

ED
TRUST
UPDATE

06/20



The Education Trust

ADVOCATING FOR A “NEW NORMAL”:

COVID-19's
IMPACT ON
EDUCATION EQUITY

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO



Recently, my family and I attended the protests in the nation's capital to demand justice for the murder of George Floyd and countless Black people at the hands of police, as people in America and around the world continue to cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This moment has forced us to face hard truths about inequity and injustice.

Words are inadequate to capture the anger, pain, sadness, and frustration of the daily toll of racism: the loss of Black lives in police violence; the intentional exclusion of Black people from access to economic opportunity; the health disparities that COVID-19 has put into sharp relief; the persistent, glaring inequities in education that drive our daily work; and the ugly legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and redlining.

It is clear that our urgent work to close opportunity gaps for the students we serve could not be more important. While students of color and students from low-income backgrounds already had to contend with pervasive inequities in schools before the pandemic, the abrupt shift to at-home learning has exposed a stark digital divide and is exacerbating disparities, turning cracks in the education system into deep crevices. With most K-12 schools closed for the remainder of the academic year, our nation should be preparing for a [voluntary, rigorous summer learning program](#) to help bridge some of the learning gaps that students may have experienced as a result.

In the meantime, students are dealing with unimaginable circumstances. I recently learned about Malika, age 10, who recently lost her father, a good friend of one of our staff, to COVID-19. She and many children like her are grieving and struggling to process their emotions. As someone who also lost both my parents at a young age, I can attest that [social-emotional](#) and mental-health supports matter. That alone can sometimes save lives. Many students are also dealing with food insecurity, which has surged since the onset of the outbreak, prompting organizations like ours to call for expansions of emergency food assistance and [pandemic EBT programs](#), which help students and families obtain meals via ATM-like cards that they can use at food stores and farmers markets.

Meanwhile, a troubling [decline in students filling out the FAFSA \(Free Application for Federal Student Aid\)](#) could signal a brewing higher education crisis, as students who were already at risk of forgoing or not returning to college opt out, either by choice or circumstance — or [simply fail to show up for their first semester](#).

Congress must invest *now* to ensure that students have the resources they need from early education through higher education.

No one knows what the future holds, but there are signs of [innovation](#) and hope. The South Bend Community School district in Indiana is using school buses to provide free Wi-Fi to students with limited internet access. [The Tennessee Department of Education and others are collaborating with cable-access and public television stations to air content in English and Spanish](#). And some [educators and schools are coming up with new and creative ways to connect with students](#).

Meanwhile, as COVID-19 upends higher education and the lives of more than 20 million students, many postsecondary institutions are launching graduates into an uncertain world and the worst job market since the Great Depression with virtual send-offs instead of traditional commencement ceremonies (and the pomp and circumstance that goes with them) attended by family and friends.

One thing is for certain. Whenever schools reopen and traditional learning resumes, there will be new challenges, not least of which will be how to even the academic playing field, as students with different socioeconomic backgrounds and degrees of home internet access return to classrooms with varying amounts of learning progress under their belts. It's no wonder [families are concerned](#). According to [polls by our New York and California offices, as well as polls that we commissioned in Washington and Texas, nearly 9 out of 10 parents are worried that their child is falling behind](#).

Meanwhile, this moment could well be a turning point for our nation, as — we decide whether to move forward or backward. What we do today to address systems of oppression and injustice will affect generations of students and families to come. In fact, a return to normal will not be good enough — our students, their families, and our communities deserve better. We can choose to keep shortchanging underserved communities or to make the changes that are urgently needed to build a stronger and more just America.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John B. King Jr.".

John B. King Jr.

President and CEO of The Education Trust

 [@JohnBKing](#)

DURING THIS REPORTING PERIOD, WE CONTINUED TO EXECUTE OUR THEORY OF CHANGE BY ENGAGING IN THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

LISTEN:

Ed Trust serves as a vigilant watchdog. We monitor policy proposals and engage legislators, parent and family coalitions, educators, advocates, and students to better understand context and conditions to inform our advocacy.

RESEARCH:

Tapping the power of quantitative and qualitative data, Ed Trust publications and materials focus on policy, practice, and community tools that are either effective in — or detrimental to — advancing equity. From teacher diversity to college completion, Ed Trust is a thought leader on key issues due to our extensive research and subject matter expertise.

ENGAGE:

Ed Trust engages policymakers, practitioners, and advocates to build a diverse coalition of people from various sectors and backgrounds. This increases political and public will to bring meaningful change for the students we serve.

SECURE:

All of our efforts should result in the adoption of meaningful changes in policy and practice, opening up opportunities for students of color and students from low-income families.

Creating a New Normal

Right now, there are intense debates occurring in the nation's capital, state houses, and in nearly every community and household about how and when America can "return to normal." Yet, for people of color "normal" has never been good enough, fair, or just. Due to systemic racism that is deeply woven into the fabric of our nation, people of color have suffered under the weight of racist institutional policies that permeate our educational system, housing market, financial market, healthcare system, hiring practices, and even our justice system. The COVID-19 pandemic, as it ravages communities of color and communities experiencing poverty, merely unveiled to many Americans the depth of these inequities.

Now, as the nation grieves the death of yet another Black man, George Floyd, killed at the hands of those charged to "serve and protect," Americans are once again reminded that all lives are not viewed as equal.

At Ed Trust, we are committed to creating a "new normal," by brokering an innovative and better social contract, so that all students — no matter their race/ethnicity, ability, income, home language, sexual and gender identity — have the same opportunity to obtain a high-quality P-12 education and an affordable, high-quality higher education that allows them to live a life of their choosing. Right now, we have an opportunity to revamp the U.S. education system and to emerge from this crisis stronger than before if the public will is strong enough and people refuse to accept the old normal. Our students are our future, and they need and deserve better.

Many Americans may find solace in the idea that **"we are all in this together,"** but that sentiment rings hollow in the face of data showing shocking racial disparities in who is suffering most amid the pandemic. Those hit hardest by illness, job loss, food insecurity, and economic hardship are disproportionately people of color and people from low-income backgrounds. To advocate on behalf of these communities and push for increased support and educational resources for vulnerable student populations, John went on a broadcast media tour:



In an interview with "60 Minutes,"

John talked about many wide-ranging issues from Black student debt to the racial wealth gap to the protests against police brutality, and what it means to not just return to normal, but reimagine the social contract in America.

On SiriusXM's ["Joe Madison Show, The Black Eagle,"](#) John discussed the prospect of reopening schools during the coronavirus pandemic and why the government can't use a "cookie cutter" approach.



During a [BET News special hosted by Gayle King](#), John and Nikole Hannah-Jones, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for The New York Times, discussed how institutionalized racism and systemic injustices can lead to diminished outcomes for Black students in public schools.

John also appeared on the PBS show, ["Amanpour and Co.,"](#) to discuss the pandemic and its impact on students.



In an [interview with NPR's "All Things Considered,"](#) John explained why educators play a vital role in supporting students' social-emotional and mental-health needs right now and talked about the impact great teachers had on him and his career.



On ["CBS This Morning,"](#) John shared what the "new normal" could look like for schools and why he fears that our country may be widening stubborn gaps in opportunity and achievement.





In nearly every major city across the U.S. as well as in international cities, protestors have hit the street demanding justice for Black Americans killed by law enforcement. In [a letter to our followers](#), we told them we are right beside those who are fighting for social justice and that we are working to “change the policies, practices, and beliefs to shift the appropriate power structures needed to truly realize justice.” Likewise Nancy Duchesneau, Ed Trust P-12 policy analyst and researcher, teamed up with Ashley R. Griffin, vice president at the Black Teacher Collaborative and Ed Trust alumna, to discuss how students of color are treated differently than White students when they advocate for themselves: [Self-Advocacy or Defiance in Protests and School Discipline? Depends: Are You White or Black?](#)



A concern of teacher candidates in this time of virtual learning is that they don’t have access to the “in-classroom” training that they would normally receive.

In an article in [The 74](#), Eric Duncan, senior analyst for educator diversity at Ed Trust, suggests that these teachers-in-training may need additional supports and mentoring when school reopens to ensure that they get the experience they need to become great teachers. Extra support is especially warranted, he explains, since newly minted teachers tend to be disproportionality assigned to schools with large percentages of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

John B. King Jr. and Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, made the case for transformation in an [op-ed in The Hill](#), noting that while it “remains to be seen what our new normal will look like for school come fall,” our first priority “is always keeping our students, families, educators, and school personnel safe and healthy We must plan for the future of education in a way that makes good on our promise to provide every child in America with the tools needed to succeed, regardless of geography or demography, but that does so within the reality of a very different world.”



School closures are affecting high school seniors

eagerly awaiting college admissions decisions for fall 2020, writes Wil Del Pilar, Ed Trust’s vice president for higher education and a former college admissions counselor, in a [post](#) that ran on our Higher Ed Equity Lens blog and the National Association of College Admission Counseling’s Admitted [blog](#). In it, he asks: “How will the COVID-19 pandemic impact the college-going decisions of students, and how should colleges adjust admissions criteria accordingly?” Wil then

offers [recommendations on how colleges can mitigate the impact, and even improve admissions processes](#). He also made a similar point, in a Forbes article called, “[Redesigning College Admission: COVID-19, Access and Equity](#).”



It will, no doubt, take enormous sums of money to get our economy and schools back on track after the pandemic, a recent [Education Week article](#) notes. In it, Ary Amerikaner, vice president for P-12 policy, practice, and research at Ed Trust, suggests that the next stimulus package will need to be in the range of \$100 to \$200 billion and should be used to extend the school year for struggling students. Ary also says she hopes Congress will ensure that those dollars are spent on things that are proven to accelerate learning for those students who are most impacted by the shutdown, such as summer school, expanded learning time, or intensive tutoring.



In an opinion piece for BET, "[COVID-19 Exposed America's Endless Educational Inequities But Now It's Time To Fix Them](#),"

Tanji Reed Marshall, director of P-12 practice at Ed Trust, calls for a new school environment that includes the best parts of at home learning that is working well for some students coupled with the best parts of a face-to-face educational experience.

The New York Times

In a [New York Times](#) article, Tanji warns school leaders to avoid viewing Black and Brown children as broken and in need of repair, noting that such "deficit thinking underestimates what young people from poor families are capable of, even during a public health crisis."

The Politico logo, consisting of the word "POLITICO" in white capital letters on a red rectangular background.

POLITICO



Relatedly, [Politico](#) published an article on how COVID-19 is impacting the choices of high school graduates, noting that some are dropping their first-choice schools in favor of colleges that are cheaper, while others are taking a year off so they can financially support their families. In it, Tiffany Jones, senior director for higher education policy at Ed Trust, points out that the impending recession is likely to hit vulnerable populations and the schools that serve them — including minority-serving institutions and historically Black colleges and universities — especially hard.

The Washington Post

Tiffany was also quoted in a [Washington Post](#) article speaking up for vulnerable student populations stuck in limbo while the U.S. Department of Education delayed guidance on how the nearly \$7 billion earmarked for emergency grants to college students would be allocated and could be used: The "response from the administration has been ... hang tight. Students can't hang tight if landlords are still collecting rent. Groceries are not free. There isn't a sense of urgency."

We called for a “new normal” via a series of monthly Twitter chats:



#AdvCoursesChat On April 15, we partnered with Equal Opportunity Schools and The Century Foundation to examine why Black and Latino students are often shut out of advanced courses, how widespread such practices are, and what policymakers at the state, district, and school levels can do to increase students’ access to advanced learning. Follow the conversation at #AdvCoursesChat. And be sure to read our report on “[Inequities in Advanced Coursework: What’s Driving Them and What Leaders Can Do](#)” and check out our [state-by-state data tool](#).

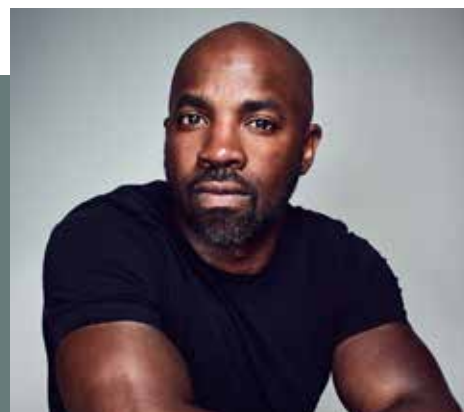
#DiverseTeachersChat On May 20, we partnered with TeachPlus, Educators for Excellence, The Black Teacher Collaborative and EdLoC for a discussion on how to support teachers of color year-round. Follow #DiverseTeachersChat to read and participate in this ongoing conversation.



#BlackStudentDebt On May 7, we and the NAACP Youth & College Division, hosted a discussion with higher-education policy experts on potential solutions to the Black student debt crisis. Follow #BlackStudentDebt to read the chat and add your voice. Also [don’t miss these essays from leading higher education experts on ways to address the Black student debt crisis](#).



On April 24, the U.S. Department of Education announced the expansion of the Second Chance Pell pilot program. Crystal Amuzie, a communications intern at EdTrust, [spoke with author](#) Chris Wilson about how access to high-quality education in prison helped him transform his life. Since his release from prison eight years ago, Wilson has become an author, entrepreneur, philanthropist, and a leading advocate for expanding access to education for people who are incarcerated.



For a full review of all our media efforts this quarter, both traditional and social, [please click here](#).



Pushing for Federal Action Amid this Crisis

When it became clear that Congress needed to act — and quickly — to address the challenges facing students, schools and districts, and higher education institutions in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak and school closures, EdTrust sprang into (virtual) action on Capitol Hill, influencing numerous proposals that were introduced and advanced through Congress.

After Congress passed an initial \$8.3 billion appropriations package in early March — known as the “Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act” ([H.R. 6074](#)) — which focused on vaccine development, research and equipment stockpiles, and supporting health budgets — attention immediately turned to state and local education needs, as schools and campuses closed and the longstanding equity issues facing students from low-income backgrounds and students of color that are ever present yet [often overlooked](#), became painstakingly evident.

A second round of Congressional negotiations led to speedy passage of the “Families First Coronavirus Response Act” ([H.R. 6201](#)), which Ed Trust called [only “the beginning”](#) of the sizable investments that would be needed to support students and their families. While this legislation was short on investment in schools and students, [Ed Trust heralded the creation of the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer program \(P-EBT\)](#), which was a provision in the bill that would allow students eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and/or free- and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) to receive food purchasing dollars on an ATM-like card if their school was closed for five or more consecutive days due to the virus.

While states are required to apply for [approval](#) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the program would provide a crucial lifeline for students from low-income backgrounds to access dollars to purchase food rather than having to rely on “grab and go” meal options that are potentially unsafe, given states’ stay-at-home orders and the dearth of personal protective equipment for food workers. Recognizing the program’s potential to connect more students to food through P-EBT, we partnered with [Hunger Free America](#) to [create a four-step guide on what states must do to opt into P-EBT through USDA](#) and asked hunger experts and associations to spread the word. We’ve since learned from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) that our efforts to make states and education leaders aware of P-EBT could ultimately prompt more than half of states to apply for the program.

With a renewed focus on the need for emergency education supports, Congress launched a third round of negotiations on economic stimulus and relief for students, schools and districts, and higher education institutions. The result was a Senate GOP-produced draft of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic

“During a national crisis, when many higher education institutions are facing existential challenges, the Trump administration has chosen to put the accused before victims. Today’s actions by the U.S. Department of Education are part of an egregiously troubling pattern to continue to rollback civil rights for students, especially those most underserved. These changes unnecessarily burden victims of sexual assault, and can deepen trauma for students by increasing the chances of victims being exposed to their accused assailants.”

“We believe, as noted in the 2011 Obama administration guidance, that institutions should hold those who violate Title IX accountable for their actions and protect victims’ rights. To do otherwise is simply unacceptable.”

— Former U.S. Education Secretaries John King and Arne Duncan

Security Act (S. 3548), or CARES Act, which, among many things, proposed harmful waivers of key federal civil rights law. Alongside our partners, Ed Trust immediately [pushed back against these proposed blanket waivers](#), [noting](#) that “ESSAs existing waiver authority is sufficient for ED to meet states’ needs” and that “[no] new waiver authority is necessary under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” (IDEA). Thanks, in no small part, to this [pressure](#), the Higher Education Act waiver was eliminated in the final bill and the waivers associated with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and IDEA were dramatically scaled back. That the department also [opted not to pursue any additional waivers](#) of ESSA or IDEA was a huge victory for equity advocates. After days of intense negotiation, the CARES Act eventually came together as [a bipartisan package that was passed into law](#) in late March — providing nearly \$31 billion to P-12 and higher education, flexible funds to governors for educational purposes, grants to outlying areas and those states most impacted by the virus, and loan relief to student borrowers through the suspension of payments for six months, interest-free.

Upon passage of this legislation, [Ed Trust joined partners in calling on the Education Department to ensure transparency and equity](#) in the distribution of emergency aid to K-12 schools. We also continued to beat the drum for equity by creating [advocacy materials](#) for [P-12](#) and [higher education](#), holding a [webinar](#) for more than 300 state and national partners to discuss [major provisions of the bill](#), and publishing blogs on how [state leaders can ensure that federal funds](#) are distributed to schools in a way that prioritizes students with the highest need.

While the CARES Act provided some much-needed relief to students and schools, it was clear that the investments would be insufficient to offset the blows to state and local budgets, meet the technological needs of K-12 students forced to move to distance learning, and help college students facing unexpected economic hardship. So, Ed Trust joined more than 20 organizations in [calling for additional higher education funding](#), while urging Congress to [extend relief to all federal student loan borrowers](#) — including those with Perkins and FFEL loans, which were not previously covered under the CARES Act.

While the Department prepared to distribute CARES Act emergency aid to college students, Secretary DeVos released new guidelines restricting emergency aid to Title IV eligible students only, effectively blocking colleges from distributing aid to undocumented and DACAmented students, a decision that has since [been challenged in federal court](#). [Ed Trust blasted this cruel decision](#) and [issued recommendations on ways to support DACA recipients](#), whose fate ultimately rests with the Supreme Court.

While the CARES Act offers some relief to student borrowers, our organization has continued to call attention to the student debt crisis, which disproportionately impacts students of color. Ed Trust [\(alongside 66 advocacy organizations\) has stressed that debt cancellation is an equity issue](#) and should, therefore, be targeted to those borrowers who struggle the most to pay and used to help close the [racial wealth gap that often forces Black students to borrow at higher rates than their White peers](#).

As we continued to monitor the disbursement of CARES Act funds to schools and districts, institutions of higher education, and governors, Ed Trust's John B. King Jr. and Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), co-wrote an op-ed in The Hill about the [need for dedicated funds to address learning loss](#) in the fourth-round stimulus package. Ed Trust also joined over 70 education organizations, including teachers' unions, civil rights organizations, and school administrators, in [urging congressional leaders to allocate \\$250 billion or more for education in the next stimulus bill](#), since numerous states "have recommended school building closures for the rest of the year, and school closures have already impacted more than 55 million K-12 students," while "nearly 26 million students attending higher education [institutions] have been affected by campus closures and shifts to online instruction." The groups' asks include: at least \$175 billion to stabilize state K-12 budgets; \$50 billion for higher education; \$4 billion for an Emergency Connectivity Fund to be administered through the Federal Communication Commission's E-rate program; expansion of nutrition assistance programs; funding for extended learning opportunities; and future funding for academic, social-emotional, and physical supports as students return to school.

One acute inequity that has been exposed by the pandemic is unequal access to technology. Many low-income students and students of color lack access to a computer and/or reliable broadband at home, a problem that has assumed new urgency now that schools around the country are closed and lessons have moved online. In response, Ed Trust signed on to letters calling for greater investment in the existing E-Rate program to ensure home internet connectivity and device access for K-12 students, as well as [overall broadband, including expanded access for college students](#). These letters informed the development of the "[Emergency Educational Connections Act](#)," which is backed by over 150 members of Congress and would invest \$4 billion in K-12 student access, and the "[Supporting Connectivity for Higher Education Students in Need Act](#)," which would invest \$1 billion in college student access. As the debate over fourth-round stimulus funds continues, we continue to work on shaping the content of these proposals, garnering congressional support for them, and advocating for their passage into law alongside our equity-focused partners.

FOUR STEPS STATE LEADERS CAN TAKE TO ADVANCE "PANDEMIC EBT" IMPLEMENTATION

1 OPT IN

Immediately announce to the public — and communicate to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) — that the state will seek to implement a Pandemic EBT program.

2 INCLUDE KEY PARTNERS

Work with all key stakeholders — including state and local education leaders, food retailers, anti-hunger advocates, front-line government social service staff, public employee and grocery worker unions, EBT contractors, counties, and non-profit service providers — to rapidly craft a detailed plan for implementation and submit it to USDA, in accordance with USDA's guidance.

3 PREPARE TO IMPLEMENT WITH URGENCY

Use emergency contracting and rule-setting procedures to secure the infrastructure and processes needed to provide benefits to potential recipients in this program, especially those who are not already SNAP participants. This is essential to ensure that families who receive free or reduced-price lunch and do not currently participate in SNAP can benefit from Pandemic EBT.

4 MAKE OUTREACH A PRIORITY

Appropriate funds to experienced, effective non-profit organizations who already provide SNAP application assistance to enable them to also provide application assistance for Pandemic EBT, including ensuring that outreach begins immediately, is sustained on an ongoing basis, and is conducted in multiple languages. The federal government will provide a 50% match for this outreach if it is part of the official state SNAP outreach plan.

As part of our advocacy around fourth-round stimulus funds, we sent a letter to congressional leadership asking for [expansions to food assistance and benefits programs](#), such as an extension of the Pandemic EBT program into the summer and next academic year, and to children under five, and increases to SNAP — all of which were included in the [House Democrats' marker bill, the HEROES Act](#), which will likely serve as a baseline for negotiations with the Senate on a fourth stimulus package.

Outside of COVID-19 rapid response efforts, we continued to advocate for the programs we care about most during the annual appropriations process. Prior to the start of the pandemic, we [submitted testimony](#) to the House Labor-H Appropriations Subcommittee for fiscal year 2021, and we were pleased to see the Education Department [expand the Second Chance Pell Program](#) to 67 higher education institutions — making the program operational in 130 colleges across 42 states, plus Washington, D.C.

Additionally, former Education Secretaries Arne Duncan and John B. King Jr. [weighed in on](#) the Education Department's harmful new Title IX rule, which was issued in early May and will make our schools and college campuses less safe for students and survivors of sexual assault and harassment.

As the coronavirus continues to plague our nation, forcing students to learn virtually or at a distance and families to lose jobs, we remain committed to influencing federal policy and holding lawmakers and the U.S. Department of Education accountable as they attempt to make good on our nation's promise of providing every child, regardless of background, the right to an excellent, equitable education — even under the direst of circumstances.

To learn more, please visit our COVID-19 webpage, [EdTrust.org/covid-19-impact-on-education-equity-resources-responding/](#)



Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education

The COVID-19 crisis disrupted college for more than 20 million students this spring. It remains unclear when, and in what form, campuses will reopen. And there are growing indications that many students may choose not to attend college or change their college plans.

At Ed Trust, our commitment to equitable higher education opportunity and outcomes for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds remains undaunted. While we have adjusted our advocacy work to fit the times, we scored some early wins in this extremely challenging era and we will keep up the work in the months ahead.

On March 13, the federal government declared the COVID-19 outbreak a [national emergency](#). Just days later, Ed Trust launched a resource hub for education equity stakeholders: [COVID-19: Impact on Education Equity | Resources & Responses](#).

As higher education institutions shut down campuses and transitioned to online learning, we raised concerns about students who may have no other safe place to live, may already be dealing with food insecurity or lack access to health care, and are now struggling even more to secure their basic needs.

We encouraged institutions to move to pass/fail rather than letter grades, as the quality of instruction may not be as consistent online as it is in classrooms, and to [rethink admissions practices](#).

We anticipate delayed deadlines for financial aid award letters from institutions for the fall semester, leaving students uncertain about their ability to finance their 2020/2021 academic year, and we remain concerned about how the sudden economic downturn will impact financial aid applications and students' ability to qualify for support, given that the FAFSA form considers family income from the two prior years. Thus far, [250,000 fewer returning college students from low-income backgrounds](#) have renewed their federal financial aid application this year.

That's why we and our partners have been weighing in on federal stimulus negotiations and advocating for students every step of the way. As our state-level partners shift their advocacy efforts to focus on the basic needs of their communities, we are identifying ways to support and amplify their work within the context of CARES Act and any future rounds of federal stimulus.

Toward that end, we held a webinar on May 19 featuring Luke Wood, associate vice president for diversity and innovation at San Diego State University; Nick Hillman, director of the Student Success Through Applied Research Lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; and Kayla Elliott, senior policy analyst for higher education at Ed Trust, about supporting student success in higher education in the time of COVID-19. In this webinar, academics and participants considered the following questions: What resources do colleges have at their disposal to support student success and how are those resources being distributed? Amid this abrupt transition to online learning, how can institutions support students in their new virtual learning environments? And how can colleges prioritize equity in distant learning? More than 100 stakeholders registered for the event.

We continue to work with national and state advocates to promote [a higher education equity agenda in response to COVID-19](#), which includes [expanded access to food assistance](#) that would help the many college students who are also parents; expanded access to broadband and devices for remote learning; and approximately [\\$50 billion more higher education funding](#) from the federal government, along with requirements for states to maintain current funding levels in higher education.

While the COVID-19 crisis has dominated headlines over the past few months, we've stayed focused on core higher education equity issues. We will continue to do our part to ensure that, when this crisis finally ends, the U.S. higher education system *does not* revert to the status quo — in which [Black](#) and [Latino](#) adults are less likely to hold a college degree today than White adults in 1990, and egregious racial disparities in college access and success are the norm in [nearly every state](#), while a soaring [affordability gap](#) keeps college all but out of reach for students from low-income families, students who are [undocumented](#), and students trying to earn a degree [while incarcerated](#).

To learn more, please visit our COVID-19 webpage, [EdTrust.org/covid-19-impact-on-education-equity-resources-responding/](#)

DACA

The Trump administration has made no secret of its sweeping efforts to remove undocumented immigrants from the U.S., including young people who grew up here and know no other home. While the U.S. Supreme Court weighs the fate of the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, Ed Trust has joined our partners in the immigrant rights community in supporting relief for Dreamers amid the COVID-19 crisis, [as we have done in the past](#).

Ed Trust staffer Mayra González Menjívar herself a DACA recipient, [wrote about the added stress undocumented families face](#) as federal immigration offices have stopped processing work permits, even as 27,000 DACA recipients are on the front lines fighting the pandemic.

Our nation's most vulnerable students and populations need protection, not punishment for factors that are out of their control.

Wil Del Pilar highlighted how out of [reach college remains for students who are undocumented](#) and called on federal and state policymakers to include Dreamers in college affordability and COVID-19 response efforts.

Access to a higher education, it would seem, is largely a false promise that is dangled in front of undocumented students. And the coronavirus crisis could well be the final nail in the coffin for their college dreams, as the economy tanks and many of the jobs on which those students depend dry up. If ever there were a time for state leaders, colleges and universities to offer extra supports for undocumented students, this is it.





Student Voice & Activism

EdTrust has made elevating student voice in higher education policy conversations a top priority, and the success of public events like last year's [Social Mobility, Race, and Higher Education convening](#) and our ongoing blog series on [Getting To and Through College](#) suggest those efforts may be paying off.

In the latest installment of the series, Gabriela Montell, a senior editor/writer who curates the series, shared several firsthand accounts about how the [COVID-19 crisis is affecting first-generation students](#) who were already juggling school, work, and family responsibilities, on top of paying for college.

"It's scary to think about what would happen if we get sick."

– D, graduating senior at a university in the east, and DACA recipient

"I had to take on a lot of responsibility for my brothers' online learning, grocery shopping, and stuff like that, so that was really stressful. In addition, we had two people pass in my family. I had so much anxiety about what was going on that I kind of bombed my first exam."

– Angelica Camilo, junior at Franklin & Marshall College

"The academic and professional side of me would like to make strategic moves in my education and career, but I have to put my brother before academics and make sure he has a safety net to fall on."

– Josh, doctoral student at a large public university in central Texas."

Meanwhile, Satra Taylor, higher education policy analyst, contends that ["In the Age of Coronavirus, Student Activism Is More Relevant Than Ever."](#)

It's a cruel irony that at a time when our most vulnerable students should be solely focused on their own well-being, schoolwork, and livelihood, many are serving as first responders — disseminating information, supporting fellow students, and confronting problems on their campuses that their institutions may not have adequately considered or addressed.

Her piece is accompanied by a [video compilation](#) of students talking about why they became activists.

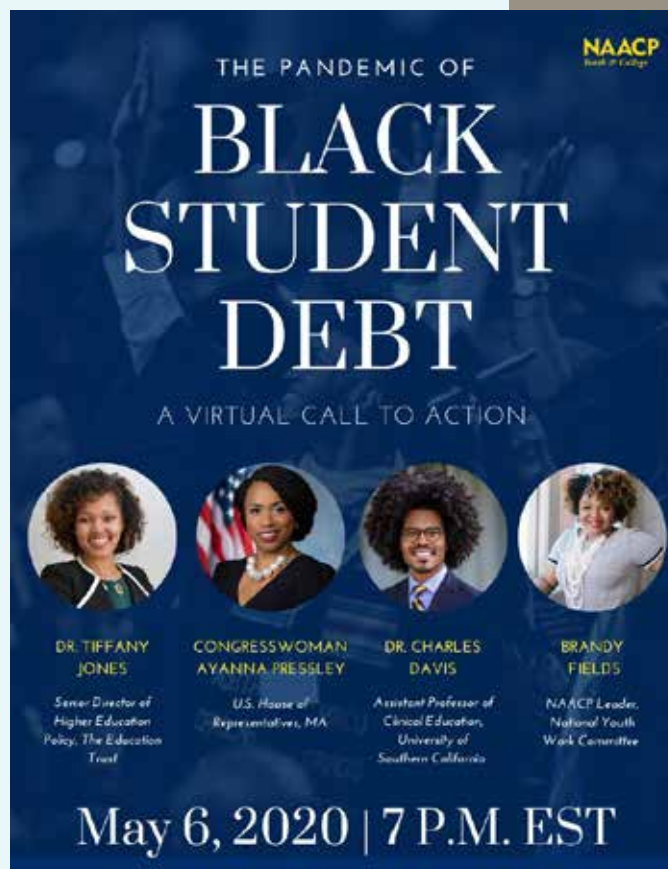




Black Student Debt

Ed Trust and The Hechinger Report co-produced a [series of essays from Black scholars on the Black student debt crisis](#). In partnership with these scholars, we launched this essay series to analyze why Black borrowers struggle so much with student debt and to offer actionable policy solutions. Big problems call for big solutions, and often the best solutions come from the people who've been most impacted by the problem. Far too often, Black people are left out of discussions about the Black student debt crisis. The scholars' essays cover the following topics: the racial wealth gap; racial capitalism and the need to improve job quality; strengthening borrower protections and regulation of for-profit colleges; the need to invest more money in institutions that serve the greatest share of Black students, like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominately Black Institutions; and the need for large-scale college affordability policy and reparations.

Victoria Jackson, senior policy analyst for higher education at Ed Trust, and Tiffany Jones opened the series with a provocative piece of their own: "[The 'Black Tax' Is Key to Understanding and Solving the Black Student Debt Crisis in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond](#)."



As Congress considers what to do next to address this deepening public health and economic disaster, it must account for the disproportionate cost of being Black in America. That will mean tackling the Black student debt crisis that was spiraling out of control well before the new coronavirus showed up.

We received positive feedback on the series from congressional staff in both chambers who are working on this issue.

Soon after publishing the series, we launched a [National Study of Black Student Loan Debt](#). With support from TIAA Institute, and in partnership with researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, we're conducting surveys and interviews with people who have student loans and identify as Black or of African ancestry. We aim to tell stories and shape policies rooted in the experiences of Black borrowers.

In related news, Tiffany joined Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.) and young Black scholars and activists for a [call-to-action panel on Black student debt](#) hosted by the NAACP Youth & College Division. Ed Trust also co-hosted a Twitter chat with the NAACP Youth & College Division on Black student debt the same week.

To learn more, please visit, EdTrust.org/Black-Student-Debt/

College Access & Success

We have continued to shine a spotlight on barriers students face getting to and through college. Marshall Anthony Jr., higher education research analyst, drew on evidence and personal experience to argue that [college application fees are obstacles to college access](#).

Students don't have to pay to apply for a scholarship or an internship. And they don't have to pay to apply for a job. So why is it okay for students to pay to apply to college? It's not.

Marshall and Andrew H. Nichols, senior director of higher education research and data analytics, teamed up to reveal the true [extent to which colleges are failing to prepare Black and Latino students for life after college](#), noting that racial disparities in college success look far worse when we examine national graduation and default rates.

A successful college experience cannot just be gauged by what happens on graduation day. What happens after a student leaves and enters the workforce must be considered, too.



COVID-19: IMPACT ON EDUCATION EQUITY Resources & Responses



The Impact of COVID-19 on P-12 Education

LISTEN

[It has been over two months since the first COVID-19-related school closures began](#), and, thus far, 48 states, four U.S. territories, Washington D.C., and the U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity have ordered or recommended that schools stay closed for the rest of the academic year, a move which affects approximately 50.8 million public school students. Meanwhile, stakeholders across the country are looking for answers on how to ensure that students, particularly our most underserved, don't lose months' — or even years' — worth of learning.

To ensure equity, we have been monitoring state leaders' tireless efforts to support districts, schools, educators, and families to protect the well-being and safety of all students as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads. While that remains our highest priority, we know that states and other stakeholders are considering what it will take to ensure that their most vulnerable students have equitable access to the resources they need to thrive while schools are closed and to make up for lost instructional time. In our guide, "[Five Things State Leaders Should Do to Ensure Students Have Equitable Access to Learning Opportunities During COVID-19 School Closures](#)," we identify these actions:

1

Create and maintain centralized, clear, and regular communication to community stakeholders.

2

Maintain and strengthen critical supports for students and families in need.

3

Provide guidance and resources to districts on educational services for vulnerable populations.

4

Support districts in developing plans with short- and long-term solutions to address COVID-19 challenges.

5

Ensure federal stimulus funds are distributed and used equitably.

Many states are leaving decisions about how to continue instruction during school closures [up to districts](#). So, we partnered with Digital Promise to compile questions to guide equity advocates and district leaders as they engage in conversations about ensuring that our most vulnerable students have equitable access to distance learning, both now and for however long school buildings are shuttered. In our guide, "[With Schools Closed and Distance Learning the Norm, How Is Your District Meeting the Needs of Its Students?](#)," we share ideas for advocates and district leaders to consider when devising continuity of learning plans, based on what other states and districts have begun to do. The guide was featured in a Fast Company article, "[The sudden shift to remote learning is exposing the huge gaps in which students have access to technology](#)," and in an Education Week article on "[How Schools Can Narrow Equity Gaps During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)."

To get this important resource straight into the hands of equity-minded advocates, we hosted a webinar about "[Helping All Students Access Learning Opportunities During School Closures](#)." This learning session was geared toward advocates and district leaders who are committed to ensuring that our most vulnerable students have equitable access to distance learning, both now and for as long as school buildings are closed. Speakers from The Education Trust, Digital Promise, the Migration Policy Institute and that National Center for Learning Disabilities were also featured during the webinar. More than 100 people attended.

To learn more, please visit our COVID-19 webpage, EdTrust.org/covid-19-impact-on-education-equity-resources-responding/



COVID-19 and Our Earliest Learners



As parents across the country grapple with the new demands of juggling work from home and child care responsibilities, they also worry that the pandemic could exacerbate education inequities, particularly for young Black and Latino children and young children from low-income backgrounds. In her blog, "[2 Ways COVID-19 is Creating Even Greater Inequities in Early Childhood Education \(ECE\)](#)," Carrie Gillispie, P-12 policy senior analyst, identified ways in which the early childhood education system is failing American parents. She notes that with reliable and accessible early childhood education providers shuttered on account of the pandemic, and parents loath to rely on grandparents as a backstop because of the health risks to the elderly, many low-income parents are struggling to find reliable and affordable child care.



Additionally, the coronavirus has wreaked havoc on early childhood education providers. When the COVID-19 crisis is over, there may be drastically fewer child care providers left, making early childhood education even harder for underserved families to access. If one-third of child care centers were to permanently close, [4 million young children](#) could be left without care. Carrie urges federal and state governments to immediately provide [economic relief for the childcare sector](#) and [safety measures and financial support for providers and families](#).

To raise parent voice around the issue of early childhood education, Prince George's County, Maryland parent Amanda Coleman wrote a blog, [What Can COVID-19 Teach Us About Prioritizing Childcare? A Parent's Perspective](#). Amanda provides a personal glimpse into her life and her and her spouse's difficult decision to unenroll their two daughters from daycare due to financial constraints. Referencing Ed Trust's [early childhood report](#), Amanda describes the financial burden that is imposed upon families when states don't provide state-funded child care for three- and four-year-olds.

To learn more about early childhood education, read our report, [Young Learners, Missed Opportunities](#) and visit our [state-by-state data tool](#).

ExtraOrdinary Districts in Extraordinary Times

We've launched a new series of ExtraOrdinary Districts podcasts featuring conversations with school district leaders on how they and their students are adjusting to remote learning, [ExtraOrdinary Districts in Extraordinary Times](#). In this series, Karin Chenoweth, a former *Washington Post* columnist and current Ed Trust podcaster and writer-in-residence, and Tanji Reed Marshall talk with expert educators about the many issues public schools are grappling with — including how to distribute food to kids who normally rely on school meals, how to build strong relationships with students in an online setting, how to make at-home school more workable and establish systems to ensure that *all* children are being served equitably and not missing out on important educational opportunities.

Subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts!

Learn more at EdTrust.org/ExtraOrdinaryDistricts.



EXTRAordinary DISTRICTS

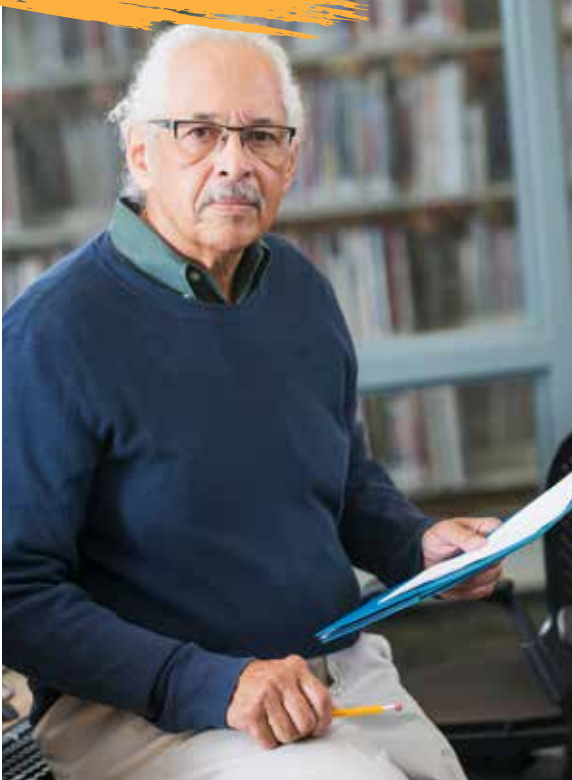


A green circular graphic with a white outline and a green arrow pointing downwards. The word "ENGAGE" is written in white capital letters along the curve of the circle.

Celebrating Teachers

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a new appreciation for the important (and heroic) role that teachers play in children's lives, as school closures and remote learning shifted many instructional responsibilities onto parents and families. This year, teachers had to adapt quickly to digital platforms and transform how they teach to ensure that their students could continue to receive lessons, provide support and allow students to see a familiar face during these difficult times. Ed Trust celebrated teachers in the following ways:

- In a recent post, [Recognizing Teachers Who Teach Advanced Coursework](#), Letisha Marrero, a senior editor/writer, describes her child's Advanced Placement United States History teacher, Ms. Shipley, as a dedicated educator who supports her students through a very rigorous AP course, and an LGBTQIA+ ally who strives to make the school a friendly place for vulnerable students. Marrero's child is one of only six students of color in the class. Ms. Shipley exemplifies the type of teacher that all students need and that we reference in our [Inequities in Advanced Coursework](#) report. Thank you, Ms. Shipley.
- Teachers of color often go above and beyond the call of duty to provide instructional, emotional, and psychological supports to their students. Going above and beyond is part of a bigger picture: the positive impact that teachers of color have on all students, particularly students of color. So says Eric Duncan in his recent blog, [Appreciating Teachers of Color](#).
- Eric participated in a Facebook Live conversation hosted by education advocate Chris Stewart in which the two discussed the importance of strong and diverse teachers and the impact they can have on all students, but particularly boys of color. Eric also joined an Instagram Live discussion on teacher appreciation with Simone Hardeman-Jones, national director of policy and partnership at E4E, and Genelle Faulkner, an eighth grade science teacher in Boston, that was hosted by a PBS-affiliate, WHUT, in Washington, D.C.



Introducing the Alliance for Resource Equity

The Education Trust and Education Resource Strategies (ERS) launched the [Alliance for Resource Equity](#) during this reporting period. Across the nation, local decision-makers and equity advocates — including school board members, state and district leaders, civil rights advocates, families, educators, and even students themselves — are committed to improving schools. However, a lack of coordination can limit the impact of their efforts. The Alliance for Resource Equity works to bring many stakeholders together around a framework for shared understanding, and a plan for collaborative action. To kick off this joint initiative, Ary Amerikaner along with [Jonathan Travers](#), a partner at [Education Resource Strategies](#), co-wrote an op-ed for The 74, “[It’s Not Just How Much Money Schools Get, It’s How They Use It. 10 Ways to Start Talking About Education Resource Equity.](#)”



Through this partnership, we released several resources to help education stakeholders:

1

[The Education Combination: 10 Dimensions of Education Resource Equity to Unlock Opportunities for Every Student](#)

Education resource equity means ensuring that schools have what they need — from adequate funding and diverse and high-quality teachers to a positive school climate and rigorous coursework — to unlock every child’s power to live a life of their choosing, regardless of race, family income, disability, or home language. This report provides an overview of each of the 10 dimensions of resource equity, along with key questions to ask when evaluating how your district or school is doing.



2

[The Resource Equity Diagnostic for Districts](#)

One of the first steps to improving education resource equity is understanding the current state of equity and excellence for students in your district. This diagnostic tool helps identify strengths and gaps across each of the 10 dimensions of resource equity and can help set the foundation for educators, local decision-makers, advocates, and families to build an action plan together.

To accompany this tool, we also issued “[The Advocates’ Guide: Improving Education Resource Equity](#)” which gives tailored guidance for advocates on using the diagnostic in partnership with their local school system

3

[EXPLAINER VIDEO: What is Education Resource Equity?](#)

Education resource equity occurs when schools, systems, and communities work together to mobilize the right combination of resources that create high-quality learning experiences for all students. We’ve learned that for authentic conversations and effective change to occur education stakeholders must not only focus on “how much” but “how well” a school uses its resources.

In this time of COVID-19, the Alliance for Resource Equity urges all educational stakeholders to mobilize the right combination of resources that create high-quality learning experiences and meet the distinct needs of every student. We note that, “as an education community, we have both the responsibility and the opportunity to respond to COVID-19 with a keen eye toward unlocking equity.”

The Alliance for Resource Equity team is currently working hard to develop guidance for both advocates and practitioners, including school district leaders, to help them navigate the challenging decisions that lie ahead. Stay tuned.





Education Resource Equity Framework

SCHOOL FUNDING



TEACHING QUALITY & DIVERSITY



SCHOOL LEADERSHIP QUALITY & DIVERSITY



EMPOWERING, RIGOROUS CONTENT



INSTRUCTIONAL TIME & ATTENTION



POSITIVE & INVITING SCHOOL CLIMATE



STUDENT SUPPORTS & INTERVENTION



HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING



LEARNING-READY FACILITIES



DIVERSE CLASSROOMS & SCHOOLS



Get all the resources mentioned above at <https://www.educationresourceequity.org/>

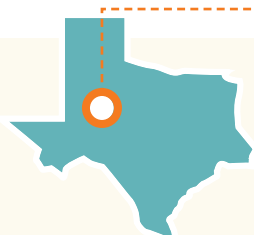
Ed Trust Working in the States



Illinois: Work in Illinois has continued despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. We attended the annual policy development meeting of the Partnership for College Completion, where we presented on the importance of achieving equity in higher education in collaboration with them and other partners. We also joined a meeting with the College Board in Chicago on making the state's higher education funding formula more equitable. Organizations in Illinois have come to rely on us for sound data and policy analyses with a strong equity foundation, while state policy makers have sought our expertise as well. Recently, we were invited to join the state's Master Plan Committee on Higher Education, which is responsible for developing recommendations on improving higher education in Illinois.

Tennessee: Although life will be different for the foreseeable future, one constant remains: our commitment to advocating for students and families in Tennessee who are at their most vulnerable. Republican Gov. Bill Lee announced that schools will remain closed for the remainder of the school year, but we continue to highlight key equity issues and strategies to support our students who are most in need. In April, we sent [this letter to Commissioner Penny Schwinn](#) with feedback and recommendations on COVID-19 priorities, including on CARES Act spending. We launched two policy [councils](#) in May, one focused on P-12 and the other on higher education. Council members, who are a diverse set of experts from across the state, will identify key opportunities for research, analysis, and advocacy

for The Education Trust in Tennessee. Also of note is the [launch of our youth voice project](#), which brings together 15 students in middle school through college from across the state. Students will narrate their experiences and articulate the changes they wish to see in their schools and communities. In early May, our students participated in two virtual student panels, one featuring [middle and high school students](#) and the other featuring [students enrolled in colleges and universities](#) across the state. Going forward, our students will have the opportunity, over the course of 2020, to learn about identity development, storytelling, and modes of communication in order to connect their experiences to the policy changes we seek in Tennessee.



Texas: [Jonathan Feinstein](#) was named our state director for Texas. In this role, Jonathan will provide leadership in building strategic partnerships and developing advocacy campaigns that seek to increase opportunity and achievement among Black

and Latinx students who represent two-thirds of all students in the state.

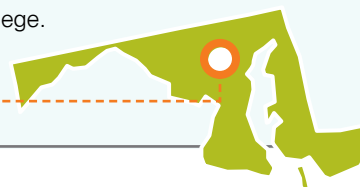
In Texas we commissioned a poll of parents and found that nearly 9 in 10 (87%) are concerned about their children falling behind academically due to coronavirus-related school closures, while 3 out of 4 (74%) public school parents reported higher levels of stress than usual. Feelings of stress were particularly common among parents of children with disabilities (43% said they're feeling much higher levels of stress) and low- to middle-income families earning \$25,000-\$50,000 annually (39% said they're feeling much higher levels of stress).

While Texas parents gave positive ratings to schools for their handling of the coronavirus and the transition to remote learning overall (87%), parents indicated that there are clear barriers preventing their children from successfully participating in distance learning while schools are closed and these feelings were especially prevalent among parents of color and families experiencing financial difficulties. [Texas Public Radio Network](#), [San Antonio Current](#), and the Wall Street Journal covered the poll.

Maryland: The Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education made its mark during the state's truncated legislative session. The coalition's advocacy blitz paid off as the Maryland General Assembly passed a landmark education bill (Blueprint for Maryland's Future), which would make school funding in the state more equitable. It includes the coalition's highest priorities: 1) increased incentives and accountability to ensure students of color and students from low-income backgrounds have access to high-quality teachers; 2) prioritization of special-education students, students from low-income backgrounds, and dual-language learners in the state's pre-K expansion; 3) an extended ban on pre-K suspensions in all government-funded pre-K programs; 4) a new grant to support the recruitment and retention of teachers of color; 5) and broadened access to advanced coursework.

Although Republican Gov. Larry Hogan vetoed the bill (which was not totally unexpected), claiming the costs were too high in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the coalition remains steadfast and is leveraging established relationships with state legislators as it considers next steps, including a potential override of the governor's veto. The coalition is focused on ensuring that the needs of vulnerable students remain a priority as the state responds to the pandemic.

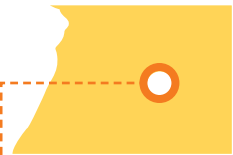
We also worked with the [Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence](#) to release a [countywide poll](#) that sheds light on Montgomery County parents' thoughts on at-home learning. While the majority of parents (74%) say their child's school is doing an excellent or good job handling the coronavirus, 3 in 4 parents (75%) are concerned about their children falling behind academically due to coronavirus-related school closures. They are also very concerned about whether their children are on track to graduate from high school and are prepared for the rigors of college.





Louisiana In the midst of COVID-19, the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) started the search to replace outgoing Superintendent John White. EdTrust and other community partners across Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Shreveport came together to send an [open letter to BESE](#) emphasizing the need for public engagement and recommendations for ensuring a fair and inclusive process. Along with the letter, EdTrust in Louisiana and the [South Louisiana Coalition for Education](#) developed a survey to allow community input in the search process. BESE heard our call! They launched a [website](#) with videos of each candidate's interviews, resumés, cover letters, and an online survey for public input, incorporating many of our suggestions. Despite a very short advertising period, the survey received over 7,800 responses and the [results](#) are also publicly available.

With school closures across the state due to the pandemic, districts and schools have been working diligently to provide access to school meals through grab-and-go programs at schools and community sites. However, because of the rampant spread of the virus throughout Louisiana, some districts were forced to condense the frequency of food distribution in an effort to better serve and protect the health of students, families, food service providers, and staff at community feeding sites. In response, Louisiana has expanded its SNAP program and is working on applying to the Pandemic EBT program. EdTrust in Louisiana created a [one-pager](#) to help inform families about applying for benefits.



EdTrust is one of 90 organizations in the [Ready Louisiana Coalition](#) that signed [onto a letter](#) urging the legislature and governor to utilize federal money in response to COVID-related closures and to assist the struggling child care industry by investing \$25.1 million of state money, so working families can access quality care for their children and get back to work as soon as it is safe.

Washington: Likewise, we commissioned a poll of Washington parents and found that nearly 9 in 10 (86%) parents in the state are concerned about their children falling behind academically due to coronavirus-related school closures, and 3 out of 4 (76%) public school parents are experiencing higher levels of stress than usual. Feelings of stress were particularly acute among parents of children with disabilities (with 54% feeling much higher levels of stress) and families earning less than \$50,000 annually (47% feeling much higher levels of stress).

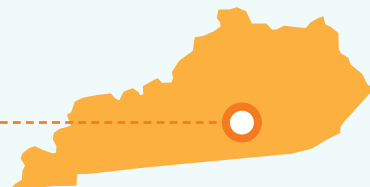
The poll also found that while Washington parents give positive ratings to schools for their handling of the coronavirus and the

transition to remote learning overall (81%), nearly all (96%) parents want regular contact with or access to their child's teacher. A majority (about 60%) of White parents, parents who primarily speak English at home, and parents of students who do not have a child with a disability report that their school is providing parents with regular contact or access to their child's teacher, while only half (about 50%) of Black parents, Latino parents, parents who primarily speak another language at home, and parents of students with disabilities are getting the same support. [The Seattle Times](#), [Tacoma News Tribune](#), [The Seattle Medium](#), [KIRO-TV](#), [KUOW-FM](#), and the [Spokesman-Review](#) covered the poll.



Massachusetts: When the COVID-19 crisis unfolded, members of the [Massachusetts Education Equity Partners](#) (MEEP) quickly raised the key concerns of the families and educators with whom they work with the larger coalition. In response, we developed recommendations on how state and district leaders can help ensure equity considerations are at the forefront of districts' COVID-19 responses. We shared our recommendations with Commissioner Riley in a letter signed by 23 organizations, then quickly issued a [public resource guide](#) for state and district leaders. The commissioner's team not only responded with a letter detailing steps the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education was taking or planning to take, but engaged MEEP in the development of the second round of DESE's remote-learning guidance, making significant changes to the proposed content in response to our feedback. More recently, 24 of our partners [submitted recommendations](#) to Commissioner Carlos Santiago on how the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education can support college students with the greatest need at this time.

Kentucky: School shutdowns in Kentucky have shined a bright light on the lack of digital access in the state. With EdTrust's support, our partners who are members of the Kentucky Equity Coalition took action by [urging members of Congress](#) to fund internet access for those in rural and low-income communities. These advocates sent the [clear message that, without the federal government's help, students in rural areas and from low-income backgrounds](#) could be left behind amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and afterwards.



The Education Trust—West

RESOURCES & RESPONSES

COVID-19: Impact on Education Equity



Education Equity in Crisis

When California's shelter in place order began in mid-March, The Education Trust-West (ETW) quickly pivoted its work to respond to the immediate crisis of school and campus closures and the short- and long-term impacts on students of color and students from low-income backgrounds by centering the voices of students, parents, and families.

From preschool to higher education, it was clear that the coronavirus crisis was exacerbating existing equity gaps that leaders in the education equity space have long worked to close. One week after the order to shelter in place, ETW launched its [Education Equity in Crisis](#) series to lead advocacy efforts, provide resources, and push the narrative to make sure across all California recovery efforts, one common-sense principle is applied – direct the most resources to the families and communities hit hardest. The first piece in the series called “[6 steps schools can take to address education equity if required to close due to coronavirus](#)” was released just days before school closures were announced in counties all over California.

To address the immediate issue of school closures, ETW pushed out an [Equity Alert](#) on “[How to Address Learning, Promotions, Transitions in Light of School and College Closures](#)” to make recommendations to school and college leaders on how best not to widen opportunity and equity gaps. This was distributed to hundreds of policymakers, K-12 school and district leaders, and higher education leaders. We talked to several prominent California stakeholders and held briefings with leaders like Janet Napolitano, president of the University of California. The Equity Alert also influenced key local decisions regarding distance learning plans and flexible grading policies. ETW plans to continue its advocacy efforts and refine recommendations in another tool to be released this summer, as school districts and colleges make decisions on possible school and campus openings in the fall.

To better help partners and advocates understand what the federal stimulus package means for California's public education

systems, ETW produced an analysis called “[Prioritizing Vulnerable Students with Federal CARES Act Stimulus](#).” ETW partnered with Unidos US, Alliance for a Better Community and the University of California Students Association to produce the analysis and urge California's leaders to keep equity at the center of stimulus spending.

For the first time, ETW and The Education Trust-New York (Ed Trust-NY) partnered to release two very important polls of [parents of K-12 students](#) and [parents of young children](#) aimed at making sure the voices of parents were front and center in policy decisions. The [ETW K-12 poll](#) was the first California poll of its kind and showed that parents are very concerned about the academic future of their children. The poll generated 28 media hits, including some from the [San Francisco Chronicle](#), [Los Angeles Times](#), [Sacramento Bee](#), and [USA Today](#) and an op-ed by Executive Director Elisha Smith-Arrillaga in [CalMatters](#). Partnering with the New York and national offices resulted in an excellent editorial board piece in [The New York Times](#). ETW's [early childhood poll](#), which showed that parents of children ages 0 to 6 were struggling with food and financial insecurity, was released in partnership with The Children's Partnership, The District Innovation and Leadership for Early Education Initiative, Early Edge California, and Child360. ETW's executive director was interviewed by many outlets, including [Education Dive](#), [ABC 7](#), and [KCBS Radio to more than 2,000 people through various webinars and podcasts](#).

The widespread media coverage of both polls increased ETW's presence at the California Capitol. Elisha was asked to testify at an Assembly Budget Committee hearing on learning loss. Additionally, our poll was mentioned in the governor's announcement on addressing the [digital divide](#). Recognizing the importance of strong allies in pushing our equity agenda forward, we held a series of webinars and briefings for partners and advocates for educational justice. The webinars were attended by over 500 allies, demonstrating a growing appetite for ETW's equity resources.

Legislative Advocacy

Each year, we analyze the state budget and propose legislation to identify key proposals that have the potential to advance educational equity and justice for California's students and educators. This year, with education equity in crisis due to school and college closures resulting from COVID-19, ETW released a special [Equity 8](#) document, which focused on legislative solutions to best address the needs of students of color and students from lower-income communities during this time. Since its release, ETW has advocated to meet the basic needs of students, close the digital divide, address learning loss, and push for legislation on accountability and data with Democratic Assemblymember Shirley Weber. As the country and the state of California prepare for a looming pandemic-induced recession, ETW is gearing up for a budget advocacy campaign to protect funding for the state's most vulnerable students. ETW released a [statement](#) on Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom's revised May budget, which was included in a [Los Angeles Times article](#) on this issue.

Race-Conscious Policymaking - Reinstating Affirmative Action

Earlier this year, the Education Trust–West became one of the co-chairs of the [Opportunity for All](#) coalition to help drive a campaign to repeal Prop 209 and reinstate affirmative action in California. The road to equity and justice, especially as California embarks on COVID-19 recovery efforts, requires that state leaders have tools at their disposal to ensure that all of California's communities, especially communities of color and women, have the resources and support they need to thrive. For over 25 years, Prop 209 has prevented state leaders from taking active measures to prevent discrimination and ensure equal opportunity.

Repealing Prop 209 starts with passing a constitutional amendment (ACA5) in the state legislature, so voters can decide in the November election which direction California should go. Many of ETW's staff [testified in support](#) and helped lead efforts to achieve the first victory for ACA 5 when it successfully passed out of the Assembly Public Employment and Retirement Committee with a historic 6-1 vote and strong bipartisan support. The team is now gearing up for the next battle when ACA5 goes before the Appropriations Committee in early June.

We are proud to be on the Steering Committee of [Opportunity for All](#) and part of a coalition of over 100 labor, business, civil rights, education equity, and community-based organizations seeking to make sure California is one step closer to joining 41 states in utilizing affirmative action and equal opportunity programs to positively impact the health, well-being, education, and economic mobility of women and communities of color.

Educator Listening Sessions

To further our commitment to listening to people closest to the students for whom we advocate, ETW held a series of educator listening sessions to inform advocacy efforts for the state's most vulnerable students. As part of our COVID-19 response, we engaged nearly 500 California educators from public schools, colleges and universities to discuss equity challenges and emerging bright spots in response to school and college closures. In a series of online educator listening sessions, California educators came together with the ETW team and partner organizations to share equity challenges, solutions, and thoughts on policy and practice.

Among the key takeaways from the series of K-12 listening sessions: re-thinking education to meet students' needs, emphasizing relationship building and socioemotional learning, and creating a protocol for distance learning that can be used in various situations. Common themes from higher education

listening session included: prioritizing connection with students and training faculty to lead effective online teaching in anticipation of longer periods of distance learning. These findings will be integrated into upcoming collateral.



#DataforthePeople

Our #Data4ThePeople campaign remains a priority in the current climate. With schools and colleges closed, it is not possible to adequately collect the data that parents, decision-makers, and advocates need to understand where education systems need support and how to measure student outcomes. In May, the Cradle-to-Career Data System workgroup endorsed an approach to establishing California's statewide longitudinal data system that incorporates many of the equity principles ETW articulated last year as part of our [Data For the People campaign](#). In particular, the endorsed plan intends to count all P-16 students, produce public-facing tools, and enable the data to be used by multiple stakeholders for equity-oriented change.

To learn more, please visit [EdTrustWest.org](#)

The Education Trust—Midwest



Convening Partners During the Pandemic and Beyond

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, The Education Trust—Midwest (ETM) has convened a durable coalition of advocates committed to educational equity and excellence throughout this crisis and beyond. This group is made up of prominent cross-sector leaders, including Alice Thompson, a Detroit-area civil rights leader; Mike Jandernoa, a prominent businessman and Republican donor; and leaders of community organizations, like Bo Torres of the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan and Jametta Lilly of Detroit Parent Network.

The group acknowledges that wide gaps in access and opportunity long predated COVID-19 and will only be

exacerbated by the crisis. Guided by best practices in research and data, the two-dozen cross-sector leaders are advocating for equity-focused policies and practices to be implemented during the pandemic and are pushing for equity when schools reopen in whatever form that may take in the fall. They are making sure that Michigan doesn't lose a generation of students due to this health crisis.

The coalition is working feverishly to advocate for food security for students from low-income families, the [use of CARES Act funds](#) to meet the needs of underserved student groups, and accountability and transparency in spending. The coalition also is advancing funding equity, particularly during budget cuts, expanded learning time for vulnerable students and equitable access to quality remote instruction.

Shaping the Conversation on Educational Equity

ETM has continued to shape the conversation around gaps in access, opportunity and success.

Our report on "[Michigan's School Funding: Crisis and Opportunity](#)" has helped make ETM a leading voice for equity during the COVID-19 school closures.

Over the last four months (February – May), ETM was quoted in 26 news articles, reaching a potential audience of 28.8 million. ETM continues to field frequent calls for our expertise and perspective in this challenging time for students, families and schools. For a full review of our coverage, please [click here: https://twitter.com/PIEnetwork/status/1229778853943480321](https://twitter.com/PIEnetwork/status/1229778853943480321)



Food Security for Vulnerable Students

Following intensive public education and advocacy by ETM and partners, Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer announced a series of steps to significantly expand food security for Michigan's most vulnerable students.

In addition to Disaster SNAP and the relaxation of work requirements for some postsecondary students to access food assistance, [Michigan became the first state to take advantage of the federal Pandemic EBT](#) program on April 9.

These programs will give vulnerable students and other populations layered access to food assistance during this unprecedented time.

Research-based Approach to School Funding

ETM's research and report on Michigan school funding continues to interest policymakers, advocates and the broader public.

Since its late January publication, "[Michigan's School Funding: Crisis and Opportunity](#)," has been publicly cited as further evidence of the need for a more equitable school funding formula by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, State Superintendent Michael Rice, legislative leadership, former state superintendents and [prominent business leaders](#).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the conversation from surplus investments to prioritization during budget cuts, this research continually is pointed to as a leading source on the need to invest in vulnerable student groups and avoid devastating reductions to students with the greatest needs.

Better Data for Teachers

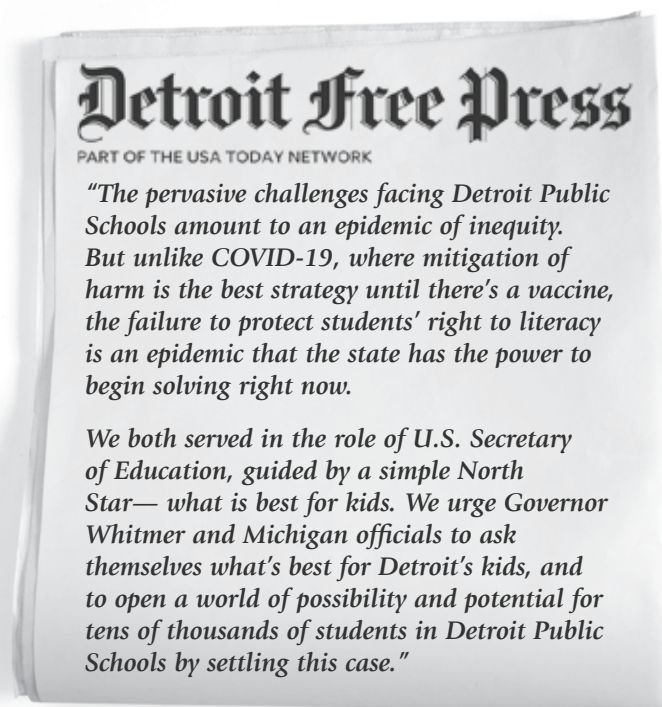
In May, the Michigan Senate adopted an emergency funding package to respond to COVID-19 needs and reestablished funding for interim assessments. In addition to previously approved vendors, a bipartisan amendment added Smarter Balanced assessment tools to the list of vendors approved for the funding.

This followed years of advocacy to ensure that a standards-aligned interim assessment suite is available to teachers and students. In the wake of summative assessment cancellations, advocacy on this front has accelerated under the leadership of ETM to ensure that teachers have robust data in the fall on student learning and proficiency.

The Right to Literacy

A landmark decision from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit upholds the right of students to a basic education. Overturning a lower-court decision, the majority confirmed the state's responsibility for providing a level of education that permits students to fulfil their civic responsibilities. The case, which ETM has been involved with over the past several years, was filed by former students of Detroit Public Schools. The students asserted that while under state-appointed emergency managers, the level of education they received failed to provide even basic literacy skills.

In a [joint amicus brief](#), we supported the students' claims, highlighted research on the ability of all students to learn and pushed back against problematic assertions made by the state. To highlight the need to educate students to at least a minimum basic standard, John B. King Jr., and his predecessor in the role of U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, co-wrote an impassioned [op-ed for the Detroit Free Press](#). In it, they write:



For more information, please visit EdTrustMidWest.org

New York's Youngest Children During the Pandemic

The Raising NY coalition, which is staffed by Ed Trust–NY, conducted a [poll](#) of parents of infants and toddlers and found that families of young children across New York State are experiencing intense financial insecurity during the coronavirus pandemic, with 1 in 3 (34%) indicating that they are skipping or reducing meals and 1 in 10 (11%) saying they are skipping or reducing meals for their children.

Unemployment and loss of income are among other key concerns expressed by New York parents of infants and toddlers, with 1 in 3 (34%) saying they have had their hours or pay reduced or have taken time off of work to care for children as a result of the crisis. Two-thirds say they worry about losing their jobs or having hours reduced in the future (67%) and more than half (51%) said they feel uneasy about their personal finances.

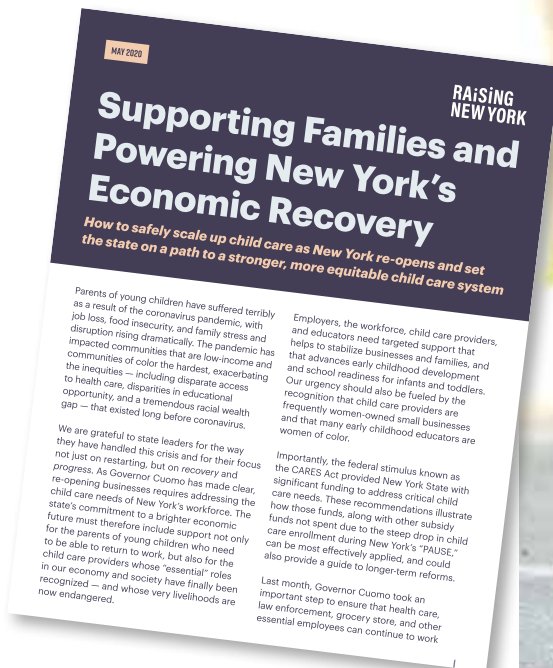
The poll also revealed that the coronavirus crisis has significantly changed parents' child care arrangements and other parenting supports. Before coronavirus, 41% of families relied on family- or center-based child care providers and 42%

had at least one parent staying home to care for their child. Now, just 5% say their child care/day care program is open and that their child/children are still attending, and 80% have at least one parent at home.

After capturing the voices of parents in the poll, the coalition released a [framework](#) to scale up child care as New York reopens and set a path to a stronger, more equitable future.

The coalition is calling on state leaders to develop and implement a comprehensive and inclusive plan to offer affordable, safe, high-quality child care during this period, rebuilding the child care system so that it is stronger and more equitable than before the pandemic.

Learn more about how the pandemic is affecting New York's families of young children at RaisingNY.org/Coronavirus.



To learn more about all of our efforts in New York, please visit, EdTrustNY.org

WITH GRATITUDE

The Education Trust would like to express our deepest gratitude for the support of our mission to expand excellence and equity in education for students of color and those from low-income families from prekindergarten through college. As the nation goes through this health pandemic, generous gifts from donors such as these provide the financial and moral support needed to continue to build a movement toward educational justice.

Thank you!

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The Education Trust

Our Mission

The Education Trust is a national nonprofit that works to close opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students of color and students from low-income families. Through our research and advocacy, Ed Trust supports efforts that expand excellence and equity in education from preschool through college; increase college access and completion, particularly for historically underserved students; engage diverse communities dedicated to education equity; and increase political and public will to act on equity issues.

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