

FIERCE ADVOCATES IN TROUBLING TIMES



The Education Trust



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

February marks our nation's annual observation of Black History Month. It is a time to celebrate the contributions of Black Americans to our democracy and culture, to grapple with our nation's complicated history around issues of race, and to acknowledge the inequities with which our society still struggles. It is fitting that, in this month of celebration and reflection, The Education Trust's leadership team will come together to recognize the organization's responsibility for social change through its work to increase educational excellence and equity — especially for the most historically underserved students.

Certainly, our mission has never been more important.

Across America this year, students are in schools and on college campuses during a period when this country does not seem to be living up to its highest ideals.

Critical supports for children and assistance that can give people a chance at a better life have been threatened. Students' civil rights in our public schools are not being adequately protected at the federal level. Travel bans and reversals of key government programs have led immigrants to wonder whether they are welcome in our country. And our children have heard rhetoric that targets people because of their religion, their race, and their families' country of origin, and they wonder if they are safe.

It is within this context that The Education Trust is leading vital efforts to build and engage diverse communities that care about education equity; to increase political and public will to act on equity issues, from preschool through college; and to increase college access and completion for students who are underrepresented in higher education.

This quarter, the organization has set about doing this work through major activities in a few key areas.

First, we are engaging in advocacy aimed at advancing the key focus of our mission — to close opportunity gaps for students of color and for students from low-income backgrounds.

Our advocacy around the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, for example, is centered on the understanding that DACA recipients are children, youth, and educators — and that rescinding DACA actively endangers teaching and learning for hundreds of thousands of DREAMers. And our advocacy on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) acknowledges that, as a nation, we must increase equity and positive outcomes in postsecondary education — and any update to the law must strengthen opportunities to learn and protections for students, especially for those who are most vulnerable.

Ed Trust continues to be a leading national advocacy voice and coalition-builder for both meaningful accountability for educational outcomes for students of color and low-income students and civil rights guardians in federal and state policy. We are facilitating equity-focused efforts in states by engaging with and supporting diverse, on-the-ground coalitions that seek to expand a high-quality, P-12 public education to more students of color and students living in poverty.

We are doing this work through technical assistance, data analysis, and capacity-building support — including “boot camps” — to help states implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). And conversations that we are leading with states and school districts are helping to highlight local disparities in students' access to strong teachers, rigorous coursework, and other necessary resources and supports. An exciting next step in this coalition-building effort is to partner with local administrators, educators, and advocates to identify solutions to their unique challenges.

Finally, we are driving and contributing to a national conversation on issues of education equity through our publications and new methods of communication. The Education Trust's analysis of Latino students' success in higher education, for example, revealed a degree attainment crisis for these students at both four-year public as well as private, nonprofit institutions — and the report received widespread attention. Also, this quarter, the organization launched its first podcast to highlight districts that are achieving outstanding results for all young people.

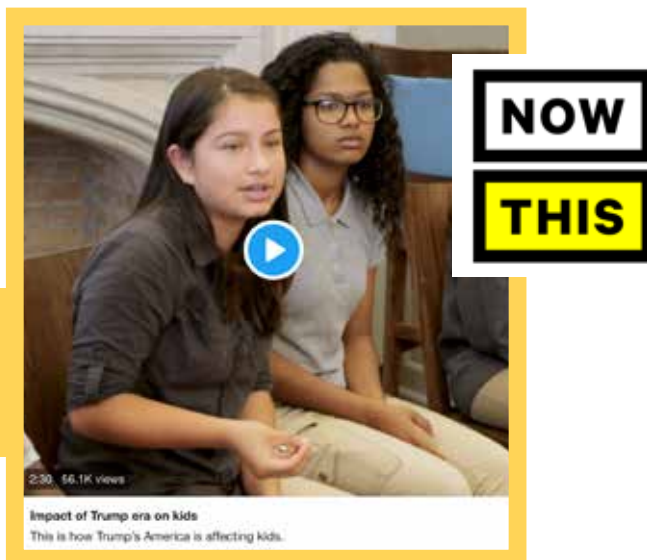
Thank you for your support of The Education Trust's mission and work. We have accomplished much, and there is still much to do to ensure all students receive an education that enables them to thrive.

John B. King Jr.
President and CEO of The Education Trust

Speaking Out in Troubling Times

Since our board last met, we at The Education Trust have continued to be fierce advocates, boldly speaking out and standing up for the rights, protections, and humanity of Black and Latino students and youngsters from low-income families, particularly during these troubling times. Here are highlights of how we are responding to the current climate:

- To learn how the current political climate is affecting students, we visited a D.C. high school and held an honest, intimate conversation with a diverse group of students — many of whom are children of immigrants or DACA recipients. Listening to students describe in their own words their stark reality in this [NowThis](#) news report is heart-wrenching. This provocative and moving video garnered more than 2.8 million views, making it one of the most watched segments NowThis has ever produced.
- We urged the Trump administration not to roll back the U.S. Department of Education's guidance on school discipline in this [Education Post op-ed](#), co-authored by Lillian Lowery and Evan Stone, the co-founder and co-CEO of Educators 4 Excellence.
- In response to the U.S. Department of Justice's investigation into Harvard University's use of race in its admissions process, Wil Del Pilar wrote [an opinion piece for U.S. News and World Report](#). Wil argues that even with affirmative action, the system is indeed rigged — against Black and Latino students.
- John B. King Jr. leveraged his bi-weekly column for The Baltimore Sun to speak out about the [need to thank educators](#), the [importance of the arts in education](#), the [transformational power of prison education programs](#), and the need for all of us [to recommit to our vital role as citizens in this New Year](#). And in his final column, which coincided with Martin Luther King Day, John [urged](#) readers not only to “celebrate the progress that the civil rights movement made possible, but also to grapple with the full truth of our nation's history, to acknowledge the inequities with which our society still struggles, and to recognize our individual responsibility for social change.”



- Additionally, John wrote an [op-ed for Teen Vogue](#) on how one year after the election of the 45th president, students are in schools and on college campuses during a time when this country may not seem to be living up to its ideals. And while there is much work to do, there is also hope.
- To add levity to the current climate, John was featured on Comedy Central's [The Opposition with Jordan Klepper](#), where he and Jordan “debated” the federal budget for education and other topics. Influential advocates, such as Melissa Harris-Perry, shared the segment on twitter. One advocate sent the link to a prominent list-serv with a note saying, “this video link is an example of how policy wonks can communicate effectively; PowerPoint not required.”
- We hosted a special breakfast conversation with Catherine E. Lhamon, chair of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Black journalists, and Ed Trust staff. The discussion focused on the state of education for Black students including what's at stake for their future and the continued fight for equity and justice. Prominent journalists, including Adam Harris, Nikole Hannah-Jones, Melissa Harris-Perry, Erica L. Green, and others were in attendance.



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

THEORY OF CHANGE



ESSA Boot Camps



In December, state and local advocates from **70** business, civil rights, disability rights, immigrant rights, educator, parent, and education reform groups from **10** states attended our ESSA Implementation Meeting in Nashville. Participants discussed:

- **Strategy**, including how to protect wins and push for ongoing changes in state ESSA plans in the face of upcoming changes to state leadership;
- **Policy**, including how to use the law's provisions on [public reporting](#), [funding transparency](#), and [improving access to strong, diverse teachers](#); and
- **Communications**, including how to engage parents and families, as well as community and business leaders, on these important policy topics in ways that resonate and offer a clear path to action.

The meeting activities included cross-state sharing and learning, issue deep dives with content experts from EdTrust and our national partners, and state team discussion, coordination, and planning for action.

Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive. In a survey, **over 95 percent** of participants “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the following statements:

- I strengthened my knowledge of important policy opportunities in ESSA;
- I was able to strengthen relationships with advocacy partners;
- The programming helped me to identify future advocacy targets and strategies for ESSA implementation;
- I strengthened my knowledge of strategies for engaging wider audiences in ESSA conversations; and
- The materials were applicable and relevant to the work I do in my state.

HERE'S A SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT COMMENTS:

“The information was rich and helpful. The time provided to share, plan, and discuss what works and how to plan ahead was great. Networking and problem-solving together is valuable.”

“Love the focus on equity and the true diversity reflected in the room.”

“It was great to see best practices highlighted and then have the opportunity to meet with our state group to brainstorm ways to incorporate the practices into our state action plan.”

“These Boot Camps are even more necessary now that ESSA is becoming a reality.”

“I learned an incredible amount about where the current opportunities are for continued ESSA impact.”

ESSA State Trends

LISTEN

To keep informing our audiences on how well states are doing with the implementation of ESSA, we released [Trends in ESSA State Plans](#), a paper summarizing the findings of our review of state accountability systems under the new federal law. Our analysis focused tightly on three questions we believe are especially important in determining whether a plan is likely to promote opportunity and improve outcomes for all groups of students:

1

Are states keeping student learning front and center?

2

Do school ratings reflect how schools are doing for all groups of students?

3

Is the state being honest about which schools need to take steps to improve for one or more student groups?

What we found is not encouraging. For all the lip-service given to the importance of equity in ESSA, too many state leaders have taken a pass on clearly naming and acting on schools' underperformance for traditionally underserved students. Many state leaders have chosen to base ratings mostly on overall averages, largely ignoring results of individual student groups. Moreover, when it comes to identifying schools that need to improve for a group of students, such as students from low-income families or Black or Latino students, most state leaders are setting the bar far too low, further overlooking underperformance.

This analysis received coverage in [U.S. News and World Report](#), [Politico](#), and [Education Week](#). And we shared it with a wide range of partners, including Congressional leaders, state and local policymakers from the National Association of Latino Elected Officials, National Black Caucus of State Legislators, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and national and state civil rights, disability, immigrant rights, business, education reform, educator, and parent advocates.

Deeper State Engagement

ENGAGE

We've continued and intensified our engagement with and support of state equity coalitions. For example:

- In **Tennessee**, we consulted with the Tennessee Equity Coalition on their strategy to build relationships with legislators and gubernatorial candidates and helped them develop an action plan for the next two years. Ed Trust will also be well-represented at their [Summit](#) in February, including a keynote address from John, help facilitating a Data Equity Walk, and a presentation on higher education issues.
- In **Kentucky**, we issued a sub-grant to the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence to supplement the full-time salary for an engagement manager position. In close consultation with The Education Trust, the engagement manager will cultivate and expand an equity-focused coalition, lead the generation of coalition advocacy materials, and ensure the coalition takes concrete, equity-advancing advocacy actions.
- In **Delaware**, we provided technical assistance to the Rodel Foundation on a bill focused on school-level fiscal transparency requirements. The foundation is working with a coalition of civil rights, education reform, and business advocates to advance the legislation.
- In **Massachusetts**, we convened representatives of 15 diverse advocacy organizations to participate in a Commonwealth specific Data Equity Walk and, based on those data, began the conversation about both the substantive and strategic opportunities to advance equity. John also served as a keynote speaker at "The Condition of Education in the Commonwealth," an event hosted by the Rennie Center that was widely attended by Massachusetts stakeholders and received coverage in the [media](#).

The Reauthorization of HEA



Congress has begun the process of reauthorizing HEA. House Republicans took the first step in December when they introduced and marked up the PROSPER Act in Committee. The PROSPER Act decreases access to financial aid, removes rules protecting students from predatory institutions, limits data availability and utility, and fails to advance equity. The bill proposes The College Dashboard, which largely presents information already available while maintaining the data and information gaps that exist today. It fails to include the College Transparency Act, a bipartisan solution that would establish a secure student-level data network allowing for more comprehensive understanding of college access, affordability, and outcomes for all students. In addition, the approach to “risk sharing” in the PROSPER Act could result in campuses excluding the students they perceive as most likely to drop out rather than working to better support underrepresented students. The PROSPER Act falls far short of what is needed in an approach to accountability that strengthens higher education, protects students, and focuses on equity. John issued a swift and strongly worded [statement](#) on the bill, asserting that the proposal would

“move our nation’s higher education system backward [and] create more barriers for students of color and students from low-income families to succeed.”

We also sent a [letter](#) outlining the key weaknesses of the PROSPER Act to the Committee, urging a no vote. And in advance of the bill going to the House floor, which is expected to be mid-to-late February, we organized a sign-on [letter](#) with 35 organizations calling for Congress to rethink its approach and instead reauthorize HEA in a way that invests in students.

On the Senate side, the HELP Committee began hearings on higher education issues, including a hearing on higher ed accountability where board member José Luis Cruz [testified](#). Ed Trust [supported him](#) in that effort. We also published an [analysis](#) of Senator Alexander’s HEA White Paper, explaining why it misses the mark on equity. Senator Alexander hopes to have a bill ready for mark up this spring, although it seems unlikely that a bipartisan product will be ready in that timeframe.

We addressed several other hot topics in higher education, such as outcomes-based funding via a [blog](#) by Tiffany Jones and a blog series drawing from the book, [Outcomes-Based Funding and Race in Higher Education: Can Equity Be Bought?](#), written by Tiffany and several other scholars. And Andrew Nichols discussed what the data tell us about diversity on our nation’s elite college and university campuses [here](#).

The PROSPER Act is detrimental to low-income students and students of color, because it:

- 1 Decreases access to financial aid**
- 2 Removes rules protecting students from predatory institutions**
- 3 Limits data availability and utility**
- 4 Fails to advance equity**

The Education Trust opposes the PROSPER Act.

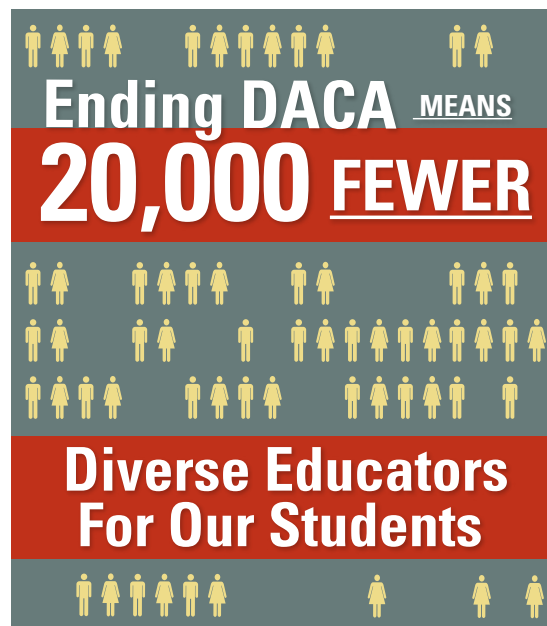
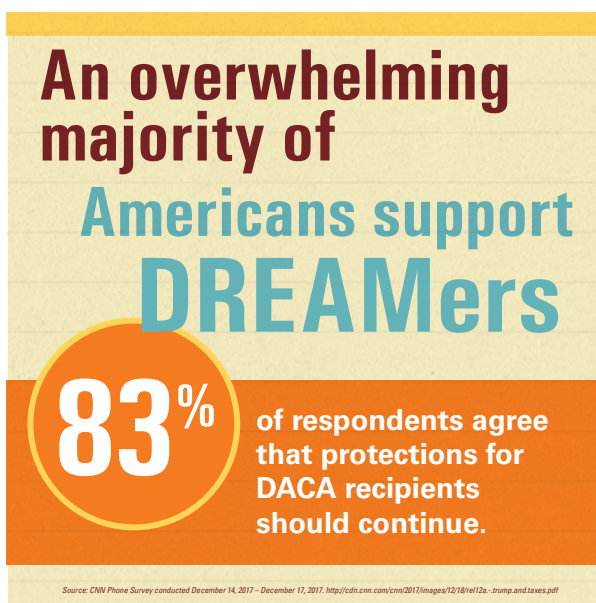
#PROSPERAct

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

SECURE

Since early September when President Trump announced the end of the DACA program, Ed Trust has actively [campaigned](#) for Congress to find a bipartisan solution to protect DREAMers, focusing on the DREAM Act. We led a sign on [letter](#) of higher education advocates prior to the announcement asking President Trump to reconsider and keep DACA and then, immediately following the announcement, we followed up with a [letter](#) to Congress calling for the passage of the DREAM Act. We partnered with KIPP for a day on Capitol Hill to connect members of Congress with DREAMers as well as education, business, and philanthropic leaders.

In addition to advocacy on the Hill, we made protecting DACA a centerpiece of our communications efforts. We joined partner organizations by marching down to the Capitol and demanding a clean DREAM Act. Lillian Lowery wrote a [blog](#) detailing how she has witnessed firsthand the hope and joy of DREAMers and their families. Davis Dixon described how [defending DACA](#) recipients is a good place for the U.S. to engage in a more significant effort to increase teacher diversity and retain Latino educators. Wil Del Pilar [chronicled](#) how immigration status affects three DREAMers' lives. And most importantly, we lead a robust and engaging social media campaign urging our 85k followers to protect DREAMers by calling and emailing their representatives.





Extraordinary Districts

We released "[ExtraOrdinary Districts](#)," our first-ever podcast. The podcast provides in-depth profiles of three school districts featuring interviews with superintendents, principals, teachers, researchers, and more. It has already won a wide audience with more than 8,500 listens by the middle of January and has received coverage in the [Washington Post](#) multiple times, once with a powerful nod to the hard work of educators with the headline, "[Yes, there are public school educators who know what they're doing. Take, for example, the folks in Steubenville, Ohio.](#)"

"ExtraOrdinary Districts" builds on a decade of work done by Ed Trust's writer-in-residence Karin Chenoweth to identify and learn from high-performing and rapidly improving schools that serve large numbers of children of color and children from low-income homes. This time, however, instead of focusing solely on individual schools, Ed Trust examines the larger contexts in which schools operate — that is, the school district — to provide a fuller picture of what is necessary to ensure that all children, no matter what their background, achieve at high levels.

Listen on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts.
Or go to www.edtrust.org/extraordinarydistricts.



P-12 Practice in Delaware and Massachusetts

Ed Trust's P-12 team has continued to support the state departments of education in both Delaware and Massachusetts, facilitating equity-directed conversations with their district academic leaders. In Delaware, our monthly meetings focus on using school- and district-level data to shine a light on the inequities that low-income students and students of color face in having access to strong and diverse educators, quality classroom assignments, and rigorous coursework that prepares them for success in college and careers. In Massachusetts, we have continued our work with targeted Tier III and IV schools to build their capacity to support assignment analysis work in English language arts, science, and social studies. An overwhelming majority of participants in both states have indicated that the content and data that we provided have promoted change in their district policies, practices, or equity conversations. Consequently, individual districts within these states have requested our services.



Latino Student Success

RESEARCH

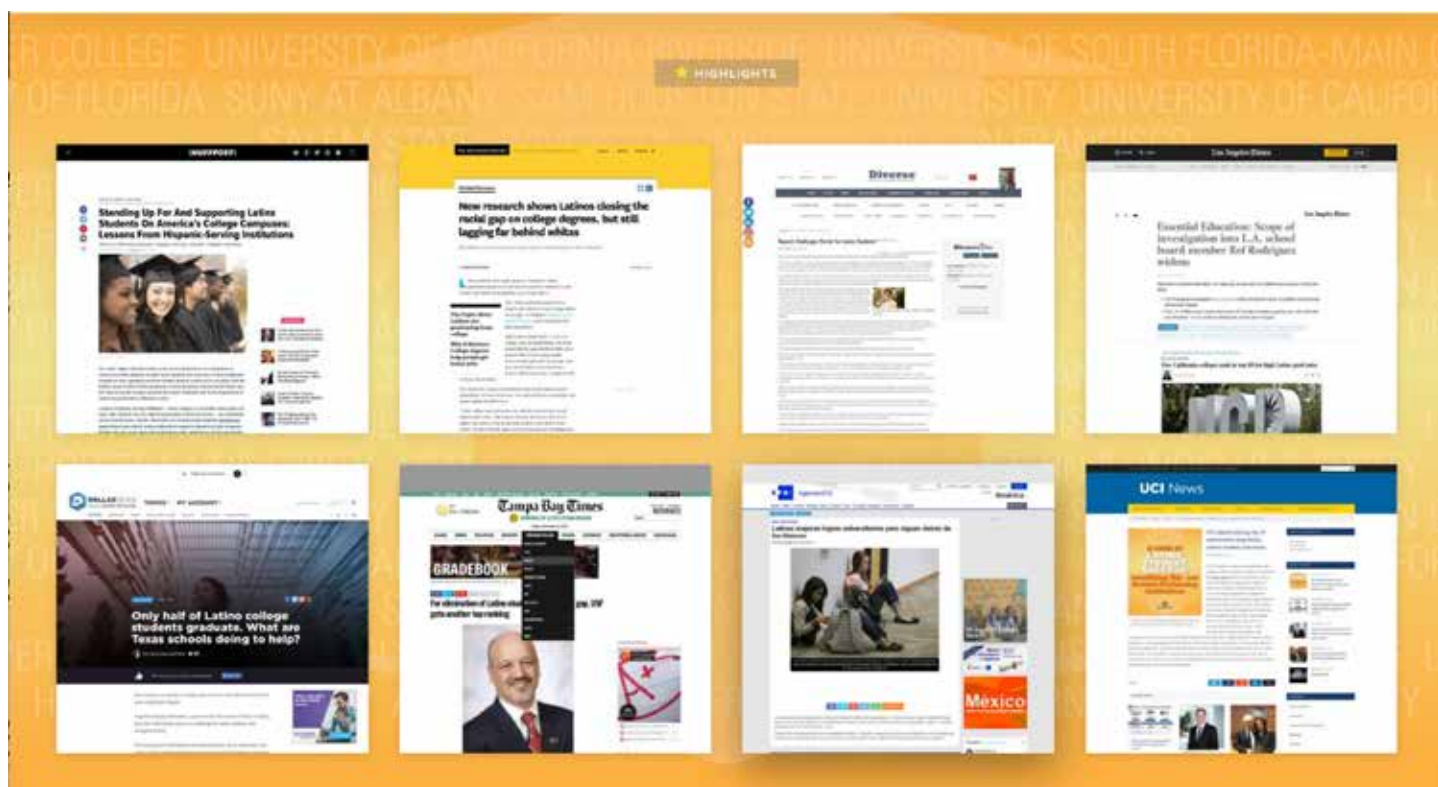
We released “[A Look at Latino Student Success](#),” a companion piece to “[A Look at Black Student Success](#),” which examines both the national and institution-level data on college completion for Latino students at four-year institutions. Our analysis examined both four-year public and nonprofit private institutions and found that while more Latino students are enrolling in colleges and universities than ever before, and graduation rates are on the rise, only half of Latino students who start at four-year colleges and universities as first-time, full-time freshmen complete their bachelor’s degree.

The report concludes that closing the national completion gap between Latino and White students requires simultaneous work from our nation’s higher education leaders on three fronts:

- Closing institutional gaps between Latino and White graduation rates;
- Improving overall graduation rates at colleges and universities that enroll significant numbers of Latino students; and
- Changing enrollment patterns so more Latinos attend selective institutions with no or a narrow gap and high graduation rates.

The report, authored by Andrew Nichols, received solid press attention in the [Los Angeles Times](#), [The Hechinger Report](#), and more than two dozen other publications. We enjoyed local coverage, like this article in the [Dallas Morning News](#), which illustrates how the report helped to prompt regional conversations about student success and institutional practices. We also saw institutions ([UC Riverside](#) and the [University of South Florida](#)) using the report to highlight their achievement, which, we hope, keeps their commitment to these students strong. A key tactic to our communications success was to market Wil Del Pilar as a higher education expert to Spanish-language media. As such, we received coverage in an [EFE article](#), which was published in more than 10 other outlets. To tease out the report, Andrew penned a powerful opinion piece in The [Hechinger Report](#) arguing for institutional leaders to prioritize the success of Latino students and other students of color. Metrics on the reach of the report suggest that Latino Student Success was viewed 280,000 times. The report promises to continue generating coverage with the release of a Spanish version of the report, an infographic, and a data tool for advocates, institutional leaders, and policymakers. Relatedly, [this piece](#) in The Hechinger Report quotes Andrew on Black and Latino students’ success at state flagship universities.

TO VIEW ALL THE CLIPS FROM A LOOK AT LATINO STUDENT SUCCESS,
[PLEASE VISIT HTTPS://EDTRUST.COVERAGEBOOK.COM/B/5E65663C](https://edtrust.coveragebook.com/B/5E65663C)





RESEARCH

Latino Teachers

We followed up with the success of our [Black teachers](#) study and released, “[Our Stories, Our Struggles, Our Strengths: Perspectives and Reflections from Latino Teachers](#),” a new report chronicling the joys, opportunities, and challenges Latino teachers face in the classroom. Currently, Latino teachers make up just 8 percent of the teaching workforce. This low number of Latino educators deprives much of the Latino student population (25 percent) of the experience of having “someone that understands” at the head of the class. Just as unfortunate, many White students (as well as those from other races and ethnicities), won’t have the benefit of learning from someone with a different background.

This has been a tremendous quarter for The Education Trust. We look forward to continuing to be fierce advocates for high-academic achievement for all students, particularly those of color and low-income students.



The Education Trust

Our Mission

The Education Trust is a nonprofit organization that promotes closing opportunity gaps by expanding excellence and equity in education for students of color and those from low-income families from pre-kindergarten through college. Through research and advocacy, the organization builds and engages diverse communities that care about education equity, increases political and public will to act on equity issues, and increases college access and completion for historically underserved students.