

# The Great American Heist

## *Stopping the theft of our students' future*

By EdTrust Staff



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At EdTrust, students come first — especially students of color and those from low-income backgrounds. For far too long, they've been failed by the American education system. We fight for a high-quality education and defend public schools as a public good. Because when students thrive, our nation thrives.

Unfortunately, in the span of a few months, the Trump administration has launched a full-scale attack on public education — including efforts to dismantle the Department of Education, eliminating student loan protections, and advocating for cuts to Pell Grants, Medicaid, SNAP, mental health supports, and more. They are also trying to funnel public dollars into private vouchers. This isn't good governance. It's the greatest theft of opportunity in modern history.

This is the **Great American Heist**.

The fact is, this administration is not just stealing dollars. They're stealing futures, robbing young people of their dreams, security, and the chance to live the life of their choice, while supporting their families and themselves.

But we won't back down. We've made sure that truth is heard — across national TV, local radio, publications, and digital outlets. This quarter alone, we've earned nearly 2,000 media hits, putting students and equity at the center of our message.

We've been making sense of deliberately vague rhetoric from White House directives in our blog, newsletters, and on social media, while pushing back against attacks on students and our communities. Since January, we've published 61 blog posts in [rapid response](#) to the administration's actions, and in doing so, have increased our web traffic by nearly 50%, staying engaged in the moment and in the conversation. With a digital-first communications strategy, we've expanded our audience and reach across social media platforms, with easy-to-understand content designed to elevate key messages while sparking conversation and action. Impressions across our digital platforms have grown by 250%, demonstrating a major boost in visibility and audience

## *Impact & Wins*

EdTrust-Tennessee helped defeat three bills that threatened undocumented students' right to public education. As members of the steering committee for the Education for All – Tennessee campaign, we provided policy analysis, reframed public conversation through op-eds, delivered testimony, mobilized community members, and convened partners statewide, successfully protecting Plyler v Doe, a long-standing precedent that grants undocumented students access to K-12 education nationwide.

In February, the Texas Tri-Agency Commission approved the state's Teacher Apprenticeship Strategy, which was informed by EdTrust's [50-state policy scan](#) and participation on the Texas Education Agency's advisory group.

reach. Engagement is also up by 145%, with 3,700 interactions across platforms, and post link clicks have risen by 367%.

Beyond being a prominent voice on the web, we've also been active in communities on the ground. In addition to organizing congressional meetings this spring, I recently testified at two Senate hearings on education, where I emphasized the need for a strong public education system to protect students' civil rights and a federal government that holds states accountable for student learning. This is why we need the U.S. Department of Education. On June 12, we joined other leading equity organizations at a public rally hosted by the Protecting and Improving Education Coalition on Capitol Hill to protest Congress's proposed cuts to education, Medicaid, and SNAP, as well as a tax credit aimed at privatizing education that diverts money from the communities most in need.

This is just the beginning. If the government wants to rob our students and our schools, we will resist and respond with data, explaining the consequences of their actions to the public.

Public education belongs to all of us. We're not letting up and we won't grow weary. It's up to all of us to STOP THE GREAT AMERICAN HEIST.

### *Empower the Future*

In late April, we convened our annual bootcamp. This year's theme was EduReimagined: Defend Equity, Empower the Future, and it brought

together advocates from every EdTrust state and region to strategize, mobilize, and act for education equity. Through powerful sessions and state team planning, participants built skills to push back against the attacks on undocumented students, DEI rollbacks, and disinvestment in our nation's students. We also organized a Hill Day, during which advocates met with congressional leaders and staff members to defend the Department of Education and oppose harmful budget reconciliation cuts. Advocates left empowered, reenergized, and equipped to fight back.

I was inspired to see so many advocates who want nothing more than to protect our nation's students and ensure they all receive the fair and high-quality education they deserve. There is power in numbers. Their passion was infectious, and I left feeling even more motivated to continue this fight.

We know we are always stronger together. That's why we've joined forces with national civil rights groups, educational organizations, student activists, and local coalitions to push back. This is about justice — not just for students but for communities and our nation. We will not go quietly into the night or stand idly by as civil rights are stripped away and critical programs are decimated. This fight is for our children, who represent the future of America. I hope you will continue to stand with us and support our work.

With fortitude,



## *Impact & Wins*

In two powerful town halls hosted by Rep. Maxine Waters, Mayra Lara EdTrust-West delivered a compelling data-backed case for protecting school and university funding, highlighting the devastating impact these cuts would have on California's education system and economic future. As the sole education advocate on both panels, Mayra fielded live questions and underscored the urgent need for continued advocacy.

In June, EdTrust in Louisiana joined a coalition of organizers, students, and advocates to defeat HB685, which would have banned DEI programs in state agencies and higher education. After passing the House, the bill stalled in the Senate—thanks to overwhelming public opposition, the leadership of the Legislative Black Caucus, and relentless organizing across the state. This win is a testament to the power of collective advocacy.



## On the Hill

This spring, the government affairs team stayed on high alert and in rapid response mode. We employed sustained, strategic advocacy to counter ongoing threats to education equity. As the 119th Congress advanced proposals that would undermine public education, we maintained a strong presence on Capitol Hill, supported our allies, briefed key decision-makers, and deepened relationships across both chambers.

Our budget reconciliation work took center stage through EdTrust's co-leadership of the College Not Cuts Coalition, a network of advocates, institutions, and student groups. The coalition met with more than 20 Republican offices in competitive districts and/or states, laying the groundwork for potential changes that would lessen the impact on students and borrowers. We co-drafted and distributed multiple coalition letters, including one signed by [over 40 partner organizations](#), which was sent to the leadership of the House and Senate.

EdTrust's annual Hill Day in April convened more than 70 state partners and affiliates from across the country, resulting in more than 35 meetings with congressmembers and staff. These conversations elevated the priorities of impacted communities and detailed the threats to students and families posed by various budget reconciliation proposals, including those related to private school vouchers, higher education cuts, and critical programs like Medicaid and SNAP.

Our president and CEO, Denise Forte, also spoke with senators about the threats to public education. She testified at Sen. Patty Murray's spotlight hearing, highlighting this administration's actions to dismantle ED. We submitted written appropriations requests for robust investments in FY2026 for key education programs. This work reflects EdTrust's ongoing commitment to being a trusted resource and partner for congressional offices navigating education policy challenges.

## IN THE MEDIA

- [Dept. of Ed Cuts \\$1B in Mental Health Funding](#) (CNN)
- [Advocates say state budget may still shortchange city schools](#) (Spectrum News NY1)
- [Student loan repayment plans may be changing. Here's what to know](#) (NPR)
- [State discipline law keeps Black, Latino kids in class. Trump says it's illegal](#) (Los Angeles Times)
- [A Smaller NAEP](#) (The Hechinger Report)

## ON THE BLOG

- [Getting To & Through College in the Time of Trump](#)
- [The Great American Heist Comes for Science: How NSF Cuts Threaten Our R&D Future](#)
- [The Hidden Costs of School Voucher Programs: A Community's Story](#)
- [The Great American Heist: Taxing Education, Not Billionaires or Corporations](#)



## EdTrust-West

EdTrust-West released [\*Black Minds Matter: Building Bright Black Futures\*](#). The 10-year update to our landmark report highlights ongoing disparities for Black students in California. It shows that Black students are underrepresented in advanced coursework, face higher suspension rates, and have lower graduation rates compared to their white peers, due to systemic failures within California's education system. We offer recommendations for supporting Black student success, including the creation of a [California Commission on Black Education Transformation](#).

We shared the much-anticipated [Equity 8](#), the top eight proposed bills for advancing education equity in the state. The highlighted bills would boost educator diversity and college access, and protect the right to education for undocumented and mixed-status students. These bills call for comprehensive changes to address the root causes of educational disparities and create a more equitable system for all students in California.

## EdTrust-New York

In June, EdTrust-New York released a poll and focus group findings showing that most New Yorkers are dissatisfied with the state of education and view transparency as essential to improving it. The findings highlight how a statewide data system can protect privacy and support meaningful family engagement. Additionally, we released a literacy report calling for bold, research-aligned strategies to support older students struggling with reading. Despite extensive evidence supporting the Science of Reading, students in grades 6-12 continue to be left behind, especially those from underserved groups. EdTrust-New York launched its first [Student Policy and Advocacy Lab](#), partnering with ADELANTE Student Voices and the Brotherhood Sister Sol. Ten high school students participate in monthly training, connect with statewide leaders, and influence higher education policy by sharing their lived experiences. In June, the lab hosted In Their Voices: A New York Youth Town Hall, in which students led conversations on issues such as school surveillance, funding threats, and DEI rollbacks.

## EdTrust-Midwest

Amid one of the most precarious times for public education, EdTrust-Midwest advocated for students with the greatest needs through equity-focused research and data. EdTrust-Midwest gained attention with its [2025 State of Michigan Education Report, Meeting the Moment](#), which provided new data on how state leaders can navigate this turbulent period for public schools. The report received significant media coverage.

We issued a three-point "Opportunity for All Plan" to address the underinvestment in Michigan's schools and unveiled a new [Student Opportunity Tracker](#), which tracks investments for students from low-income backgrounds against those in leading states. At our [third annual Advocacy Day in Lansing](#), we met with legislators from both sides of the aisle to share strategies for closing opportunity gaps for students and promoting fiscal transparency and accountability. We joined other EdTrust state teams to advocate for students as Congress considers proposals from the Trump administration.

## EdTrust-Tennessee

EdTrust-Tennessee's annual [Ten for Tennessee](#) award reception, brought together lawmakers, partners, and students to network and celebrate policy solutions that advance educational opportunity and access. With over 150 attendees, the event showcased our impact and laid a foundation for future advocacy.

Over the past two years, we've advocated for eliminating out-of-state tuition at Tennessee community colleges, which have the highest out-of-state tuition premium in the nation — nearly \$17,000 for out-of-state, compared to \$5,000 for in-state. This harms undocumented students, who are classified as out-of-state. In May, the Tennessee Board of Regents passed a historic 54% decrease in the out-of-state tuition rate, citing our research as a major factor in their decision.

We're also shaping the conversation around school funding in the South through The Fair Share, a new video series from Southerners for Fair School Funding powered by EdTrust-Tennessee.

## EdTrust in Louisiana

EdTrust in Louisiana has worked to support policy priorities that create equitable opportunities for students of color and those from low-income backgrounds. To engage our communities, we've produced resources such as Chalk Talk, which tracks education bills during the legislative session and helps advocates engage with state legislators. We also penned an op-ed that highlights efforts to dismantle the Department of Education. Our surveys tell real stories about Black educators, state accountability for schools, and the higher ed climate, while our Lunch & Learns provide professional development focused on advocacy and build a partner pipeline to elevate diverse voices. We've also partnered with EBR Readiness on a program that provides alternative pathways for young people.

## EdTrust in Texas

With the 89th legislative session gaveling out on June 2, we are celebrating major policy wins culminating from the tireless advocacy of our Texas team, coalition partners, and the student, educator, and parent leaders we've directly supported. Throughout the fast-paced 140-day session, we contributed to countless [office visits](#), [Capitol Days](#), and [testimonies](#) in Austin, while consistently delivering real-time updates and insights to advocates statewide.

Our team helped champion a historic [\\$8.5-billion increase in public education funding](#) that includes landmark investments in teacher preparation and compensation, early learning interventions, and special education. We secured continued funding for [need-based financial aid](#) and community college success, defended our assessment and accountability system, [codified chronic absenteeism](#), and established a [legal framework for higher education in prison](#). As we moving forward, we confront new challenges following the passage of private school vouchers and [legal action ending in-state tuition for undocumented students](#).

## EdTrust in Massachusetts

To raise awareness about the growing literacy crisis in our state and equip advocates, we launched the #LiteracyIsLiberation campaign in March as part of the [Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership](#). It comprises a [comprehensive website](#), a user-friendly [data dashboard](#), and advocacy toolkits designed to empower families and communities to act. These resources have received over 2,200 views and widespread media coverage, while also fueling efforts to pass comprehensive literacy legislation.

Our team is addressing another overlooked issue: the escalating numeracy crisis. In April, we published a brief on [The State of Math in Massachusetts](#), which draws on data and parent perspectives to paint a picture of the challenges and offer recommendations aimed at improving math outcomes for all students. We have also been responding to federal developments in the media, while highlighting solutions, mitigating harm, and keeping equity at the core of every discussion.

## Coalition Work

This past quarter, EdTrust has played a crucial role in advancing equity-focused policies across multiple states. In **Kentucky**, we supported the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in the unanimous passage of an [advanced coursework bill](#), requiring local education agencies to develop an accelerated learning plan outlining how students in grades 4-12 can access advanced coursework in language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. EdTrust provided advocacy tools and strategic guidance. In **Maryland**, EdTrust helped protect \$3.4 billion in [Blueprint funding](#), organizing a Youth Takeover in Annapolis that mobilized over 250 students. Our assistant director for advocacy & engagement testified against the governor's budget, which threatened collaborative educator time. Additionally, the [Sensitive Locations Act](#) passed, restricting ICE access to critical community spaces. Finally, EdTrust worked with partners and constituents from **Kentucky**, **Delaware**, and **Maryland** to meet with congressional staff in DC, advocating against proposed cuts to Medicaid, SNAP, Pell, and education funding impacting P-12 and higher ed students.

## P-12



## Focus on Fair Funding

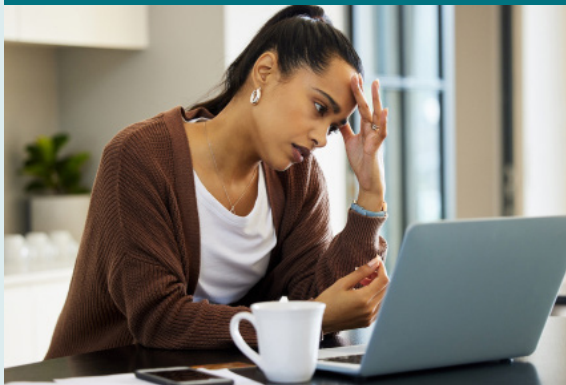
This spring, we advocated for more equitable education funding at the state level and defended important federally funded programs.

To support more equitable funding at the state level, we released [EdTrust's Policy Positions on School Funding](#), which outlines organizational principles on adequate and equitable funding, transparency, and opposition to vouchers. These policy guides are especially timely for advocates, as state policymakers face headwinds to state and federal funding, including lower enrollment and major cuts to key national programs.

At the federal level, the team spoke to the media in defense of education, advocating for a number of vital federal funding programs that faced cuts. Most prominently, we addressed the \$1 billion reduction in school-based mental health programs, through appearances [on CNN](#) and in the [Washington Post](#) and [USA Today](#).

We released two papers on the intersection of climate change and education equity, a new policy area for EdTrust. In January, we detailed how the students [most impacted by school closures during California wildfires](#) were primarily Latino and those from low-income backgrounds. On Earth Day, we released [Why Environmental Justice Is Education Justice](#), which outlines six principles that states and districts can adopt to promote equity in their responses to climate change.

## Higher Ed



## Protecting College Students

On higher education, we exposed how Trump's unlawful attempts to dismantle the Department of Education—through executive orders, anti-DEI funding threats, and cuts to DOGE—undermine public education, student opportunities across the P-16 pipeline, and civil rights protections. In addition to informing talking points and building a strong media presence through our new rapid response structure, we also expanded our advocacy efforts.

In response to Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill" and House budget proposals, which rob students to finance tax breaks for the wealthy, we've sounded the alarm on efforts to gut income-driven repayment, end subsidized loan options, stall student debt relief, and reduce the Pell Grant's purchasing power — which would push low-income and first-generation students deeper into debt while rewarding the those who already benefit from a rigged system.

We've responded with clear, consistent advocacy and messaging — meeting lawmakers, mobilizing students and partners, and highlighting what's at stake in the media. With higher education under attack, EdTrust is standing firm. We're ensuring that students aren't left behind in a deal that prioritizes billionaires over future generations.

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