



The Education Trust  
EDTRUST.ORG

THE EDTRUST UPDATE FEBRUARY 2021

# HOPE

FOR JUSTICE

# HOPE

FOR PROGRESS

# HOPE

FOR STUDENTS

# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO



During this Black History Month, the nation is still grappling with systemic racism and injustice. The beginning of this year has not been easy for many of us. At Ed Trust, we mourned the passing and commemorated the life and many achievements of our friend and dear colleague [Andrew Howard Nichols, Ph.D.](#), who steadfastly served as our senior director of higher education research and data analytics.

Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic rages on and not enough Americans have access to vaccines. In just three Wednesdays to start the year, we watched insurrectionists storm the U.S. Capitol and attempt to disrupt our democracy, a second impeachment of our former president, and the dawning of a new era of leadership with the Biden-Harris administration and our nation's first woman and woman of color vice president.

As a country, we've indeed learned once again that our democracy isn't perfect. Though we may be a bit weary, we are not defeated. At Ed Trust, we continue to be inspired by those hard at work securing a better future, despite the odds. Our work is far from done, and we're prepared to fight for equity and justice — and face challenges that come our way — in partnership with students, educators, families, and elected and community leaders.

Through our advocacy, we are making steady but sure progress.

In December, Congress passed the year-end stimulus bill, which included many of [Ed Trust's recommendations](#) for P-12 and higher education. Among them was overturning the misguided 1994 federal ban on Pell Grants for people who are incarcerated, unlocking the doors of opportunity for nearly 2 million of our nation's students who are incarcerated to access a quality higher education — a glimmer of hope in trying times after years of activism with our partners and those directly impacted. Soon, we will be launching our Justice Policy Fellows program for individuals impacted by the criminal legal system to help make certain they become the next generation of leaders in the fight for social justice.

As the pandemic continues, we've worked with partners from those in states [to the NFL](#) to lead on efforts like the digital divide, unfinished learning, and [pushing a new presidential administration to reinstate the role of the U.S. Department of Education as a civil rights agency](#).

And we've not let up on the issues that existed before the pandemic that are just as, if not more, important, like [pushing for more teachers of color](#) and [an update on our free college work](#) that includes recommendations, for students who are undocumented and incarcerated.

In 2021, at Ed Trust, we're committed to making leaps, not just taking steps toward equity and justice.

The U.S.'s first-ever youth poet laureate, Amanda Gorman, issued an urgent call to action in her incredible poem, ["The Hill We Climb,"](#) on Inauguration Day for Americans reeling from recent events and the divisiveness of the last four years:

*And yet the dawn is ours  
before we knew it  
Somehow we do it  
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed  
a nation that isn't broken  
but simply unfinished  
We the successors of a country and a time*

We cannot afford to let up when it comes to justice for students, educators, and families. We cannot let up hope for the future. Let's climb that hill together.

**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.

# Hope for Justice, Hope for Progress, Hope for Students

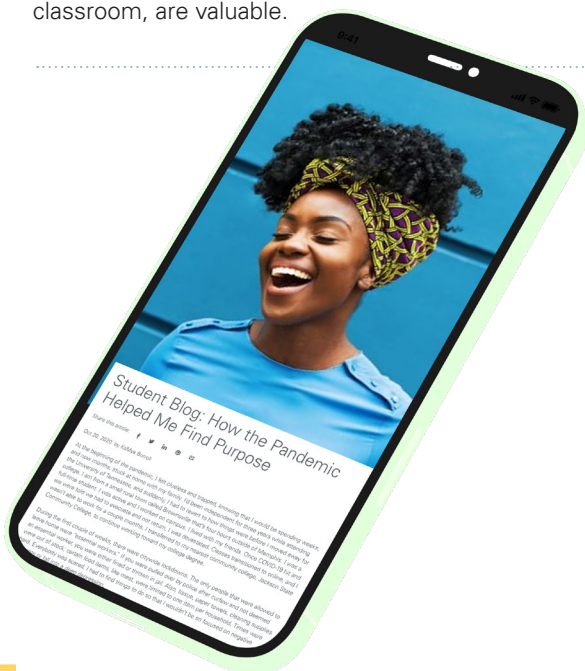
As we celebrate Black History Month, we are energized as we recall the stories of iconic civil rights activists and educators like Mary McLeod Bethune, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Marian Wright Edelman, and lesser-known heroes such as [Annette "Polly" Williams](#), [Johnnie Fullervinder](#), [Horace Tate](#), [Marva Collins](#), and [Septima Clark](#). All of them had tremendous hope for justice, hope for progress, and hope for students, despite living in turbulent times.

And while we too live in troubled times, we at The Education Trust possess the same hope and passion for activism and what is possible as those who preceded us. Indeed, we have a new administration led by Joseph Biden and Kamala Harris, who shattered the glass ceiling, and the most diverse cabinet in our nation's history. They promise to rebuild and unite our country. And there is a renewed charge by many Americans to fight for justice in all aspects of American life. This is an exciting time. But as history has shown, it is not enough to just have hope. We must work collectively toward delivering on our hope for a fairer and more just America. That is why we're dedicated to pushing for better policies, hard-hitting research, and equitable practices that can deliver on the promise of a high-quality education for students facing the most injustices. We hope that you are with us.

## During this reporting period:

**We used our platforms to elevate the voices** of those closest to the students for whom we advocate:

- Cynthia Osborne, Ph.D., is the founder and director of the Child and Family Research Partnership, home of the Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center. [In this Equity Line blog post](#), Osborne explains why she advocates for equitable access to effective early childhood programs for children who are the most underserved.
- Tim Green Jr. is the co-founder of the Memphis Restorative Justice Coalition. [In this Equity Line blog post](#), Green talks about working with teachers, students, families, and community leaders to implement restorative practices in schools and advocate for restorative justice practices outside of schools (e.g., in homes and communities). He explains how changing the way students are treated when they make mistakes can help foster better learning environments.
- [In this Equity Line blog](#), Ruby Aguilar, a Latina teacher in Tennessee, recalls her experience as one of only two students of color among 30 White students in her education program, and explains why Grow Your Own scholarship and outreach programs, which are designed to recruit teachers of color and provide them extra support so they'll stay in the classroom, are valuable.



**We uplifted students' voices.** Students are often missing from conversations on how to improve education and make schools better.

- In a moving piece for The Equity Line, "[Black Student Activists Are Sick and Tired of Talking. They Want Action](#)," Satra Taylor, manager of higher education justice initiatives, talks with student activists about what they want their higher education institutions to do to promote equity and justice and what these students are doing to promote the change they want to see.
- In another piece for The Equity Line, KaMya Burrell, a student at the University of Tennessee, talks about [the toll the pandemic is taking on her life and how COVID-19 helped her find purpose in serving those most in need](#).



**We continued to advocate for access to high-quality early childhood education** for Black students, Latino students, and students from low-income backgrounds.

- In this [Equity Line blog post](#), Carrie Gillispie, Ed.D., discusses the limited availability of race and ethnicity data for preschool education. And that the data that is readily available to measure the quality of state early learning data is insufficient for measuring equity for our youngest students of color. She writes, “making real progress toward racial equity requires comprehensive, transparent data systems that allow us to easily identify and eradicate inequities in early learning.”
- In this [MarketWatch piece](#) about then President-elect Biden’s \$335 billion plan to improve access to affordable high-quality child care, Gillispie was quoted as saying, “This is a moment for child care and early child education to reinvent itself. If we can demonstrate with this extra funding what’s possible, and how much it would improve everyone’s lives and the economy, that could be an impetus for long-term and more robust investment. We have to hope that people remember how difficult work was when they were at home trying to be early childhood educators themselves.”



## MarketWatch



**We pushed for fairer and better school climates for students who face the most injustices.**

- When some members of Congress complained about the installation of metal detectors in the Capitol after the deadly coup attempt, advocates were quick to note that many members of Congress aren’t troubled by the use of metal detectors in schools or the fact that a disproportionate number of Black and Latino students attend schools that resemble prisons. In [a timely and related Equity Line post](#), Kayla Patrick, a senior policy analyst at Ed Trust, explained why now is the time to move away from “punitive, racist, and hardened” schools toward more “equitable learning environments that actually keep kids safe” and “send positive messages to students” by investing “in welcoming and equitable discipline policies and integrated wraparound services and supports.”
- Meanwhile, in another timely Equity Line post on [The Urgency of Anti-Racist Classrooms](#), Eric Duncan, a P-12 data and policy senior analyst for educator diversity, argues that the recent insurrection is a teachable moment. Duncan notes that social studies educators have a responsibility to “position America’s next generation to learn from our country’s past mistakes” and must, therefore, address this event — with a full, unsanitized account of what happened — and the issues surrounding it, in their classrooms, adding that, “[t]eaching an honest history of America’s issues with race is an important step toward dismantling systemic racism.”
- ABC News cited our [discipline work](#) in this news segment called, “[Families Say Incidents Show Pattern of Unfair Punishment for Girls of Color](#),” which makes a case for fairer and more equitable discipline policies for girls of color.

# Hope for Justice, Hope for Progress, Hope for Students



The Education Gadfly Show

## State budget cuts and our schools - 11/18



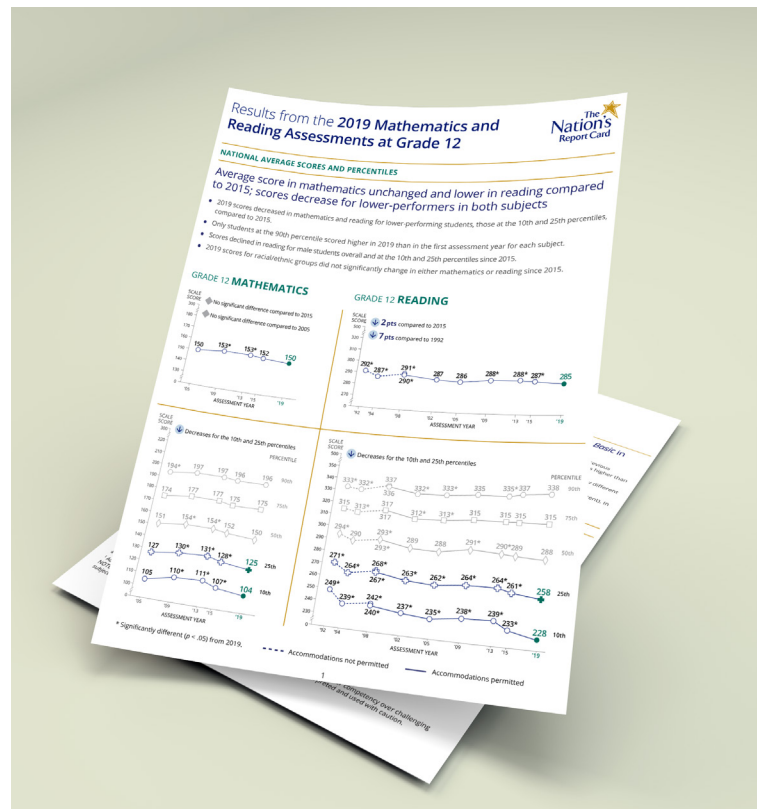
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### We championed fairer and more equitable funding.

- [This Hechinger Report piece](#) quotes Ary Amerikaner, vice president for P-12 policy, practice, and research, who highlights funding inequities within districts. She notes that people are “less aware of the inequities within districts and less aware that children attending high-poverty schools in relatively high-poverty districts can get hit twice — first by inequities because their district doesn’t have the revenue and then unfair spending within their district.”
- Meanwhile, Zahava Stadler, EdTrust’s special assistant for state funding and policy, was a guest on the Thomas B. Fordham Institute podcast, “The Education Gadfly Show.” [In a segment on state budget cuts and schools](#), she discussed the importance of prioritizing fair and equitable funding and protecting already underfunded schools from additional cuts as states reduce budgets because of COVID-19.

### We pressed for more transparent and public reporting of college and career readiness data.

- Unfortunately, as has become all too commonplace, results from the latest [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) show that underserved 12th-graders scored lower than their more advantaged peers in reading and math, suggesting that there’s a need for better learning opportunities including ensuring that all students have access to coursework that is standards-aligned, challenging, and engaging. [In this Equity Line post](#), Sarah Mehrotra, a P-12 data and policy analyst, and Jonathan Davis, a senior research associate, argue in favor of greater transparency and public reporting across states. Advocates and policymakers need essential college and career readiness data to better address gaps in opportunity and achievement.



**John B. King Jr. had several high-profile opportunities to spotlight certain systemic issues and inequities that have only been intensified by the pandemic.**

In this [CNN segment](#), John talked about how COVID-19 has exposed and widened educational opportunity gaps for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, and he highlighted the risks of failing to educate and reach out to students who are “missing” from virtual classrooms.



In November, John participated in a [New York Times DealBook series on “How to Fix America,”](#) in which he called for increasing access to technology and the creation of a national tutoring program for K-12 students to help reduce learning loss amid the pandemic. King urged that two things be prioritized now: “a swift federal response as part of a new COVID-19 relief package and a national commitment to help our children make up for interrupted and unfinished learning.”



**The importance of closing the digital divide** and providing affordable, high-speed internet access to all of our nation’s students was also the topic of [this compelling op-ed](#) by Kelvin Beachum, an offensive lineman for the Arizona Cardinals. Kelvin opened his piece with this quote from John: “If Black lives matter, shouldn’t Black brains matter, too?”

To read more of The Equity Line posts and sign up to have them sent directly to your email, please visit [EdTrust.org/The-Equity-Line/](https://EdTrust.org/The-Equity-Line/).

# Ed Trust on the Hill

In the waning months of 2020, additional COVID-19 relief was not only long overdue, it was widely viewed by lawmakers and the American public as a necessity for millions of Americans to survive what public health officials said would be the darkest and deadliest months of the pandemic.

In early November, Congress remained [deadlocked](#) on the parameters of the federal relief package after months of failed negotiations, while Americans voted in a tense election. [Ed Trust outlined](#) various key legislative proposals (related to COVID-19, fiscal year 2021 appropriations, and higher education policy) for advocates and partners to watch during the lame-duck session.

After months of disagreement and stalling, [Congress finally struck a deal on another round of COVID-19 relief](#) in late December. The final bill included a number of items that were backed by Ed Trust (i.e., additional education stabilization funding, nutritional supports, and support for the child care sector). [We urged Congress to pass the COVID-19 Relief and Year-End Funding Package immediately.](#)

After days of empty veto threats, then President Trump signed the measure in late December. While the bill contained some important provisions to support state and local education agencies and higher education institutions amid the pandemic, we were disappointed that [it omitted state and local aid](#), which are vital to averting cuts to future state education budgets. We were also discouraged by the absence of [more resources aimed at closing the homework gap](#) and [addressing the digital divide](#), which disproportionately impact students of color learning remotely.

We were heartened, however, that the bill included long-overdue [aid to higher education and changes](#) to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), including simplifying the form, removing question 23, as well as removal of the 1994 ban on the use of [Pell Grants by students who are incarcerated](#); this is a huge legislative victory for Ed Trust and our partners across the criminal justice, business, faith-based, education, and civil rights communities.

After winning the presidency, the Biden-Harris transition team named [Miguel Cardona, Ed.D.](#), as its pick for U.S. Education Secretary. Cardona, who is of Puerto Rican descent, was Connecticut Commissioner of Education and a former teacher and former principal. In [our statement on his nomination, we expressed hope](#) that educational equity would be at the forefront of his agenda. [Assuming Cardona is confirmed by the Senate](#), we look forward to working with him and the U.S. Department of Education to create and cultivate a more just, equitable, and excellent educational experience for our nation's students.

During this time of transition, Ed Trust laid out our wish list for the incoming administration and Congress:

- [Ed Trust's Memo on Opportunities to Advance Educational Equity During the Next Administration](#)
- [Memo from 11 National Organizations on Advancing Educational Equity Through the Biden-Harris Administration](#)
- [Memo from Civil Rights Organizations on Advancing Early Learning Equity for Young Children of Color](#)

It is clear that there are many challenges facing our nation, but [as John B. King Jr. told lawmakers](#) in previous congressional testimony: "The challenges that face us right now are significant, but they are not insurmountable." We look forward to deepening our relationships with the Biden-Harris Administration and federal policymakers, meeting and engaging with new members of Congress, and working alongside families, civil rights activists, and education advocates to make our nation's schools more fair, equitable, and just.







# Hope for College Students

## *A Promise Worth Keeping*

Before COVID-19 threw a wrench into the U.S. economy, the equity-focused free college movement was picking up steam in the states. The state of Washington established a gold-standard college promise program in 2019, and states such as Tennessee, Maryland, and New Jersey were sharpening their equity focus by making more students eligible for such programs and/or covering more costs. Unfortunately, in too many states, the free college promise remains a promise unkept, and looming budget shortfalls caused by the pandemic could hamstring the movement further.

In a new report called, [“A Promise Worth Keeping: An Updated Equity-Driven Framework for Free College Programs,”](#) we revisit our 2018 rating of statewide college promise programs and review several new programs against an equity-focused framework that now also considers whether promise programs are open to undocumented students and students who are incarcerated.

Here are some of the key findings of “A Promise Worth Keeping”:

- There are eight more statewide free college programs today than there were three years ago.
- Most programs still cover tuition but not fees, books, and living costs.
- Just a third of statewide promise programs cover four years of tuition and include bachelor’s degree programs.
- Only two states have designed statewide free college programs specifically for adult and returning students.
- Half of free college programs exclude undocumented students or students who are incarcerated; these students face higher college costs, as they are ineligible for federal aid.

Based on our analysis, the Washington College Grant, which was passed into law in 2019 and funded by a new tax on employers who benefit from high-skilled workers, is the most equity-focused free college program in the country. It’s the only program that meets all of Ed Trust’s equity criteria for free college programs.

“Business, government, and campus leaders stepped up in a big way to create the Washington College Grant,” said Michael P. Meotti, the executive director of the Washington Student Achievement Council, the state’s higher education agency.

“This makes our state the senior partner in the state-federal partnership on grant aid to college students of all ages. If other states want to make the same commitment to their economic future as we’ve made to ours here in Washington, we’d be happy to help.”

“A Promise Worth Keeping” makes five broad recommendations for statewide free college programs:

1. Include all students — no matter how long they’ve been out of high school, whether they’re part time or full time, or undocumented or incarcerated.
2. Go beyond tuition. Programs should cover the full cost of college — including fees, learning materials, and living expenses like food and housing — or at the very least, cover tuition while allowing students to use other financial aid like Pell Grants for these costs.
3. Make improvements over time. State leaders can and should seek ways to build political support for making free college programs more generous and more equitable.
4. Be transparent about who benefits and who doesn’t — and include data on race, ethnicity, and income.
5. Invest in student success — in part, by guaranteeing equitable funding for the colleges serving large percentages of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

Media coverage included [Diverse: Issues in Higher Education](#), [The Hechinger Report](#), and [Inside Higher Ed](#).

# JUSTICE FELLOWS

## POLICY PROGRAM



Tucked into the end-of-year federal spending bill were key provisions that we and our partners [pushed for](#): restoration of Pell Grant eligibility for students who are incarcerated, along with strong consumer protections for said students to ensure that their efforts to obtain a higher education in prison pay off.

This victory is the result of 25 years of organizing and advocacy led by people directly impacted by the criminal legal system. Their stories, their analysis, and their strategic partnership laid the foundation for a diverse and winning coalition of educators, prison abolitionists, racial justice advocates, libertarians, faith leaders, and many others.

While restoring Pell Grants is a policy change that will alter the trajectory of millions of lives, there is more to be done to remove the barriers that those who have come in contact with the criminal legal system face on the path to a higher education.

To that end, The Education Trust is launching a [Justice Policy Fellows program](#).

This cohort of professionals with firsthand experience at the intersection of criminal justice and higher education will help us continue to open the doors of higher education for people who are, were, or could be at risk of becoming incarcerated.

More to come.



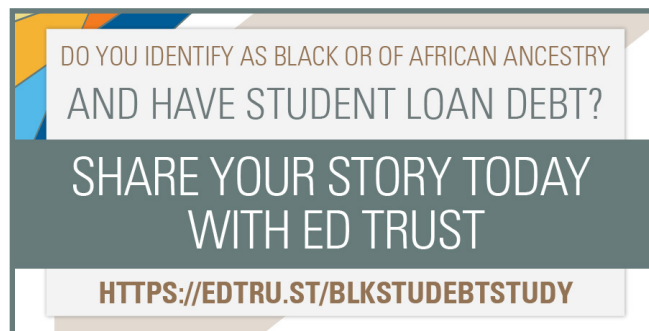
# Black Student Debt

Black students face greater hurdles when it comes to financing their college education and repaying student loans. Black students are more likely to borrow, borrow more, struggle with repayment, and default on their student loans than their peers. Any solutions to the Black student debt crisis must not only address the immediate needs of those with existing debt but help future generations of Black students to complete college without crushing debt. Resources must go to the students who struggle the most to pay and the colleges that serve the greatest shares of students of color.

To find solutions to this problem, we went straight to those most impacted — students. During this reporting period, we collected data for our National Study on Black Student Loan Debt. The research team fielded more than 1,000 surveys and conducted 100 interviews with Black borrowers to gather firsthand insights about the challenges Black Americans face while managing the burden of student loans. We look forward to conducting rigorous data analysis to complete this nationally representative survey during the next few months.

Some initial themes that have emerged from our survey and interviews with Black borrowers include:

- Student loans are not viewed as optional, but as a necessity for accessing upward mobility associated with higher education.
- People are being denied home mortgages because of their student debt.



- Having outstanding student loans is a major mental health stressor for borrowers, who worry that their wages might be garnished, leaving them with no way to cover basic needs.
- Many hold jobs that barely cover living expenses.
- Borrowers believe that factors such as race, class, and gender may impact a student's need to borrow for college and may help or hurt their labor market opportunities.
- About half of the initial respondents said they have postponed saving for retirement because of their student debt, while nearly 60% said they have delayed buying a home. Nearly a third have delayed having children as a result of their loans.

While the issue is still being debated on [Capitol Hill](#), four out of five survey respondents support canceling all debt and two of three support tuition-free college.



## Using Professional Judgment in Financial Aid to Advance Racial Justice & Equity

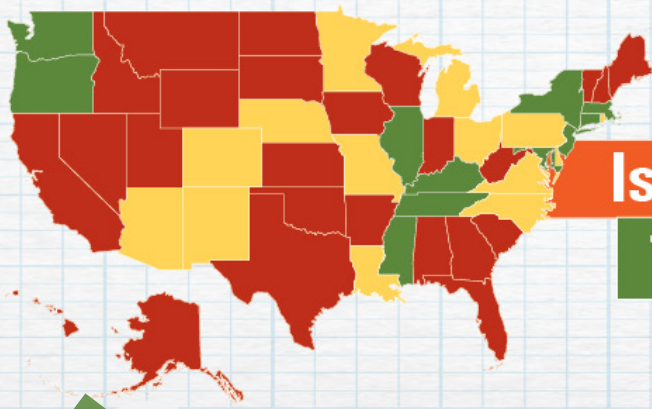
Many college students can no longer afford to pay for college, as growing numbers of them and their families are experiencing a loss of employment and/or income amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whether and how financial aid officers use their discretion to adjust students' financial aid packages can determine whether underrepresented students of color and those from families with limited means are able to access a higher education and finish a degree or join the estimated 36 million Americans who left college without a credential and miss out on the upward mobility that a degree may confer.

In our brief, "[Using Professional Judgment in Financial Aid to Advance Racial Justice & Equity](#)," we argue for greater transparency on how college financial aid officers use their "professional judgment," mandatory racial equity training for financial aid staff at colleges, and more need-based financial aid for students experiencing financial hardship.

The brief was covered by [Diverse: Issues in Higher Education](#), [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), and [Inside Higher Education](#).

A related op-ed by Jaime Ramirez-Mendoza, policy analyst on the higher education policy team, and Tiffany Jones, Ph.D., former senior director for higher education policy, ran in [Inside Higher Ed](#).



## Is Your State Prioritizing TEACHER DIVERSITY & EQUITY?

### Hope for Our P-12 Students *Educator Diversity Policy Scan Tool*

In November, we released [an educator diversity data and policy tool](#) for equity advocates and policymakers. The tool provides data and actionable policy recommendations for increasing teacher diversity in all 50 states.

Our data show:

- In most (27 of 33) states that make student-level data available, more than 1 in 10 Latino students attend a school without a single same-race teacher. The same is true for Black students in 18 states.
- In one-third of the states that make student-level data available (12 of 33), more than 1 in 3 students attend a school without a single teacher of color.

States vary widely in their demographics, making it important for all states to examine their data and determine the right ways to address gaps in parity and student experience. The tool helps make this data more accessible and provides state and district leaders the ability to strategically focus their recruitment and retention efforts.

In Texas, for instance, a state in which 68% of the students are students of color, only 40% of the teaching force is comprised of teachers of color. In the Lone Star state, 2% of students attend schools without a single teacher of color, while 2% of Latino students and 6% of Black students attend schools without a same race teacher. Comparatively, in Massachusetts, students of color make up 35% of the student population, while only 7% of teachers are teachers of color. In that state, 21% of Latino students and 26% of Black students attend schools without a single same-race teacher.

Since research shows that all students benefit when there's a diverse educator workforce, we were eager to share this data and policy tool as states and districts prioritize policy and practice decisions to address COVID-19 challenges. The policy recommendations are specifically tailored for each state, providing guidance on enhancing existing policies, recommending targeted new efforts, and highlighting states that are doing well based on a set of evidence-backed criteria.

The tool was covered in [District Administration](#), the [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#), and in many blogs and newsletters.

[Take a few minutes to explore the data and policies for your state](#), or [check out the best practices page](#) and see which states have policies that are really making a difference.





## COVID-19 Equity Guides

Since March 2020, states have been working to support districts, schools, educators, and families to ensure the well-being and safety of students during the pandemic. While students' safety remains the highest priority, COVID-19 has, unfortunately, heightened the barriers that students who face the most injustices experience in accessing learning opportunities. We urge state leaders to take steps to ensure that underserved students have rigorous, engaging, and positive educational experiences while schools are a mix of in-person and virtual sessions — and for years to come.

In order to support state leaders in centering equity in their response to the pandemic, we've created a series of [COVID-19 Education Equity Guides](#) on seven critical topics: school funding; teacher equity and diversity; digital access; graduation and college and career readiness; expanding learning time; supportive school climates that foster students' social, emotional, and academic development; and measuring student learning. Each guide includes equity actions for state leaders and promising practices. [Check them out.](#)



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## Assessments

After months of interrupted instruction, states and school districts across the country are thinking about ways to accelerate student learning. One key tool that decision-makers use to gain insight into student experiences and shine a light on educational inequities is summative assessments. The U.S. Department of Education [waived annual assessment requirements in spring 2020](#), due to the suddenness of last year's school closures and the shift to distance learning. But Ed Trust believes that it is critical to resume these assessments this year, so educators and state leaders can identify where and how the pandemic has disrupted students' progress toward grade-level standards. We have [partnered with civil rights, social justice, disability rights, and education advocates](#) to advocate for the administration of state assessments this year, and these efforts were recently [highlighted in The Washington Post](#).

A piece in [The Seattle Times](#), meanwhile, quoted Denise Forte, senior vice president for partnerships and engagement, as saying that the "greatest fear we should be experiencing right now is a lack of data, a lack of any information about how kids have performed this year in light of this horrible pandemic, in light of anti-Blackness."

John also [co-authored an op-ed](#) with Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, for [Black Press USA](#), which ran in more than a dozen Black publications. In it, they called on the new administration to assume a greater oversight role and do more to protect underserved student populations: "To do that, the incoming secretary must hold fast to ensuring that educators, families, and communities have accurate information about how students are performing in our K-12 schools, including data from statewide assessments, so that resources can be directed to schools and students in need." We will continue to urge the new administration to require statewide summative assessments in the coming months.



## ExtraOrdinary Districts in ExtraOrdinary Times – Real Educators, Real Challenges, Real Stories



Immediately after schools shuttered their doors because of the pandemic, Ed Trust launched the fourth season of its podcast, "[ExtraOrdinary Districts in Extraordinary Times](#)." The podcast features highly skilled educators discussing the challenges of educating students amid the pandemic. One episode features Freeman A. Hrabowski III, Ph.D., president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, talking about the ways the university has supported and developed hundreds of Black doctors and scientists, among them Dr. Jerome Adams, U.S. Surgeon General, and Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett, an immunologist at the Vaccine Research Center at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases of the National Institutes of Health, and one of the leading researchers behind the mRNA COVID vaccines. At last look, the podcast had been downloaded nearly 55,000 times.

The spring catalog of The Harvard Education Press includes "[Districts That Succeed: Breaking the correlation between race, poverty, and achievement](#)," a new book by Karin Chenoweth, Ed Trust's writer-in-residence, based on the first two seasons of her podcast. The book will be published in April.

# EXTRAordinary DISTRICTS







## Hope for Progress: Equipping Advocates for Contentious Legislative Sessions



This past October, The Education Trust hosted our first virtual bootcamp, “Equity Matters: Education Equity in the COVID-19 Era,” which featured [a fireside chat with Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley \(D-Mass.\)](#) and concluded with inspiring [remarks by John B. King Jr.](#), who noted that, in these uncertain times, we need bold collective action and to reimagine America’s social contract. More than 200 participants from across the country attended [sessions on equity issues in P-12 and higher education and advocacy strategies](#), and we previewed our new [educator diversity data and policy tool](#) and our latest higher ed report, “[A Promise Worth Keeping: An Updated Equity-Driven Framework for Free College Programs](#).” The preview of the higher ed report generated a fair amount of buzz, so when it was released right after bootcamp, state advocates were prepared to lift up the report using this [digital toolkit](#). The virtual event was well-received, and we are looking forward to our next bootcamp, “Equity Matters: Facing the Future Together,” in April 2021.



# Funding Workshop

ENGAGE

This past December, Ed Trust held a half-day funding workshop, "[School Funding Policy in Challenging Times: Tools for advocates and policymakers.](#)" It provided attendees resources about the crucial issues facing decision-makers this year in light of the high costs of safe school reopening; likely reductions in state revenues; and state policies that place high-need districts at greater risk for funding cuts. The workshop consisted of three sessions: (1) Protecting High-Poverty Districts from State Funding Cuts; (2) Leveraging ESSA's Fiscal Transparency Requirement to Advocate for Fair Funding; and (3) Building a Better School Funding Formula: Funding Policies for the Long Term.

A hundred attendees — mostly state-level advocates — joined the online event, and over 100 additional registrants received slides and a video of the presentations for asynchronous viewing. The post-event feedback we received was uniformly positive, and attendees said the information presented in all three sessions was high quality and actionable.



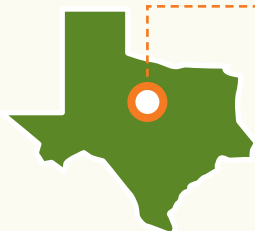
# Ed Trust WORKING IN THE STATES

## The Education Trust in Tennessee



The Education Trust in Tennessee celebrated its first anniversary this January. We are excited to start the new year with recent staff additions, including our new manager of external relations, [Reginald White](#); higher education policy fellow, [Kiah Albritton](#); and policy intern, [Aden Klein](#).

Our student voice initiative, [EmpowerED](#), is thriving, and several students have bravely shared their stories of resilience and determination in a variety of virtual panel conversations, blogs, and advocacy workshops. EmpowerEd student William Collins kicked-off Ed Trust's fall bootcamp with [a moving performance](#), and several students participated in a timely discussion with educators across Tennessee about [how schools can foster meaningful conversations after the 2020 election](#). Additionally, our Tennessee office released its first report this fall titled, ["‘Segregation Forever?': The Continued Underrepresentation of Black and Latino Undergraduates at Public Colleges and Universities in Tennessee."](#) Our school finance advocacy is well underway with monthly meetings of our [Resource Equity Task Force](#), the launch of our Tennessee School Finance Institute, and a [virtual event on school-level funding in Tennessee, with Marguerite Roza, a research professor at Georgetown University and director of the Edunomics Lab](#).

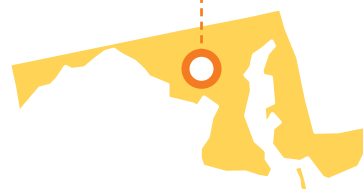


## The Education Trust in Texas

The Education Trust in Texas achieved a milestone by introducing ourselves to state legislators as a force for education equity. In December, we hosted a webinar on ["House Bill 3 & Education Equity in the 87th Legislative Session"](#) that attracted an audience of 50 state legislators and staffers. John B. King Jr. and a diverse panel of trusted Texas advocates urged policymakers to put education equity at the top of their agenda as they prepared for the legislative session. A recording of the event is available [here](#).

**Maryland:** This fall, Ed Trust worked with state and local advocates to push for educational equity as students and families confront the day-to-day challenges of COVID-19. At the state level, we worked with the Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity and Education to [override the veto of the landmark education reform bill, "The Blueprint for Maryland's Future,"](#) which included [Ed Trust priorities and recommendations and supported fair funding for Maryland's HBCUs](#). Our work now turns to ensuring the funding and initiatives are implemented with fidelity and equity in mind.

At the district level, we helped our partner, the [Black and Brown Coalition for Educational Equity and Excellence, prepare for its virtual accountability forum](#) in October, which was attended by more than 1,200 community members. The goal of this forum was to urge district leaders, including the superintendent who participated in this forum, to maintain their commitment to improving access to high-quality teachers and leaders and eliminate the barriers keeping Black and Latino students from enrolling in advanced courses.





### The Education Trust in Louisiana

The Education Trust in Louisiana, in partnership with [Algiers Charter school network](#) and [Black Education for New Orleans \(BE NOLA\)](#), produced an eight-week radio series to engage families and schools in courageous conversations about their remote learning experiences. The series, "[It Takes a Village: Caring for Community During COVID](#)," created a space for educators and parents to discuss critical issues related to reopening schools amid the pandemic while building empathy. Among the guests were local and state education leaders, charter school leaders, teachers, and mental health professionals. Audio recordings of each episode are available on our [webpage](#).

Our Louisiana team continues to work to ensure that stakeholder voices are included in the decision-making process on dual enrollment policies and practices. Jointly with the [State of Louisiana Board of Regents](#), we conducted focus groups with students, parents, and school counselors to help inform policies and practices that best serve students and increase dual enrollment participation. We also surveyed 3,500 students about their knowledge of and experiences in postsecondary preparatory courses offered at their schools. Keisha Smith, Ph.D., state director for Louisiana, presented the information collected from the focus groups and the survey at a [Dual Enrollment Taskforce meeting](#).

**Washington:** In November, Ed Trust released a report titled, "[Right Direction. Miles to Go: Closing the Widening Achievement Gaps in Washington State](#)," which garnered news stories in [The Seattle Times](#) and [The Seattle Medium](#). Partners shared the report with their constituencies and key state decision-makers. A group of key Washington education equity partners are using the report to identify a shared priority for the coming year(s): improving the state report card to reflect data that sheds more light on education equity in the state and where gaps in opportunity and achievement lie.



### The Education Trust in Massachusetts:

This fall, the [Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership](#) (MEEP) launched its [#MeetTheMomentMA campaign](#), which seeks to elevate the voices of underserved families and give them opportunities to shape state and district approaches to teaching and learning amidst COVID-19 and to build public demand for racially and socially just, culturally responsive instruction in schools and districts across the Commonwealth. The campaign captured the attention of [NBC Boston](#) (including New England Cable News and Telemundo), allowing us to establish a strong media partnership to help amplify our work. Although we initially focused on [highlighting student and family experiences](#) in these [tumultuous times](#), our latest [family forum](#) shifted the conversation to the impacts of long-standing underrepresentation of people of color in the curriculum on Black and Brown students. The forum, which aired on [NBC Boston's Facebook Live](#), drew nearly 4,000 views.

In addition to amplifying family voices through our campaign, our Massachusetts team has been working with the MassINC Polling Group on a year-long effort to collect and disseminate critical data on family experiences and perspectives on education during the pandemic. Results of the first family poll, released in November, were featured on [NBC Boston](#) and the front page of the [Boston Globe](#). As we head into 2021, the powerful testimonies of students and families, supplemented by survey data, will inform MEEP's recommendations for how our state can approach pandemic recovery with an equity lens.



# The Education Trust—West

## Race-Conscious Policies — What's Next After Prop 16

[Prop 16](#) — a bill that would have restored the right of California's public universities to use affirmative action — was an opportunity to act against systemic racism and level the playing field for all college students. It was intended to provide policymakers and advocates with a powerful tool to dismantle persistent and structural inequality by allowing the state to better support students of color, fight discrimination, and retain teachers of color.

While the proposition failed to pass, The Education Trust-West's (ETW) surveys of parents of K-12 public school students in California revealed overwhelming support for anti-racist policies and practices, diversity, and equal opportunity. We will continue listening to their calls for justice, and they will be the driving force that inspires us to continue advocating for change. Though we are short one tool, we will not be deterred from addressing the systemic barriers faced by students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

We remain hopeful that change is possible, and we will continue to lift up policies that support the high academic achievement of all of California's students from pre-K through college and help to close gaps in math achievement, integrate anti-racist practices into the classroom, secure equitable funding for our schools, create access to the state's public universities and colleges, and eliminate the digital divide.

## Math Equity Toolkit

ETW continued to support equitable access to math standards for Black, Latino, and multilingual students in grades 6-8. Our new toolkit on ways to address and close inequities in math education was well received by educators in the field; it got nearly 25,000 unique web visitors and was featured in an op-ed in [The 74](#), a podcast by the [California Department of Education](#), as well as a podcast by Elevation Education, called "[Highest Aspirations](#)," which highlighted our work at ETW.

In other great wins, the toolkit was referenced in a draft of the California Math Framework, a development course by the San Mateo County of Education, a partnership with EdInsights at the California State University, a professional learning series by the Los Angeles County Office of Education, a professional learning session designed by Bay Area Math Project, while groups such as TODOS: Mathematics for All, UnBoundEd, and WestEd incorporated elements of the toolkit into their work.

## From Crisis to Opportunity

In October, ETW released the results of a [statewide poll](#) showing that California parents' satisfaction with distance learning has plummeted since spring 2020. When ETW's first [statewide poll of parents was taken in March 2020](#), 57% of parents rated distance learning as successful, compared to just 35% in the most recent poll. Parents with lower incomes (36%) and parents of color (37%) were less likely to be satisfied with schools' preparation for the fall semester.

Many respondents expressed concern about their child's health and well-being, and the poll revealed parental support for more teachers of color, digital equity, greater communication with parents, and more real-time instruction. The poll results were picked up by the [Sacramento Bee](#), [LATimes](#), [KTVU](#), and [S.F. Gate](#).

## Building and Sustaining a Diverse STEM Teacher Pipeline

Last November, after the election, we released "[Building and Sustaining a Diverse STEM Teacher Pipeline](#)," a new report on the shortage of STEM teachers of color in California. The research examines the role of teacher preparation programs, shines a light on the barriers preventing teachers of color from entering the profession, and provides recommendations to support future STEM teachers of color.

The shortage of STEM teachers of color is a product of structural barriers across the recruitment and retention continuum, which would have been addressed had Prop 16 passed. The report sheds light on promising practices that policymakers can implement now, despite the failure of Prop 16, to cultivate a diverse STEM teacher workforce. The report also makes recommendations on the critical role that teacher preparation programs can play in eliminating recruitment and retention barriers for future STEM teachers of color, many of which were included in California Gov. Gavin Newsom's proposed 2021-2022 budget proposal.





## Equity-First Budget for California

In January, the governor released his 2021-2022 budget proposal, which contained four key ETW priorities and looked like a good first step toward an equity-first budget. We will focus our budget advocacy efforts on ensuring that these proposals are included in the final budget:

1. **Statewide Data System.** We advocated for a [data system](#) for more than a decade, and we're pleased that the governor has proposed \$15 million for a cradle-to-career education and workforce data system. The pandemic has reinforced how painfully difficult it is for families, educators, advocates, and even state leaders, to access clear, easy-to-use information about how well education systems are serving students, so that resources can be targeted to the places of greatest need. This investment signals that the governor is committed to providing data to the people.
2. **All in for Financial Aid.** For nearly a decade, ETW advocated for statewide action to ensure that every high school senior submits a financial aid application. We are encouraged that the governor's proposed budget recognizes the detrimental impact that the pandemic has had on financial-aid form completion and would require districts to confirm that all high school seniors complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act Application (CADAA).
3. **Safe Schools for All Plan.** In December, the governor announced "[California's Safe Schools for All Plan](#)," which would phase in in-person instruction beginning in February 2021. The plan includes \$2 billion for safety measures, using the local control funding formula (which prioritizes districts with the most underresourced students), and was one of ETW's recommendations for an equity-first budget.
4. **Investments in the teacher workforce.** We were pleased to see significant investments in teachers in the governor's proposed budget, since this is one of ETW's key advocacy priorities. Among the proposed investments are professional development geared toward education recovery and expanding the teacher pipeline, specifically in hard-to-staff subjects and schools.

Our [budget statement](#) was picked up by [EdSource](#).



## The Digital Divide in Higher Education

As California and the nation continue to grapple with the health and economic impacts of COVID-19, we know that college students have suffered academically, emotionally, and financially. Our [spring 2020 poll](#) of higher education students revealed that the initial transition to remote learning was extremely disruptive, with over 100,000 students of color and students from lower-income communities possibly lacking access to the internet. As learning on California colleges continues to be fully or partially virtual, access to quality connectivity and technology is an undeniable necessity.

Last October, ETW released a [map showing the extent of the digital divide among college students](#) in California. This map includes detailed estimates of how many students of color and students from lower-income backgrounds on college campuses lack access to the internet and devices. In a [recent blog](#) co-authored with the Michelson 20MM Foundation, we highlighted the results of our higher ed poll and underscored the importance of closing the digital divide. We also generated news stories in [KQED](#), [CalMatters](#), and [LAist](#). We hope state and institutional leaders will use this map to advocate for resources to ensure that every student has access to the technology and connectivity needed to effectively engage in distance learning.

For more information, please visit [EdTrustWest.org](#)

# The Education Trust—Midwest

## Setting the Agenda for Michigan's Educational Recovery

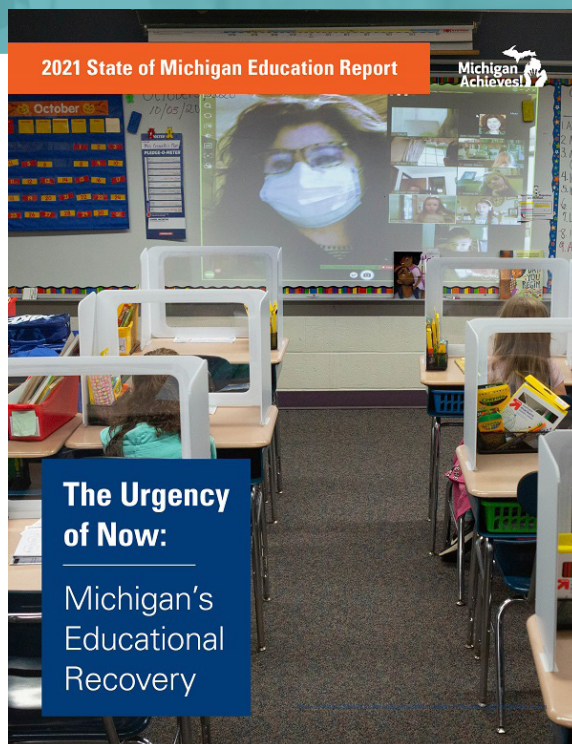
The Education Trust-Midwest (ETM) kicked off the new year with an agenda-setting parent poll and its 2021 State of Michigan Education report, which included an urgent call to state leaders to develop a plan for the educational recovery of Michigan students' learning.

Driven by conversations with parents and solution-based policy recommendations, the 2021 State of Michigan Education Report, "[The Urgency of Now: Michigan's Educational Recovery](#)," underscored the critical need to invest in public education and prioritize underserved students to ensure that they do not face incalculable harm to their future life outcomes due to interrupted learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report, which was spotlighted via media, social media, partner and stakeholder briefings, and a [public webinar](#), reiterated the need to address Michigan's education crisis through six priorities: fair investment; honest information, transparency, and reporting; extended and expanded learning time; quality virtual instruction and access; inclusivity and socioemotional supports; and transitions to postsecondary opportunities.

ETM outlined the need to prioritize early literacy efforts and develop a comprehensive plan around educator talent that places equity at the forefront, two important levers for improvement.

The report and poll got significant media attention, including a



radio interview on WDET and articles in the [Detroit Free Press](#), [The Detroit News](#), [Chalkbeat-Detroit](#), and [Bridge Michigan](#), and they were also featured in a Sunday editorial by the [Detroit News](#) and a [column](#) by a prominent Detroit Free Press opinion writer. In a guest column, Amber Arellano, ETM's executive director, also outlined key legislative priorities for education in a [Crain's Detroit Business Forum](#).

In December an opinion piece by Amber, "[Michigan's leaders can act now to mitigate learning losses](#)," ran in Bridge Michigan, while Mary Grech, chief of staff at ETM, was [quoted in a Detroit News](#) editorial on the need for state leaders to adopt proven strategies to address learning loss.

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## Lifting the Voices of Parents and Students and Telling Their Stories

In addition to the poll, the State of Michigan Education report highlighted the voices of those impacted by the pandemic and featured testimonials by parents from across Michigan.

The report's narrative was informed by dozens of Michigan parents who were interviewed in focus group settings to learn about diverse perspectives across the state.

There was consensus among those interviewed that Michigan's education system has not been effective in meeting the needs of all children — and that the inequitable distribution of school funding leads to differences in resources and teaching quality, made worse by the pandemic.

Parents across the state also expressed a desire to see better distribution of resources across schools — even when they felt their own schools were well-resourced.

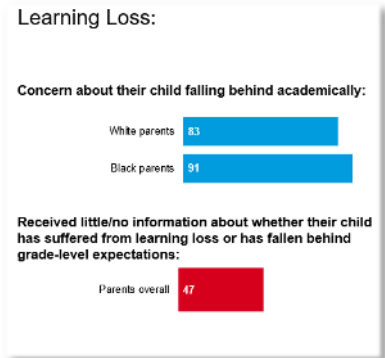
## Driving the Narrative on Equity and a Recovery Plan Through Polling, Data, and Research

The poll commissioned by ETM, and conducted by Global Strategy Group, shed new light on Michigan's troubling educational inequities, and parents of color who took the poll were more likely to report that their child is learning remotely full time.

Nearly half (47%) of the parents who were polled indicated that they have received little or no information from their child's school about whether their child is suffering from learning loss or has fallen behind grade-level expectations as a result of last spring's school closures when the pandemic hit. The poll also found that 91% of Black parents and parents of color are concerned about their child falling behind academically because of the pandemic, while 83% of White parents share this concern.

The vast majority of Michigan parents who were polled want state leaders to ensure that students catch up to grade level. The following [key findings](#) could help guide legislators' decision-making in this regard:

- An overwhelming majority (83%) of Michigan parents agree that state leaders should provide safe, free, and voluntary in-person summer school for students that need to catch up.
- 85% of Michigan parents polled agree that state leaders should have a plan to address learning loss and make sure students catch up to their current grade level.



## Building a Movement Around Equity

ETM brought together partners and coalition members to call on state leaders to prioritize investment in education and center their decision-making on equity.

ETM engaged business, special education, civic and civil rights leaders from both sides of the aisle for a virtual press conference on the 2021 State of Michigan Education report and poll findings.

Members of ETM's growing coalition also participated in a public webinar highlighting the poll findings and the recommendations outlined in that report, "[The Urgency of Now: Michigan's Educational Recovery](#)."

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

# The Education Trust—New York

The Education Trust—New York (Ed Trust—NY) is pleased to [announce the appointment of Dia Bryant, Ed.LD as its interim executive director](#), a position in which she will lead the organization's ambitious policy and advocacy agenda focused on educational equity for all New York students.



## As FAFSA completion rates continue to drop during the pandemic, Ed Trust—NY released a toolkit to support to high schools to help students with college financial aid applications.

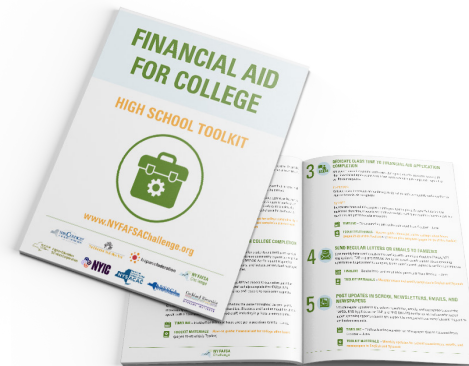
With data indicating that the percentage of high school seniors who completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in New York dropped as the coronavirus pandemic forced school closures last spring, Ed Trust—NY and education organizations across the state released the "[Financial Aid for College: High School Toolkit](#)" to support high schools in helping all students complete financial aid applications.

Completing the FAFSA matters because, according to the National College Access Network, 90% of high school seniors who complete the FAFSA go to college immediately after graduation — compared to just 55% of seniors who do not complete the FAFSA.

Yet, an analysis by Ed Trust—NY of FAFSA completion data found that in the 2019-20 school year, approximately 62% of New York State public high school seniors completed the FAFSA by June 26, representing a decline of more than 2 percentage points in FAFSA

completions compared to both the 2018-19 and 2017-18 school years. Ed Trust—NY's analysis of FAFSA completion data also reveals that schools that enroll the largest shares of students from low-income backgrounds have a completion rate that is 13% lower than schools that enroll the smallest shares of students from low-income backgrounds.

The "[Financial Aid for College: High School Toolkit](#)" highlights 10 evidence-based strategies schools can use either remotely or in person to help students with financial aid application completion, tips for tracking progress, and materials in English and Spanish that can be used to communicate with students and families.



## Ensuring Equity Online: 10 Principles for Equity in Remote Learning

The school year that is now more than halfway complete has been exceptionally challenging for New York students and educators. The ongoing effects of the pandemic, ever-evolving adjustments to teaching and learning, and the continued national reckoning with systemic racism are all taking their toll on educators and students. Yet across New York State, students and educators continue to persevere through one of the most challenging times facing schools in our lifetime. It's become relatively easy to find what is hard, difficult, and challenging, so Ed Trust—NY decided instead to look for educators who are taking on the challenges and staying in the fight for children — by actively addressing opportunity gaps and doing their part to ensure that children are supported academically, socially, and emotionally.

In its "[Ensuring Equity Online](#)" series, Ed Trust—NY is periodically highlighting equity-focused educators, principals, and staff members from across the state who are doing their best to get remote learning right. Their experiences allow us to consider the implications for state policy changes to support students throughout the state.

Ed Trust—NY also developed a set of principles for clear expectations for remote instruction that can be prioritized in state and local policy to promote equity in classrooms and school communities throughout the state.



## Advocates urge state leaders to power New York's pandemic recovery with new focus on higher education equity: commit to an 'attainment goal' of 60% of New Yorkers holding a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030.

As New York State works to recover from the devastating economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the [REACH NY](#) network of civil rights, student-serving, veteran, and education organizations called on state leaders to adopt a postsecondary attainment goal that will help improve the state's overall economic competitiveness and improve economic justice and equity.

Committing to a goal of increasing attainment among New Yorkers of all races and ethnicities to 60% by 2030 would, if successful, up the number of residents who hold a postsecondary degree or credential to 6.5 million — representing a 484,000 increase in postsecondary attainment over current projections.

In its report, "[Aiming Higher](#)," REACH NY explains how adopting an ambitious and equity-driven postsecondary attainment goal and enacting the policy changes needed to meet it would expand the pathway to a stronger economy and more equitable future for all New York residents.

Economic opportunity and financial security are deeply intertwined with educational attainment. Even in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic downturn, the national unemployment rate in September was 4.8% for workers with a bachelor's or advanced degree, compared to 9% for workers with only a high school diploma and 8.1% for those with some college but no degree.

**The lifetime earnings of an average bachelor's degree holder are double the lifetime earnings of an average high school graduate.**

[EdTrustNY.org/ReachNY](https://EdTrustNY.org/ReachNY)



## A poll reveals that parents from low-income backgrounds and parents of color are concerned about virtual learning instruction, even as their children are more likely to be learning online.

More than a month into the school year, a [poll](#) released by Ed Trust–NY highlighted significant concerns among parents from low-income backgrounds and parents of color about the quality of remote learning, even as their children were more likely to be learning online.

The poll came as an Ed Trust–NY [analysis](#) found that schools with the greatest share of students from low-income backgrounds and students of color were far more likely to be learning remotely and less likely to have in-person instruction than the schools with the smallest share of students from low-income backgrounds and students of color.

According to the data snapshot, New York State students enrolled in the schools with the greatest shares of students from low-income backgrounds were 1.7 times more likely to be learning remotely than students in schools with the smallest shares of students from low-income backgrounds, and students in schools with the greatest shares of students of color were 1.4 times more likely to be learning remotely than students in schools with the smallest shares of students of color.

This poll, the fourth such parent survey conducted by Global Strategy Group and commissioned by Ed Trust–NY during the pandemic, and subsequent data analysis underscored educational priorities that have been top of mind for New York families since school buildings closed last spring. These include the availability of teachers and amount of live remote instruction, access to personal learning devices and high-speed internet, and student attendance and engagement.

To learn more about all of our efforts in New York, please visit, [EdTrustNY.org](https://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 continues to go through this health pandemic and national reckoning with race, 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 *West*

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The Skillman Foundation  
Steelcase Foundation  
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation



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# The Education Trust

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## 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.

To view this copy online, please visit [EdTrust.org/ed-trust-updates](https://www.EdTrust.org/ed-trust-updates).



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