Colleges and Universities”](#) a follow-up to our 2020 [report about the dearth of Black and Latino students enrolled at public flagships](#). This time around, Ed Trust looked at how access for Black students has changed at selective private colleges and universities over the past two decades and found that, despite marginal gains and a lot of rhetoric from college leaders about diversifying their student bodies, Black students are still woefully underrepresented at the nation's top private colleges and universities. The new report offered various recommendations, including developing recruitment strategies to increase college access, assessing and improving campus racial climates, leveraging federal accountability and accreditation accountability metrics.



## MEANWHILE, IN RESPONSE TO THE GROWING ANTI-CRT AND ANTI-DEI MOVEMENT

Ed Trust has created a digital report, [Creating Positive College Campus Racial Climates for Students of Color](#), that's designed to give institutional, state, and federal policymakers a glimpse into the experiences of Black, Latino, and Asian American students at predominantly White institutions, so they can develop effective policies for diversifying college campuses, supporting the success of students of color, and enhancing students' wellbeing.

The report features numerous quotes from students of color at PWIs in 15 states, and was developed based on interviews with them about their campus culture, experiences, and sense of belonging at their respective college or university. We heard a lot about the underrepresentation of students of color and faculty on campuses, the lack of support from PWIs for students of color — including a lack of mental health supports and failures by administrators to recognize, report, and deal with incidents of microaggression, racism, or discrimination. The report also offers recommendations for policymakers (state and federal), accrediting bodies, attorneys general, and more.

*"I don't know where to report incidents of racism. But if I needed to report a racial incident, I think I would most likely go to one of the organizations on campus that caters to students of color. A lot of times, though, with racial incidents that happen on campus, they just get brushed under the rug. So even with reporting, much doesn't happen. There's just a formal report filed, but action isn't necessarily taken."*  
—Sabrina, Black student

*"[My campus] police department is not super great with dealing with minority students. They shut down the majority Black parties way earlier and with a lot more force than they do the White frat parties."*  
—Tina, Black student

*"I'm just like, yo, we got to prove everyone around you wrong. We got to become a role model and become a leader for those who might not have those people. I feel like going to a PWI really forces this idea and makes you really think about, do you belong here all the time? And it just sucks."*  
—Kevin, Latino student

*"On a study abroad, my professor said, 'There's this area between France and Germany that's disputed.' Then she looked at me and said, 'Faye, you would know what it's like to be from a war-torn area, right?' Then, she commented how a Black student didn't need sunscreen because she was Black, but the rest of us did. The same student had an asthma attack and the teacher said she was faking it, so she didn't help her get medical attention."*  
—Faye, Asian American



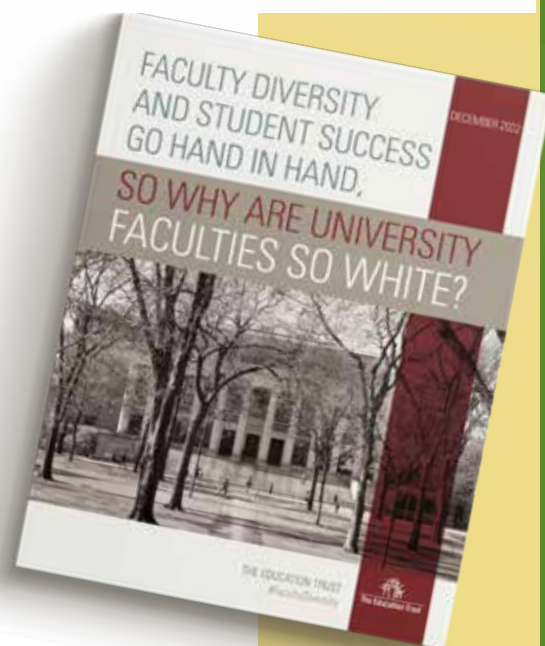


## Teacher/Faculty Diversity and Teacher Shortages

Many states and districts need more qualified teachers — especially teachers of color — which is making it difficult to provide students with the high-quality education they need and deserve. Teacher shortages are affecting urban and rural areas, and shortages in subjects like STEM and special education are particularly acute. Meanwhile, low pay, heavy workloads, larger class sizes, an overwhelmingly White teaching force, and limited resources are hindering efforts to recruit more teachers of color and impacting students' learning experiences.

At a time when what is taught in our nation's schools is being challenged, so-called “anti-critical race theory” campaigns are gaining traction, and racial divisions are driving political and social discourse, it is vital to have inclusive education spaces and opportunities for students to encounter and engage with different viewpoints. Students, particularly students of color, thrive in classrooms led by teachers who share their racial and/or cultural backgrounds. Sadly, our nation's P-12 system is far less diverse than its student population. [Only 19% of the nation's P-12 teachers are people of color, while the students of color make up 47% of the total student body.](#) (Learn more with our data tool, [Is Your State Prioritizing Teacher Diversity & Equity?](#))

Unfortunately, this lack of diversity also extends to college and university faculty. [A study](#) by Ed Trust researchers found that universities made very little progress in diversifying their faculties, especially when it comes to hiring tenure-track faculty and granting tenure.





# Teen Suicide and the Mental Health Crisis

Tragically, schools and universities are witnessing a student mental health crisis — and suicide attempts are on the rise. Academic burnout, economic stress, social isolation, a rise in anti-LGBTQ policies, and cyberbullying are all contributing factors in the upsurge in depression and student mental health issues. And many schools and colleges lack the resources to meet the increased demand for comprehensive student mental health services and/or aren't providing the right programming to meet students' social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD) needs.

To draw attention to this crisis and help P-12 leaders address it, Ed Trust issued a new brief on [“How Mental Health Supports Impact the Social, Emotional, and Academic Development of Students \(SEAD\).”](#) The brief looks at how providing mental health supports in schools benefits students, especially students of color, who disproportionately lack access to mental health supports, and provides recommendations for local, state, and federal policymakers on adopting and integrating culturally responsive support systems and implementing evidence-based policies and best practices that will foster safe, supportive, and affirming learning environments, which are essential for students' academic and emotional development.

Meanwhile, students are bracing for loan payments to resume in October, and the stress is already straining their mental health. Ed Trust research has shown that carrying large amounts of student debt is tied to anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. We have continued to call media attention to the ways that student debt impacts the mental health of borrowers, particularly Black borrowers. Brittani Williams, a senior policy analyst in higher education at Ed Trust, recently sat down with [Marc Lamont Hill on The Griot TV](#) to talk about the restart of student debt payments, options for borrowers, and how the resumption of payments could impact the Black community.



## Recovering from Unfinished Learning

The nation is in the midst of a literacy and math crisis, as students in all grades — but particularly Black and Latino students, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds, who bore the brunt of pandemic-related disruptions — are still grappling with unfinished learning. Recent NAEP test results show historic declines in national reading and math scores, and colleges report that more students are being placed in pre-college math courses.



To help advocates improve access to a high-quality and culturally relevant curriculum, materials, coursework, and class offerings, Ed Trust hosted a series of webinars to discuss why empowering, rigorous content is a key component in the fight for resource equity and against unfinished learning — and provided attendees with new resources to use in their own policy and advocacy work. The series included sessions on:

- [Embedding Equity in Middle School Advanced Coursework to Foster STEM Identities](#)
- [Leveraging High-Quality Instructional Materials to Accelerate Student Learning](#)
- [Analyzing Representational Balance in Language Arts Curricula](#)



## Funding

Most state funding systems perpetuate inequities for students of color, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds. And next fall, on or around September 30, 2024, time will run out for state and district leaders to spend the one-time federal relief funds that were allocated to help schools recoup from pandemic-related setbacks. With that in mind, and to help ensure that states and districts are spending those funds wisely and in ways that center equity and improve student outcomes, Ed Trust released a new brief, “[Watch Out for the Fiscal Cliff: Advocating for Education Equity as ESSER Spending Winds Down](#).” The report received media attention from [Education Week](#), [Politico](#), and [District Administration](#).

Ed Trust also released a companion piece, “Budgeting for Equity Beyond ESSER,” which is meant to serve as a guide for advocates on actionable state and district policy responses to the fiscal cliff. To support advocates in promoting equitable school funding environments in a post-ESSER climate, this brief identifies key questions and answers that advocates should listen and look out for as they initiate and participate in conversations with district and state leaders about funding needs post-ESSER.

## Affirmative Action and Student Debt Repayment



This summer, the Supreme Court ignored the plight of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds with two rulings that dismantled federal education equity efforts. In blocking President Biden’s debt relief plan and overturning affirmative action in college admissions — and, with it, a half-century of precedent and progress — the justices in the majority ignored the systemic racial barriers that still make it much harder for students of color to access higher education and obtain a degree.

In response to these decisions, Ed Trust released [a series of blogs on affirmative action by various higher education experts](#), and landed stories in major media outlets including [Good Morning America](#), [The Washington Post](#), [Chalkbeat](#), [the 19<sup>th</sup> News](#), and the [Atlanta Journal Constitution](#). Ed Trust staffers, along with staffers from various partner organizations, [participated several protests on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court](#).

At Ed Trust, we know that navigating these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach involving policymakers, educators, researchers, parents and families, and the wider community. School and university leaders must prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in their institutions, while also addressing teacher shortages and providing adequate resources to promote effective teaching and learning. Additionally, introducing proactive mental health initiatives and destigmatizing asking for help are crucial steps for creating supportive environments where students can thrive academically, emotionally, and socially.

# At a Glance

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



## On the Hill

Over the very busy summer, Ed Trust, alongside advocates and policy experts, continued [ongoing efforts](#) to educate the public about Black student debt and the need for [race-inclusive college admissions processes](#). We met with representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, congressional offices, and coalition partners in the wake of [the Supreme Court decisions](#) to strike down broad-based student debt cancellation and severely curtail the use of race in college admissions. We are heartened by the guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education in response to the affirmative action decision and have been meeting with state-level partners to clearly delineate what the ruling allows and does not allow.

Additionally, [Ed Trust and other groups](#) called on the department to continue pushing for student debt cancellation via the negotiated rulemaking process. Ed Trust continues to publish pieces about the negative impacts of the court's recent decisions and explore ways to educate the public and stakeholders further.

As we continue the fight into the fall, we are also working to protect and expand vital funding streams that millions of students and educators rely on. Ed Trust and [other partners](#) are [forcefully pushing back](#) on the proposed funding levels by the House, which include extreme cuts to a host of essential educational programs, including Title I. Fortunately, the [bipartisan Senate proposal](#) would maintain or slightly increase funding for the vast majority of essential programs,

including Title I and the Pell Grant. We look forward to continuing to work with coalition and government partners to ensure that the government remains funded and educational investments are increased in a final deal at year's end.

We continue to be deeply involved at the federal level in combatting efforts to silence people of color and whitewash their stories, perspectives, and lived experiences, via legislation like the Parents Bill of Rights Act and other anti-LGBTQ, anti-CRT, and anti-DEI laws. In partnership with congressional partners and advocacy organizations, Ed Trust has played a key role in ensuring that harmful amendments related to these topics, which were included in the House-passed National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), are excluded from the final NDAA. With our research in hand, we have also met with congressional partners to highlight how banned books, restricted school curricula, and other censorship efforts harm underserved students.

Finally, we remained active in the student hunger space by hosting a webinar with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) in early September on federal efforts to address the summer meal gap and steps that state and local advocates can take to ensure successful implementation of the Summer EBT program in 2024.



# Events

This quarter, we collaborated with our partners at ERS to host various webinars through our joint initiative, the Alliance for Resource Equity.

- **Improving Student Access to Empowering, Rigorous Content Webinar Series**
  - [Embedding Equity in Advanced Coursework in Middle School to Foster STEM Identities](#)
  - [Leveraging High-Quality Instructional Materials to Accelerate Student Learning](#)
  - [Analyzing Representational Balance in Language Arts Curricula](#)
- **Advocating Across Government: Identifying Key Influencers**
- **Affirmative Action and Student Loan Forgiveness for the Justice Impacted**
- [Addressing Summer Hunger Through Summer EBT](#)



## Ed Trust Speaker Series: Connecting Research to Policy to Advance Educational Equity in P-20



This [inaugural speaker series](#) is designed to foster crucial dialogues between scholars, researchers, policymakers, and influencers, and address pertinent P-20 topics. These groups often operate in silos, but our initiative aims to bridge this gap and facilitate rich exchanges that can inform policies and research, especially those that target Black, Latino, and low-income communities. Our series also aims to connect P-12 and higher education discussions. Our October session looked at the role of race in admissions and explored strategies for amplifying Black and Latino college enrollment. The session was moderated by Jinann Bitar, director of higher education research & data analytics, and our guest

speakers were [Roberto Montoya, Ph.D.](#), associate vice-president of partner success for Hispanic-serving institutions at InsideTrack, and [DeMarcus Jenkins, Ph.D.](#) an assistant professor in the School of Social Policy & Practice at the University of Pennsylvania. Our spring sequel will shed light on the pivotal roles of teachers, counselors, and parents in P-12 settings.

# In the States

## KENTUCKY

This quarter, Ed Trust worked closely with the Kentucky Equity Coalition and the Prichard Committee to set priorities for the coming year. In September, Ed Trust researchers presented the initial findings of a Kentucky brief about how COVID-19 impacted access to advanced coursework in the state and facilitated a planning and brainstorming session on how to advance policies in the coming legislative session. In the coming months, we will continue to work closely with the coalition and the Prichard Committee, as we release the brief and use it to make a stronger case for policy reform. Ed Trust shared resources with the Prichard Committee to help engage families as the organization works to select pilot school districts for the implementation of their full-service community schools grant, [Kentucky Community Schools Initiative](#).



Ed Trust released the [A.S.P.I.R.E.S.: State Policy Review Framework](#) in August, which was designed in close collaboration with the Lumina Foundation, a select group of state higher education officials, and state advocacy partners. Kentucky was one of the states that helped inform the creation of this framework, and its state leaders have been working over the past year to use the framework to reach their goal of ensuring that 60% of the working-age population holds a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030.

## LOUISIANA

In recent months, The Education Trust in Louisiana has worked to build connections with teachers, students, and advocates across Louisiana. We started by launching a partnership engagement initiative, [Cocktails and Conversations](#), which convened more than 60 educational leaders and advocates across Louisiana's southern region to align and strategize on educational priorities.

As an extension of the [Forever a Teacher campaign](#), Ed Trust in Louisiana collaborated with community partners to create The ECA (Empower Connect Advocate!) Collective, an educator-based coalition that serves to increase teacher appreciation, provide professional development opportunities for teachers, and, ultimately, formulate and advocate for equitable policies. To continue to advance our AMPLIFY LA student work, we held an HBCU and Advocacy Tour in Atlanta, where students worked with organizational partners to increase their advocacy skills and expand their knowledge of minority-serving higher education institutions. Lastly, in partnership with the Baton Rouge Alliance for Students, Ed Trust in Louisiana [launched](#) the second iteration of the [Baton Rouge Youth Voice Initiative](#). Via a survey, this initiative encourages Louisiana students to share their perspectives about their education system.



## MASSACHUSETTS

In Massachusetts, Ed Trust continues to work closely with [the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership \(MEEP\)](#). Following the Supreme Court's decisions on affirmative action and federal student loan debt forgiveness, MEEP created a postsecondary education working group, which launched the [#Allin4aDebtFreeFuture](#) campaign. This campaign aims to build greater awareness and momentum around higher education affordability. The campaign features a collection of resources made up of an interactive [data dashboard](#) that's designed to help users explore the full cost of attaining a degree at a public two- and four-year institution in the Commonwealth and an advocacy toolkit in English and Spanish to empower families, students, and community members to effectively advocate for appropriate resources and policy-based solutions to ensure that every student can succeed and thrive.



## TEXAS

Since the end of the regular legislative session in May, the Texas team has been working to influence the implementation of new state policies, while advancing school funding equity, teacher quality and diversity, and early literacy intervention during the October special session. We are highlighting [the advocacy power of students](#) whose efforts led to the passage of community college finance legislation that includes increased need-based financial aid, new funding to offer dual credit courses at no cost to students from low-income backgrounds, and new formula weights for high-need student groups. As our forthcoming higher ed research brief on the distribution and impact of federal emergency aid highlights, leaders must do more to understand and meet students' financial and basic needs.



## MARYLAND

In Maryland, Ed Trust continues to make local communities aware of what's in their district's plan to implement the [Blueprint law](#). This quarter, we worked to support community members in prioritizing strong policy recommendations that address specific inequities in their school districts. In July, Ed Trust presented to the state NAACP our brief on "The Blueprint for Maryland's Future: What's in It, What It Means for Equity, and What Questions Advocates Should Ask," guiding questions for advocates to engage in Blueprint implementation, and narrative one-pagers that explain the how the Blueprint benefits certain student groups. Conversations with key state partners informed the final brief and accompanying materials. Ed Trust will work with partners in the state this fall to distribute the brief to key advocates and stakeholders.

Additionally, members of Ed Trust serve on the advisory council of [The Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence](#), which is developing issue priorities for the coming year.





# The Education Trust—West

## Power Building for Long-Term Racial Equity in Education

This summer, new cohorts of The Education Trust—West’s signature fellowship and advisory council programs continued efforts to build a pipeline of powerful equity-minded individuals working for sustained policy change and racial equity in education.

- Six students and recent graduates joined us as [Russlynn Ali Fellows](#) for the program’s 6th year. The Russlynn Ali Fellowship Program, named in honor of the founding executive director of Ed Trust—West, aims to support people of color entering policy and advocacy leadership by laying a foundation for current and future policymakers, researchers, advocates, and African American, Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous communities to become lifelong leaders within California’s P-16 education ecosystem.
- In August, Ed Trust—West opened the application process for the second cohort of [The FIERCE \(Fighting for Innovation and Equitable Recovery in College Education\) Student Fellowship](#). Eight students of color will be able to partake in this leadership development opportunity for undergraduate community college and university students attending California public institutions. The goal of the fellowship is to support student advocates as they promote policies and practices that push for equity at their campuses and across the state. Throughout the program, fellows will engage with researchers, policymakers, and advocates in the field to learn more about pressing policy issues in higher education and hone their own perspectives.
- Also in August, applications opened for the third cohort of the [Educator Advisory Council](#), a program to provide educators of color with exposure to issues, policies, and the current TK-12 and higher education landscape in California. The council will gather feedback from members on current and future projects, seek their input on our policy and legislative positions, and encourage them to advocate for educational justice in their respective communities.

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## Planning for Future Wins for Students

This summer and fall, Ed Trust—West is also rolling out a newly completed strategic plan that will guide the organization’s work and partnerships for 2023-2026. Developed through a collaborative, intentional process, the plan identifies and outlines the state’s most pressing issues affecting students and surfaces potential solutions to those issues that our organization will pursue over the next three years. The planning process also provided an opportunity for Ed Trust—West to consider the right-sized approaches and internal processes and structures that will support the team in ensuring their work is maximally effective and impactful.



# The Education Trust—West



## Budget & Legislative Advocacy Scores Big Wins, Protects Crucial New College-And-Career Program

The annual California legislative cycle wrapped up in October and included big wins for California students thanks to Ed Trust-West. Six of the eight legislative proposals we identified as part of the “Equity 8” (proposals with the most potential to advance educational equity and justice) were adopted in the budget or signed into law this year. These new policies will help improve student experiences in early learning programs and improve discipline policies in TK-12, support newcomer students learning English, and improve access to early college programs. Ed Trust-West also led a coalition that successfully sought the Governor’s veto on a misguided bill that could have had costly ramifications for community college students.

California’s budget cycle wrapped up in the early summer, with a budget that included far fewer cuts to key education

programs than were originally proposed in a year that saw deep deficits in state revenue. Ed Trust-West engaged closely with partners, fellow advocates, legislators and the governor’s office throughout the budget process. This advocacy helped bring about important education equity wins in the final budget, including strengthened accountability measures in TK-12 funding, and funding for additional staffing and programming for the California Student Aid Commission to support the implementation of California’s universal financial aid completion requirement.

Ed Trust-West and partners also successfully advocated during this year’s budget cycle to extend the financial aid application period by one month. At the beginning of the budget cycle, the Golden State Pathways program, a high-quality college and career pathways program to which the state had previously committed \$500 million, was threatened with elimination as legislators looked for ways to balance the budget. The program, which, per its website, promotes “pathways in high-wage, high-skill, high-growth areas, including technology, health care, education, and climate-related fields” to allow students to “advance seamlessly from high school to college and career and provide the workforce needed for economic growth,” was preserved in the final state budget, thanks in large part to targeted advocacy efforts by Ed Trust-West and its Fast Forward California partners.



# The Education Trust—West

## A New Mathematics Framework Adopted

In July, the California State Board of Education adopted an updated framework for mathematics in the state, culminating a multi-year, comprehensive, and, at times, contentious process. Over the past two years, Ed Trust—West engaged in multi-faceted advocacy efforts, working directly with decision makers developing the new framework, uplifting and supporting engagement from local advocates around the state, and running a communications campaign to draw more attention to the state's alarming student outcomes and equity gaps in math and the urgent need for updated guidance from the state to close these gaps.

Ed Trust—West worked closely with multilingual learner partner organizations, provided state decision makers with thorough reviews of each version of the framework, and worked over the summer to ensure strong alignment between the mathematics guidance and the state's English Learner Development Standards. While the revised framework was attacked by anti-equity groups, some of them well-funded national organizations, Ed Trust—West's advocacy helped ensure that the final framework centered equity, where possible, and retained key guidance around evidence-backed, culturally responsive practices in the teaching of mathematics. Ed Trust—West was also recently invited to join the state's Math Steering Committee, which will provide guidance on the implementation of an \$85 million investment in professional development opportunities for educators in math, science, and computer science.

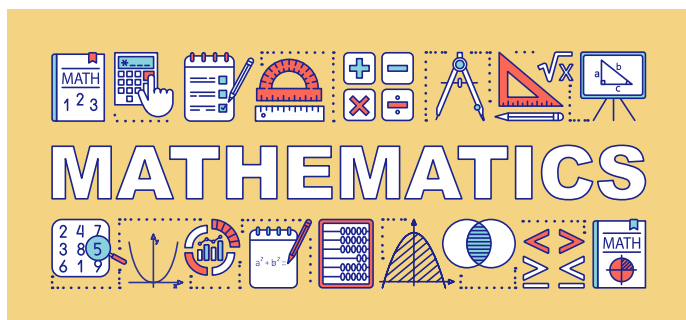


*Ed Trust team at the SHEEO Conference*

## Ed Trust—West Higher Ed Team Connects With Fellow Advocates From Across the Country

In August, Ed Trust—West's higher education policy team attended the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) national conference in Denver, Colorado. The team made important connections with hundreds of fellow higher education advocates, researchers, and practitioners from around the country.

Ed Trust—West Executive Director Christopher Nellum, Ph.D., gave the opening keynote address — provocatively titled “Enough Equity?” — at SHEEO. Chris called on attendees to refocus on the power of higher education institutions to change students' lives. Pushing SHEEO participants to reject burnout and complacency, his keynote also noted that many of the now-normalized or emerging practices on campuses across the country — addressing student food insecurity, welcoming parenting students — were once seen as impossible.



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



# The Education Trust–Midwest

## Scoring a Historic Win & Setting the Stage for What's Next

After years of sustained advocacy, The Education Trust–Midwest (Ed Trust–Midwest) and the Michigan Partnership for Equity Opportunity coalition (MPEO) scored a [historic systemic school funding win for Michigan's students](#) that will greatly benefit students who are the most underserved, including students from low-income backgrounds, English Learners, and students with disabilities.

Michigan is now among the nation's first 10 states to include an index for concentrations of poverty in its state school funding formula. The Opportunity Index was strongly championed by Ed Trust–Midwest and coalition partners and follows years of research, advocacy, and policy recommendations by Ed Trust–Midwest on fair funding in leading states.

In the immediate term, the Opportunity Index will drive more than \$950 million toward educating students who qualify for “at-risk” funding in the FY24 state school budget, which is more than \$200 million above FY23 levels. The new state funding mechanism, which is now enshrined in law, also sets new long-term goals for investing in Michigan students who qualify for at-risk funding. Upon full implementation, the Index will invest more than \$2.9 billion annually in these students.

“This is a moment of both great progress and sober celebration,” said Amber Arellano, executive director of Ed Trust–Midwest and one of three chairs of the MPEO. “We celebrate the tremendous progress made this year for students from low-income backgrounds, as well as English learners and students with disabilities. This is the beginning of a real conversation about what fair funding should look like in Michigan.”



### *In addition:*

- State policymakers invested \$39.8 million dollars in English learners in the FY24 school aid budget — an increase of 50% over FY23 and the most funding ever put toward that student group in Michigan. Ed Trust–Midwest and the MPEO led the efforts to increase funding to support the needs of English learners.
- Lawmakers also voted to fully fund the foundation allowance for students with disabilities. FY24 will be the first time that districts receive 100% of the foundation allowance for students with disabilities, in addition to 28.6% of the cost of delivering special education services. Last year, districts received only 75% of the foundation allowance for students with disabilities, in addition to the required reimbursements. Increasing funding for students with disabilities to fully support their needs was a key advocacy initiative for Ed Trust–Midwest and the MPEO.

# The Education Trust–Midwest



## More to do: Advocacy Advances to Improve Fair Funding in Michigan

More than 60 education equity advocates – including local elected leaders, state officials, educators, civil rights, civic and business leaders, supporters and partners – joined together recently to celebrate the historic school funding win for Michigan’s students, especially the most underserved.

The event was a celebration of a systemic change, noted on pg. 16, to invest dramatically more in students from low-income backgrounds – and a discussion of next steps to create a truly fair school funding system based on what leading states and research say is needed to close opportunity gaps for students with the greatest needs.

The gathering was hosted by The Education Trust–Midwest and the Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity (MPEO), who were instrumental in championing the transformational change to Michigan’s school funding formula.

“That change is a monumental win for students from low-income backgrounds who have among the greatest needs. Indeed, this is the most important systemic change in Michigan’s school funding system for decades – since proposal A,” said Amber Arellano, executive director of The Education Trust-Midwest and a co-chair of the MPEO.

*“Sen. Darrin Camilleri credited the Education Trust-Midwest, a nonprofit advocacy organization based in Michigan, for bringing the idea of an opportunity index to him, including examples from other states.”*

*—Detroit Free Press*

### FROM THE HEADLINES

[Michigan schools will see big funding gains for neediest students under budget deal](#)

CHALKBEAT DETROIT

[Michigan’s school aid budget includes universal meals, more special education funding](#)

DETROIT FREE PRESS



[Opinion | It’s time for Michigan to invest in its most vulnerable children](#)

[Alice Thompson, Amber Arellano,](#)  
& [Mike Jandernoa](#)

Bridge Michigan

# The Education Trust–Midwest

The morning's featured speaker was State Senator Darrin Camilleri. He is the leading legislative champion for equitable funding and the author of the Opportunity Index.

Additional speakers included Detroit Public Schools Community District's Superintendent Nikolai Vitti, who talked about the district's ongoing progress and challenges, as well as the need for greater funding for students with the highest needs. He was joined by MPEO's other two co-chairs: Mike Jandernoa, founder & chairman, 42 North Partners, and Alice Thompson, CEO, BFDI Educational Services, Inc., chair of the Detroit NAACP's Education Committee.

The Opportunity Index would not be possible without many partners, including from The Education Trust–Midwest and Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity, Sen. Camilleri said. The information from ETM and partners provided the foundation needed “to fight for a program that we know is going to make transformational differences for our students,” he said.

“It's something that our state has never attempted before, and it's something that I'm very proud of championing.”

The event was followed by a coalition retreat, where member organizations and individuals gathered to strategize about collective advocacy efforts on equitable funding, access to rigorous coursework, fiscal transparency and accountability, educator shortages and retention, and more.



## Amber Arellano appointed to governor's statewide PreK-12 Education workgroup

Amber Arellano, executive director of Ed Trust–Midwest, was appointed to the PreK-12 Education work group for Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's Growing Michigan Together Council, a statewide bipartisan group of leaders charged with making important recommendations for the future of the state.

“The diverse workgroup members of the Growing Michigan Together Council will be instrumental in our effort to grow our economy and population while protecting our natural resources,” Gov. Whitmer [said in a statement](#).

Alice Thompson, who along with Arellano is one of the three chairs of the MPEO coalition, also was appointed to the education workgroup. Thompson chairs the education committee for the Detroit NAACP and is CEO of the Black Family Development, Inc.

The work group provides an opportunity for Ed Trust–Midwest and the MPEO to engage fellow members on key priorities that will benefit students who are the most underserved in Michigan.

For more information, please visit [midwest.edtrust.org](http://midwest.edtrust.org)



# The Education Trust—New York

## [The state of early literacy in Monroe County](#)

In June, we published “[A Call to Action: The State of Early Literacy in Monroe County](#),” which is a follow-up to our statewide report on early literacy. This new report shows that Monroe County’s early literacy crisis is driven by a combination of low expectations for students, unstable leadership, and the use of non-evidence-based instructional materials and practices that are ultimately denying students the right to read.



Dia Bryant, executive director of Ed Trust–NY, was featured in a New York Times article, “[As States Confront a Reading Crisis in Schools, New York Lags Behind](#),” in which she drew attention to the state’s literacy crisis and was quoted as saying, “What’s missing for me is the leadership from the state ... These are people I’m expecting, and I think who the public expects, to be leading the charge on this ... But New York is doing nothing.”

## [Science of Reading Center of Excellence to be established at the State University of New York at New Paltz](#)

In June, leaders at SUNY New Paltz [announced](#) that the school will establish the Science of Reading Center of Excellence on campus, which will build knowledge of the science of reading in New York State’s educator pipeline and is in line with recommendations from Ed Trust–NY’s April 2023 report on [the state of early literacy in New York](#), which noted that many programs do not train teachers in the science of reading or use of evidence-based instructional materials and called for strengthening the alignment between teacher preparation programs and the science of reading. The center, which will launch in fall 2023, will feature a first-of-its-kind Science of Reading Fundamentals microcredential for New York teachers. Ed Trust–NY will continue working with partners in the early literacy space to advocate for early literacy resources for educators in New York State.

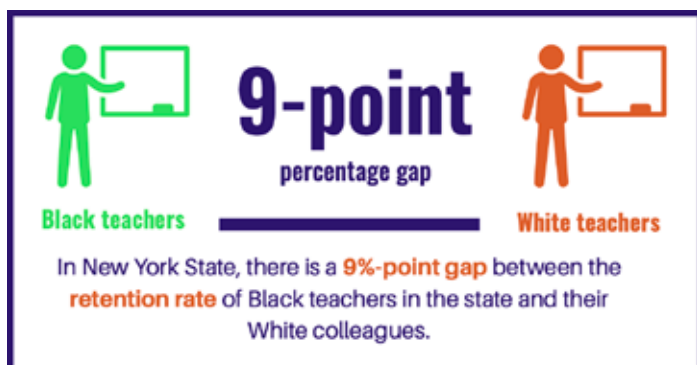


## [The New York Legislature advances a bill to expand child care access to parents with irregular work hours](#)

Parents are often unable to access child care in New York State, especially those with rotating, part-time work schedules, experiencing homelessness, or in other nontraditional arrangements. This summer, the New York State Senate and Assembly passed [S5327/A4986A](#), which removes the requirement that parents work a minimum number of hours to qualify for child care subsidies, thereby expanding access to care and increasing equity. Members of [Raising NY](#), a statewide coalition convened by Ed Trust–NY, pushed for this change by meeting with decision-makers; submitting testimony, sign-on letters, and memorandums of support; and issuing statements of support for the legislation on social media. The coalition will continue working until Gov. Kathy Hochul signs the bill.



# The Education Trust—New York



## Teacher retention in New York State

Over the summer, public schools in New York State struggled to retain teachers of color, particularly Black, American Indian, and Latino teachers, according to an [report](#) by The New York Equity Coalition. The analysis noted that over a four-year period (2018-19 to 2021-22) teachers of color and students of color were disproportionately concentrated in schools with the lowest teacher retention rates. The report, which is part of an initiative by The New York Equity Coalition — of which Ed Trust–NY is a member — to improve educator diversity and retention at the state level, also noted that teacher retention rates were highest at schools in low-need districts, while charter schools, New York City schools, and schools in Buffalo, Yonkers, and Syracuse had some of the lowest retention rates in the state.

## Bill That Funds ‘Grow Your Own’ initiatives signed into law by Gov. Hochul

New York’s educator workforce doesn’t come close to matching the rich diversity of our state’s students. But thanks to the unwavering support of Ed Trust–NY’s New York Equity Coalition partners, who submitted memorandums of support to state leaders in support of [a bill](#) that will help improve teacher diversity in the state, [A68A/S2140B](#) was signed into law in September. The new legislation directs the New York State Commissioner of Education, in consultation with higher education institutions, to issue guidance for school districts and boards of cooperative educational services to help school districts develop Grow Your Own programs to recruit more underrepresented candidates into the teaching profession.



## Gov. Hochul signs bill into law that improves access to advanced coursework

Last month, [The New York Equity Coalition](#) advocated for a bill that would improve access to advanced coursework for students, particularly students of color and those from low-income backgrounds. Ed Trust–NY and our partners from The New York Equity Coalition met with legislators, elevated student and parent stories on the issue, led a digital advocacy campaign to engage policymakers, and sent letters to lawmakers to support the bill. Thanks to our collective advocacy, [A514A/S5650A](#) was unanimously approved in September and signed into law by Gov. Hochul. This legislation will direct school districts to inform families early on about the benefits of enrolling in advanced classes and ensure that families have information about what courses are offered, what supports are available for students, and how students can enroll.

# The Education Trust-Tennessee

During the last quarter, The Education Trust–Tennessee advanced various advocacy initiatives by working alongside coalition partners, parents, family, and community.

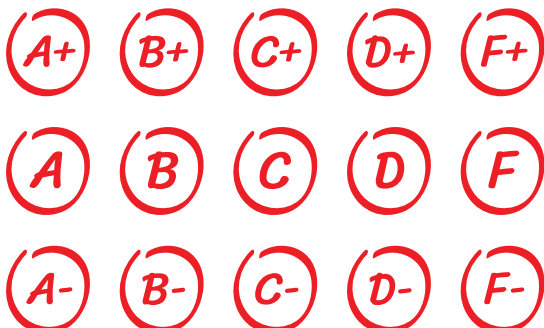
## Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance recognizes The Education Trust-Tennessee as the inaugural Community Partner of Excellence Honoree

The Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance (TECA) envisions a future in which the diversity of Tennessee educators reflects the diversity of students across the state. Since 2020, The Education Trust-Tennessee has partnered with TECA to increase educator diversity in the state by ensuring that every student has access to skilled, well-resourced teachers, leaders, and staff who reflect the state’s racial and linguistic diversity. This year, they honored us with the [“Community Partner of Excellence”](#) award.



## Making It Count: Revising Tennessee’s ESSA Accountability System

Tennessee schools will receive letter grades for the first time later this fall, and The Education Trust–Tennessee is closely engaging the Tennessee Department of Education and stakeholders on this issue. In advance of the new rating system, we released a memo, [“Making it Count: Revising Tennessee’s ESSA Accountability System,”](#) and are encouraging Tennesseans to attend a town hall meeting and submit public comments on the issue.



## Introducing The Education Trust-Tennessee Speaker Series on ‘Policy and Community’

The Education Trust-Tennessee is proud to introduce [“Policy and Community,”](#) a webinar speaker series that connects current education policy issues with advocates across the state. Our goal is to convene those who are leading innovative solutions to understand how our public education system can better serve students of color and students from low-income backgrounds in pre-K through college.



# The Education Trust-Tennessee



## Pa'Lante: Advancing Latino Student Success in Tennessee

In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, we kicked off the “Policy and Community” series with an event that examined the state of education for Latino students in Tennessee. Amanda Fernandez, CEO and founder of Latinos for Education, led a [conversation](#) with Laura Delgado, program director of Pionero Scholars at the College of Education at Lipscomb University, and Ruby Aguilar, a teacher at Glenclyff High School in Metro Nashville Public Schools, that explored national and state trends related to Latino student success, the important role of education advocates, and looked at ways that policymakers and leaders can help ensure that we are equipping Latino students in Tennessee to succeed in school and beyond.

## Equipping Tennessee Advocates With the Tools to Lead

Statewide education policies affect millions of students, families, and communities and have a crucial and far-reaching impact on educational equity and justice. That's why legislative advocacy is a core function of our work in the Tennessee Alliance for Equity in Education, an initiative of The Education Trust in Tennessee.

We have designed various tools to help stakeholders advocate effectively for education justice in the state of Tennessee. We are excited to continue connecting local advocates across the state with education policy issues that impact them and their children, so advocates can help shape policy decisions and expand educational equity and opportunity.

**Learn more at:** <https://thealliancetn.org/advocacy-resource-hub/>



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

# WITH GRATITUDE

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

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# The Education Trust

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## Our Mission

The Education Trust is committed to advancing policies and practices to dismantle the racial and economic barriers embedded in the American education system. Through our research and advocacy, Ed Trust 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](https://edtrust.org/ed-trust-updates).



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