

edtrust

A Bold Vision for Education Equity and a Bold New Look

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Welcome to the bold new look of EdTrust! First and foremost, I'm proud to unveil our rebrand — a yearlong effort to ensure that our brand identity reflects EdTrust's bold vision for education equity. In these turbulent times, we believe it's important to be bold with our advocacy so that, together, we can protect our nation's students and uphold democracy. As part of our rebrand, we have reformatted this booklet to summarize all our efforts in just a few pages. And, as you'll see, this summer was chock-full of activity and advocacy.

Reimagining Education

EdTrust's new campaign, [#EduReimagined](#), encourages us to envision how to create opportunities for all students. On our website and social media channels, we are calling on our followers, partners, and others to share in our vision — to imagine the

possibilities if an equitable education system was achieved and children were allowed to realize their full potential.

I entered the advocacy world with an unshakable vision of what is possible when all students — regardless of race, identity, or economic background — have access to the educational and economic resources and support systems they need to achieve their dreams. I see excellence in the students of color and students from low-income backgrounds we, at EdTrust, tirelessly serve. I believe others will see it — and will do what's necessary to make it more prevalent — if we dare to dream more, focusing on the promise of education equity, rather than the setbacks.

Celebrating Diversity

At EdTrust, we celebrate the diversity of students in the U.S. — and insist that students of color must feel seen to boost student achievement. That's the motivation for our latest blog series, "[Representation in Books](#)." Building on last fall's [analysis](#) of 300 children's books, which revealed a woeful lack of complex racial and cultural representation in curricula, here, we explore more races, ethnicities, and identities — such as Afro-Latino, Muslim, LGBTQ+ and more — and where they intersect. I invite you to follow along.

Impact & Wins

EdTrust-Midwest and coalition partners scored a major policy victory in late September to improve early reading outcomes. After more than six years of collaboration with advocates and policymakers, the Michigan legislature overwhelmingly passed the Reading for All package — a bipartisan legislative initiative to identify and support students with dyslexia that EdTrust-Midwest helped develop.

EdTrust-Midwest's executive director, Amber Arellano,

received a 2024 Education Award from the BFDI International Training Institute for her leadership in advancing education equity for Michigan's underserved students.

Gov. Gavin Newsom in California signed the GAINS

for Student-Parents Act, which lets colleges identify student-parents and increases access to financial aid and supports. This bill is part of EdTrust-West's Equity 8, and will help about 300,000 Californian student-parents complete their degrees.

Responding to Today's Most Pressing Issues

EdTrust was at the forefront of tackling some of the most pressing education issues of the day — including chronic absenteeism, DEI policies, and AI. For example, in July, after I testified before the House Oversight Committee alongside Hedy Chang of Attendance Works and Nat Malkus of the American Enterprise Institute to discuss [pandemic recovery](#), we decided to [join forces](#). This chance meeting resulted in a public challenge urging states to commit to [reducing chronic absenteeism by 50% over five years](#). Fourteen states answered the call, representing more than 9 million students.

Without a doubt, one of the hottest topics today is artificial intelligence (AI). In our rapidly evolving technological landscape, the need for AI education, literacy, and skills is more pronounced than ever. But how will AI affect education? What are the ethics and equity concerns surrounding AI? In September, I moderated a panel discussion on integrating AI in education during a congressional briefing to address these questions about AI, which is rapidly affecting students' learning and changing how educators teach.

Ultimately, education equity comes down to resources. By identifying schools that produce the lowest outcomes, school accountability systems provide insights into which kids need more resources and help ensure that all students have access to high-quality learning experiences.

Recently, we released a [digital report](#) that finds that many states' reporting is inequitable and presents our vision for an ideal school accountability system. Also, as the September 30 deadline to spend pandemic relief funds was fast approaching, EdTrust urged state and district leaders to evaluate decisions about keeping or cutting programs through an equity lens. And then we asked, "[Where do we go from here?](#)"

Additionally, EdTrust was one of the leading voices urging the Department of Education to resolve issues related to the 2024 Better FAFSA launch to better serve first-generation students and students from [mixed-status families](#). We also encouraged ED to [ensure](#) the system's full functionality and provided suggestions for supporting the successful completion of the [2025-26 FAFSA](#).

Finally, during this frenzied election season, we sent both presidential candidates our [2024 Transition Memo](#), which outlines the federal policies that should be prioritized in the next administration. This comprehensive guide is designed to inform, inspire, and spur action from Congress and the executive branch — serving as a strategic roadmap for advancing education equity. It ensures that all students, particularly those from traditionally underserved communities, have access to high-quality learning opportunities.

As we prepare for whatever happens this November, let's remember to always put students first — because they are the leaders of tomorrow.



Impact & Wins

After EdTrust in Texas submitted testimony, the Texas' State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) voted to expand options and adjust requirements to enable more aspiring teachers to demonstrate English Language Proficiency when applying for teacher certification.

Washington State passed a law "allowing persons to receive professional licenses and certifications regardless of immigration or citizenship status" after a state official read an EdTrust report on undocumented students. It went into effect on July 1, 2024.

ETNY released a report in partnership with our Raising NY coalition titled, [From Barriers to Opportunity: Confronting Systemic Barriers to Early Childhood and Poverty-Reduction Programs](#), which highlights qualitative and quantitative data on the obstacles to accessing programs such as child-care subsidies, WIC, SNAP, and voluntary home visiting.



On the Hill

EdTrust maintained a strong presence on Capitol Hill and at events with federal partners this summer, playing a leading role in numerous briefings and speaking engagements. Denise Forte moderated a panel on artificial intelligence (AI) featuring thought leaders, advocates, and Congress members, which emphasized the importance of AI literacy in education and positioned Denise as a leading voice for education equity in this area. In addition, Eric Duncan, director of P-12 policy, spoke about gun violence prevention and the need for safe, and inclusive school climates. During the event, which was sponsored by March For Our Lives and included remarks from Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT) and Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), Eric highlighted the extensive school climate resources produced by EdTrust, as well as the work of our state teams. Finally, as a key member of the One Million Teachers of Color (1MTOC) campaign, EdTrust co-facilitated a congressional briefing to discuss the crucial need for educator

diversity and the importance of using educator demographic data to inform decision-making.

EdTrust also participated in numerous events in Washington, DC, with federal partners. As part of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference (ALC), VP of Partnerships & Engagement Augustus Mays was invited to speak as a panelist at an event sponsored by Reps. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ), Yvette Clarke (D-NY), and Robin Kelly (D-IL) on the impact and importance of teaching African American studies in classrooms, as well as how the wave of anti-DEI state policies is harming students. Furthermore, during a panel discussion at ALC hosted by Rep. Pressley on the rise of censorship campaigns and the attack on Black literature, EdTrust provided several recorded student testimonials that were featured in a video highlighting the negative impact of book bans and other censorship efforts in schools.

IN THE MEDIA

- [State Accountability Systems Aren't Actually Helping Schools](#) (EdWeek)
- [American Kids Have Fallen Far Behind in Math & Reading](#) (Vox)
- [Lawsuit prevents TEA from releasing A-F accountability scores](#) (ABC13-TX)
- [College Financial Aid in Massachusetts is Confusing](#) (Boston Globe)
- [NY school funding formula needs an update, more than 100 organizations urge](#) (Chalkbeat)
- [50 Years After Detroit Desegregation Cases, Schools Remain Divided](#) (Detroit Free Press)

ON THE BLOG

- [Campus Racial Climates Amid Student Protests: Keeping Students of Color Safe](#)
- [Sounding the Alarm on Black Girls and School Discipline](#)
- [Why DEI Programs Matter to College Students](#)
- [A Policy Roadmap That Steers Students of Color to Success, Pre-K Through College](#)
- [Why We Need Afro-Latino Representation in Children's Books](#)

EdTrust-West

EdTrust-West has been actively convening partners across California. In September, we hosted the fifth annual Education Equity Forum, the largest gathering of education equity advocates in the state. This year, 500+ attendees gathered in Oakland to exchange ideas, network, strategize, and get inspired! After delivering a morning keynote address, executive director Christopher J. Nellum led an impactful conversation with Nikole Hannah-Jones, Pulitzer Prize-winner and *New York Times* best-selling author. Learn more about *the Education Equity Forum* [here](#).

We also celebrated wins from our Equity 8 priority legislation, including the signing of our co-sponsored bill, the Greater Accessibility, Information, Notice, and Support (GAINS) for Student Parents Act (AB 2458). The GAINS for Student Parents Act is a first-in-the-nation initiative that will improve how over 300,000 student parents, mostly women of color, access financial aid and are identified by colleges and universities for support. For more on EdTrust-West's accomplishments, visit edtrustwest.org/impact

EdTrust-New York

In August, EdTrust-New York [responded](#) to the release of statewide assessment data, noting that it lacked disaggregation by student subgroups and sufficient details on district and school outcomes. We urged the state to increase data transparency, provide timely information to parents, and take action to improve student outcomes.

This year, Gov. Kathy Hochul requested a review of New York's Foundation Aid Formula, the main source of state funding for schools. EdTrust-New York [testified at public hearings](#) that the formula, which relies on outdated information and greatly impact students from low-income backgrounds and communities of color, needs updating. Our testimony included recommendations to reform the formula with a focus on equity and transparency.

In October, EdTrust-New York and the Raising New York Coalition hosted a discussion on a new report, "[From Barriers to Opportunity](#)," which highlights systemic barriers faced by Black, Latino, immigrant, and low-income families in accessing early childhood and poverty-reduction programs.

EdTrust-Midwest

Amid a tight budget cycle, EdTrust-Midwest and partners in the Michigan Partnership for Equity and Opportunity (MPEO) scored significant fair-funding wins following a multipronged advocacy and legislative campaign. As a result of their efforts, Michigan's FY 2025 School Aid budget invests an additional \$83 million in the Opportunity Index, championed by ETM and partners, bringing the total investment this year for students from low-income backgrounds to over a billion dollars. ETM and coalition partners' efforts also secured a \$10 million increase for English learners. This investment builds on last year's historic funding wins, resulting in a total increase of nearly 90% — or \$24 million — in English learner funding since FY 2023. The budget also includes an overall increase of \$365 million for students with disabilities and allocates \$500,000 to study Michigan's special education system and provide recommendations to improve outcomes for students with disabilities, which was a recommendation from the MPEO.

EdTrust-Tennessee

EdTrust-Tennessee's founding executive director, Gini Pupo-Walker, stepped down after nearly five years. We are excited that [Alexza Barajas Clark, Ph.D.](#), the founding chief of staff, will serve as interim executive director and provide the continuity and direction needed to move our work forward. In preparation for the upcoming legislative session, we created a new resource to help advocates understand [the education issues at stake in Tennessee's 2024 elections](#). Our team has also been meeting with education leaders, students, advocates, and policymakers across the state. At stops in Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis, Jackson, and Nashville, we're listening to top education equity concerns and strengthening our partnerships. Our statewide coalition, the [TN Alliance for Equity in Education](#), has grown to nearly 90 organizations. We also launched our first stand-alone [website](#), which includes an [Undocumented Student Resource Hub](#). As part of our [Southerners for Fair School Funding](#) initiative, we were named a finalist in the Most Actionable Tools and Research category by the PIE Network for our School Funding Rating Rubrics and Advocacy Guides.

EdTrust in Louisiana

EdTrust in Louisiana reached major advocacy milestones in recent months. In July, we were awarded the Excellence in Education Award by the College Board for our commitment to expanding college opportunities for students, and the Zakim Award from Team Harmony for our work with Amplify LA, which elevates youth voices in our community. We also provided engagement strategies to community advocates during the superintendent search in East Baton Rouge Parish. In August, we launched a campus culture and climate survey to combat anti-DEI attacks and created tools for students and advocates, alongside the Amplify & Elevate Ambassador Program, which empowers student leaders to enhance campus inclusivity. We also hosted voter education panels to highlight how elections impact education. In September, we launched the Black Male Educator Experience Survey to address recruitment and retention challenges. And, in October, we held a youth empowerment rally, where we led more than 100 students in advocacy training and encouraged early voting.

EdTrust in Texas

Our team is wrapping up a busy season and preparing for the next legislative session in January. At the House and Senate interim hearings, we presented research and recommendations to address the state's alarming rise in uncertified teachers, improve assessment, strengthen early literacy skills, increase participation in advanced middle school math, and bolster postsecondary completion through the state's new community college finance formula. We also continue to amplify the powerful advocacy of students, teachers, and families. We welcomed our latest cohort of [Educator Advisory Council members](#) from school systems serving more than 300,000 students in the Houston Region. Our Student Advisory Council members shared stories and solutions with [college trustees from across the state](#), [testified at the Capitol](#) on the impact of community college funding, and participated in [discussions about AI in higher education](#). Justice Fellows from Texas also led national and state sessions on improving postsecondary and reentry success for justice-impacted students.

EdTrust in Massachusetts

It's been a busy few months for both the EdTrust in MA team and the [Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership \(MEEP\)](#). Our recent collective advocacy efforts have yielded substantial wins in the FY25 state budget, including a new \$20-million line item to address the growing literacy crisis and increased funding and policies to support the recruitment and retention of educators from diverse backgrounds. We've also continued to influence statewide conversations around equitable access to postsecondary opportunities, leading efforts to [inform the implementation of new higher education initiatives](#), and [drawing attention to the need for more progressive financial aid approaches](#). This fall, our focus is on providing voters with the information and resources necessary to make informed decisions regarding whether to maintain the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) as a graduation requirement, including circulating an infographic in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#). Furthermore, we are preparing to launch a statewide literacy campaign that will equip families with tools to advocate for policy and practice changes to improve literacy outcomes.

Spotlight: Chris Nellum, Ph.D.

Executive Director, EdTrust-West



As the executive director of EdTrust-West, Christopher J. Nellum, Ph.D., leads a team of nearly 40 talented education equity advocates in California. His passion for this work is inspired by his family's example of challenging commonly held "truths" about Black communities, while pushing for fairness, racial justice, and equity. He is a gubernatorial appointee and serves on several statewide committees and advisory boards.

P-12



A Season of Partnership

This summer, EdTrust's P-12 team and partners led a landmark effort to curb chronic absenteeism among vulnerable students, which has been exacerbated since the pandemic. In July, EdTrust joined Attendance Works and Nat Malkus of the American Enterprise Institute to [urge state leaders to commit to reducing chronic absenteeism by 50% over five years](#); in early September, [we announced that 14 states](#) had joined this effort. (See our [joint op-ed in The Hill](#), along with press coverage in [trade](#) and [local](#) media.)

With All4Ed, we released a [paper on postsecondary pathways](#), outlining our vision for an equitable pathways system and calling

on the federal government to support the creation of pathways navigators to assist students in navigating advanced coursework and career options during and after high school.

The P-12 team also monitored and advocated for equitable post-COVID recovery and support for underserved students in interviews with [Vox](#) and [Education Week](#), and in a [paper detailing how states supported students' social, emotional, and academic development](#) through the American Rescue Plan. We're also closely watching how states are using accountability laws to support Black and Latino students and those from low-income backgrounds. EdTrust's [first digital report](#) on our new website outlines states' mixed records on centering equity in their Every Student Succeeds Act plans and their failure to sufficiently leverage school improvement systems to better support students.

Higher Ed



Advocating for FAFSA & DEI

The higher ed team focused on several priorities to improve access to college, increase affordability, and create positive campus racial climates. The [Better FAFSA](#) aimed to simplify financial aid access, but ultimately failed due to technical issues and insufficient support for students and schools. In response, EdTrust provided technical assistance, student-centered policy recommendations, and focused on those hardest hit by FAFSA delays. The complexities of the application process and the lack of guidance led to confusion, disproportionately affecting low-income and first-generation

students. To address this, we hosted a series of webinars designed to assist [mixed-status families](#) with FAFSA navigation. We also submitted public comments highlighting the need for clearer instructions, streamlined processes, and stronger partnerships between high schools and colleges, provided additional resources, including targeted outreach and technical assistance for students and school administrators. Our policy recommendations suggest simplifying eligibility verification and expanding access to financial aid counseling to ease the burden on students. This led to several media placements in outlets such as [PBS News Hour](#), [Washington Post](#), [Politico](#), and [Fox Business News](#), among others.

Amid growing attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in higher education, EdTrust produced a DEI toolkit to assist state leaders, advocates, and students in defending civil rights on campus, ensuring that all students — regardless of race, gender, or background — have equitable opportunities to succeed in college.

EdTrust's work would not be possible without the generosity of our donors. See the full list [here](#).