

A Change Is Gonna Come

Inspired by Sam Cooke's timeless anthem of hope and perseverance

By EdTrust Staff



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The future of education stands at a crossroads. Just like in every pivotal moment of the civil rights movement, we have a choice: to sit back and watch inequities deepen, or to rise, reimagine, and rebuild an education system that serves all students well. As the singer Sam Cooke reminds us, change is not only coming — it's demanded — and EdTrust intends to lead that change.

In July, I [testified](#) before Sens. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) to oppose the [Great American Heist](#). On the panel, I presented a vision for public education in which investments and opportunities for all students are increased, civil rights are enforced, and privatization is rejected.

Two months later, EdTrust was invited by Sen. Hirono for a second time to [discuss](#) the growing barriers students face in accessing and affording college, the real impact of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), and the Trump administration's proposed FY 2026 federal budget, which severely impacts college students.

In outlining our vision for public education, we launched a [literacy campaign](#) to increase reading comprehension rates among students of color, students with learning disabilities, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds. This is not only a civil rights issue that has bipartisan support, but it's also crucial for helping students access pathways to higher education, job opportunities, and civic engagement.

We are not only laying out our vision for literacy, but we are also working to protect students, families, and schools from the [Great American Heist](#). The campaign highlights efforts to rob students of their futures — including through school voucher programs and reverse Robin Hood schemes, deliberate efforts to make college less accessible and affordable, the disappearance of federal data and research, and the president's

Impact & Wins

EdTrust and EdTrust-TN are winners of the [PIE Network's 2025 Eddie Awards](#), which honor strategic advocacy efforts leading to meaningful policy changes. Our P-12 team got the Best Collaboration award for our ongoing advocacy for auto-enrollment in advanced coursework. EdTrust-TN won the Best Defense award for blocking a bill that would've restricted immigrant students' access to public education. EdTrust-Midwest and EdTrust in Texas were finalists for the Game Changer award: Michigan for the passage of the "Reading for All" law aimed at fighting dyslexia and boosting early reading skills; and Texas for its work with partners to increase education funding.



and House of Representatives' FY26 budget proposals that decimate public education funding.

At EdTrust, we believe it is not enough to merely describe the harm of these proposals. We also want to alert advocates, districts, teachers, and families about the truly disastrous impacts ahead that will affect every American. Our new [interactive FY26 At Risk budget tool](#) does just that. The tool puts specific dollar amounts on the proposals from the president, House, and Senate, illustrating their potential impact on every student in terms of per-student funding, school lunches, and teaching positions. In addition to the budget interactive tool, we launched a [higher education tool](#) to highlight the unique affordability gap faced by student-parents at two-year colleges.

Giving our partners and stakeholders a way to see impact through our various interactive tools allows them not only to understand an issue but also form their own narratives around it. This diversity of stories builds coalitions and drives positive change. Our multimedia platform, [The Black Principals Project](#), launched in August, is a prime example of the illustrative work we do: sharing impactful personal stories while emphasizing the importance of a diverse educator workforce.

We also continue to educate advocates in state and local communities across the country, including Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington,

about the impact of the OBBBA, and the threats to education posed by current events. We have held virtual briefings for congressional staff on a host of topics, including the voucher tax credit provision in the OBBBA, the state of higher education, and the effects of state waivers on student civil rights and school accountability.

We have a lot of work ahead. Overall investments in public education are down, students' civil rights are being trampled upon, test scores are dismal, and the threat of federal education privatization looms. Still, we are achieving key wins. States continue to join our collaborative effort with Attendance Works and Nat Malkus from AEI to reduce chronic absenteeism by 50% over the next five years, with [California](#) being the latest to join. In Tennessee, we participated in multiple legislative working groups to support improved student outcomes and launched a webinar series to help advocates, educators, and families navigate the federal education landscape. In Louisiana, we expanded our youth impact by launching the 2025-26 Amplify Louisiana initiative, and elevated public discourse through Chalk Talks with state representatives and community college leaders to advance our pathways work.

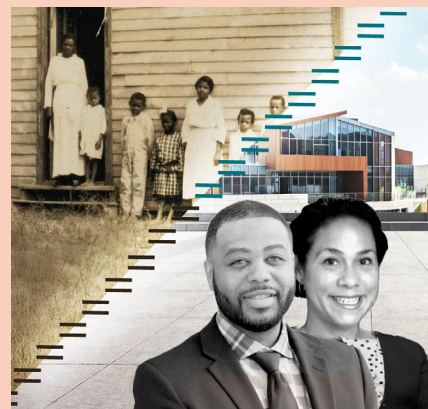
Whether in Washington, D.C. or in classrooms across America, a change is gonna come, and EdTrust will be there to meet it, lead it, and make it a reality.



Impact & Wins

[California](#) is the latest state to join our 50% Challenge to cut chronic absenteeism by 2030. During the 2023-24 school year, the state's chronic absenteeism rate was 20%. We launched the campaign last year in collaboration with Attendance Works and Nat Malkus of AEI, with 14 states initially taking the pledge.

The [Black Principals Project](#), a multimedia platform launched in early August, has received overwhelmingly positive acclaim, especially on social media. One Instagram post went viral, garnering 88,984 views across 71,231 accounts, 1,800 likes, and 614 shares.





On the Hill

Following the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) on July 4th, EdTrust has been actively involved in the regulatory and implementation process. We are closely monitoring the negotiated rulemaking process and providing comments and feedback both individually and in coalition. We are also at the forefront of educating congressional staff and state and local advocates about the policy implications of this sweeping legislation.

This summer, when the Trump administration illegally withheld billions of dollars in K-12 formula funding, EdTrust worked closely with congressional partners and state and local allies to highlight the harmful impacts of this action. Following the eventual release of those funds, EdTrust has been monitoring the status of FY25 competitive education grant funds, which have faced ongoing freezes, delays, and, in some cases, cancellations.

We also remain vigilant about the status of an FY26 federal spending

deal. Following the release of federal education budgets from both the president and the House of Representatives, we [released](#) an interactive tool that outlines the harmful impacts of these budget proposals on students, families, and educators. We continue to highlight the [bipartisan Senate proposal](#) as the best path forward to protect and strengthen public education.

Finally, EdTrust continues to be a key national leader in Congress. In July, Denise Forte [testified](#) before the Senate about the threats to public education posed by the administration's recent actions. In September, Roxanne Garza, director of higher education policy, [testified](#) before the Senate about the attacks and lasting impacts on college students from the reconciliation bill and federal withholding.

As we approach winter, EdTrust will remain at the forefront of federal education policy and will continue advocating for policies that benefit our nation's students.

IN THE MEDIA

- What Schools Stand to Lose in the Battle Over the Next Federal Ed Budget – [NPR](#)
- Jim Crow 2.0 Is Becoming Reality, but True History Can't Be Erased – [Word in Black](#)
- America's Schools Weren't Built for the Climate Era. Some Are Adapting – [TIME](#)
- The ChatGPT Generation: How Students Are Actually Using AI – [Boston Magazine](#)
- NYC's High Rate of Chronic Absenteeism: 1 in 3 Students Missed 10% of School Year – [Chalkbeat New York](#)

ON THE BLOG

- [More 2024 NAEP Results Reaffirm That Our Nation's Students Need More Support](#)
- [Robbing Our Students' Futures: The Indefensible Attacks on Public Education](#)
- [What the Federal Voucher Program Means for Students in Your State](#)
- [Libraries are at the Heart of the Reading Ecosystem](#)



In our latest equity alert, [Taking the Reins](#), EdTrust-West (and over 30 endorsers) urged California to take a leadership role in protecting students' civil rights amid federal rollbacks. The equity alert outlines five key threats and offers strategies for state and local leaders to safeguard equity and access for under-represented communities in California. Our [Growing Together](#) brief reveals that nearly half of parenting students in the California State University system feel a lack of belonging. The report recommends systemwide changes, such as clearer communication, flexible policies, and family friendly spaces, to better support these students. Additionally, EdTrust-West co-hosted a Student Parent Summit, which drew nearly 300 attendees from across California. You can read more about the summit [here](#).

The [Dual Enrollment Practitioner Guides](#), created in collaboration with the Career Ladders Project, are designed for educators who support the expansion of college access for high school students. These guides provide actionable tools that emphasize inclusive recruitment, family engagement, and cross-sector collaboration, especially for Black, Latino, and Native American youth.



Over the past few months, ET-Tennessee has tracked education policy across the state, providing expertise to legislative working groups and committees while amplifying local voices in crucial decision-making spaces. These efforts ensure that policies address the real needs of Tennessee students and communities.

With school back in session, we've prioritized keeping educators and community members informed about new [Tennessee laws that directly affect their daily work](#), covering areas from classroom instruction to resource allocation and student support services. When stakeholders understand these changes, they can better advocate for their students and maximize positive outcomes.

While federal education policy changes can seem complicated and overwhelming, they have profound implications for Tennessee schools. Funding streams, accountability measures, and program requirements set in Washington impact every district in our state. That's why we've introduced [Federal Focus, Tennessee Lens](#), a new webinar series that tracks federal developments, translates policy into practice, and highlights what's at stake for Tennessee students, families, and educators.





In July, [EdTrust-New York supported](#) the state's new [Portrait of a Graduate](#), especially its emphasis on culturally responsive education and real-world readiness. However, we raised concerns that removing Regents Exams and introducing new graduation pathways could weaken education equity. In August, [we called for truth and transparency](#) following the New York State Education Department's early release of 2024–25 assessment data, which raised more questions than it answered. Transparent and accessible data is crucial for supporting families and driving equity-focused decisions. We also [responded to alarming NAEP data](#) showing that 12th-grade scores in reading and math have dropped to levels not seen since the early 1990s, reflecting decades of systemic inequity. The New York Equity Coalition [updated its Educator Diversity Data Tool](#) to expose persistent gaps in the representation and retention of teachers of color across New York State's public schools. Additionally, we [released new polling](#) that shows strong support among New York parents and voters for a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) that ensures privacy, improves outcomes, and addresses long-standing inequities.



Amid a challenging fiscal landscape in Michigan and ongoing national attacks on public education, EdTrust-Midwest, alongside its partners, secured significant school funding increases for English learners (25%) and students from low-income backgrounds (25%) in Michigan's FY26 School Aid Budget. These wins came after months of sustained advocacy, which included legislative meetings, blog posts, press statements, commentary, and more, following the legislature's failure to meet a self-imposed deadline to pass a school aid budget by June 30. In September, EdTrust-Midwest co-hosted a convening that drew nearly 75 advocates to discuss budget implications. The event featured a visit from the new state superintendent and the senator who chairs the PreK-12 School Aid Budget. ETM also co-authored two op-eds that were featured in [Bridge Michigan](#) and [Crain's Detroit Business](#). ETM also convened advocates and partners for a half-day retreat on "Advancing Equity in Education," which provided real-time updates on Michigan's budget, as well as an update from EdTrust's national team about recent federal changes and their impact on Michigan's students. Participants provided overwhelmingly positive feedback and expressed hope for additional opportunities.

EdTrust in Louisiana

Over the past quarter, EdTrust Louisiana expanded Amplify Louisiana into five high schools serving underserved communities and welcomed our first eighth-grade class and partnership with an alternative school. In July, we hosted our annual Teacher Leader Summit with more than 300 educational leaders. We also convened Chalk Talks with [State Rep. Vanessa LaFleur](#), high school principals, and collegiate leaders to advance conversations with policymakers on dual enrollment and pathways. State director Tramelle Howard issued a [statement opposing Gov. Jeff Landry's executive order on accreditation](#) and wrote an [op-ed](#). We also co-founded the Capital Area Literacy Coalition in partnership with Teach For America South Louisiana and launched surveys capturing parent, educator, and student perspectives to amplify stories that will guide our advocacy.

EdTrust in Texas

Following the end of the regular legislative session in June, EdTrust in Texas stayed active through two special sessions that led to the passage of House Bill 8. This major reform of the state's assessment and accountability system aims to provide families and educators with more timely, actionable information while preserving honest results to help close achievement gaps.

We hosted multiple media briefings that drew statewide attention to federal threats to [K-12](#) and [higher education](#) and worked to ensure that the implementation of state policy changes delivers real benefits to students. We informed hundreds of K-12 and higher education leaders across the state about new "PREP allotment" funds aimed at expanding access to high-quality teacher preparation pathways. We continued to center students in discussions about postsecondary success, supporting our Student Advisory Council members as they engaged with elected trustees and college leaders at a statewide convening for the fourth consecutive year. And we maintained consistent advocacy, demanding clarity and consistency from state leaders following a June court ruling that ended in-state tuition for undocumented students.

EdTrust in Massachusetts

EdTrust in MA is actively addressing the state's growing literacy and numeracy crises. This summer, we convened over 40 members of the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) for an impactful in-person gathering with the newly appointed commissioner, Pedro Martinez. His vision for K-12 education has sparked momentum for deeper collaboration. We also celebrated a significant legislative win: the passage of the [Protect Education Equity Bill](#), which codifies the right to public education for every child in Massachusetts, regardless of disability or immigration status. In September, we partnered with the MassReads coalition to [testify on Beacon Hill](#), advocating for legislation that ensures every child has access to evidence-based reading instruction and materials. At the same time, we led efforts to keep math at the forefront of policymakers' minds, publishing a compelling [op-ed](#) and [blog post](#) that challenge exclusionary narratives and promote effective solutions.

Coalition Work

Recently, our partners at the Prichard Committee in **Kentucky** launched a [community schools](#) advocacy [campaign](#) urging members of Congress not to rescind funding. The campaign includes sample [messaging](#) for advocates, op-eds from community members on what is [at risk](#) for local school districts, and [interviews](#) with local media.

In **Maryland**, the Maryland Alliance for Racial and Educational Equity (MAREE) continues to influence the implementation of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. In an [article](#), sharlimar douglass, lead advocate and education policy analyst for MAREE, stressed the need to prioritize racial equity, investments in high-quality instruction, early literacy supports, rigorous math curricula, and culturally affirming learning.

In **Delaware**, EdTrust worked with Rodel to push for a new funding formula. After a months-long co-development process, Rodel persuaded the state commission overseeing the funding reform to adopt a community engagement framework.

P-12



Chronic Absenteeism, Waivers, Funding & Literacy

This summer, we monitored budget proposals from the Senate, House, and president that would eliminate billions in funding for programs students depend on, especially in high-poverty urban and rural communities. We released the [FY26 Funding at Risk tool](#), which highlights the stakes if any of these budgets become law. [NPR featured the tool](#) and quoted Ivy Morgan, P-12 director of data and research.

In response to Indiana, Iowa, and Oklahoma seeking waivers from federal accountability and assessment laws, we submitted [public comments](#) with sign-ons from national partners and co-hosted briefings with advocates in those states. In interviews with [Chalkbeat Indiana](#), [Iowa Public Radio](#) and [ProPublica](#), Nicholas Munyan-Penney, assistant director of P-12 policy, explained why this issue threatens education equity.

In July, we issued a [series of publications on literacy](#), urging policymakers to ensure that students of color, those from low-income backgrounds, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities have equal opportunities and resources.

In early October, we built an [interactive tool](#) evaluating 23 states' approaches to attendance data and accountability and their policies to reduce chronic absenteeism, showing that only half require schools to take attendance daily and have a standard definition of a full day of attendance. This tool includes a guide for states on supporting undocumented students and a strategic action guide for state and district leaders to evaluate their policies and practices.

Higher Ed

Federal Advocacy & Policy Analysis

In September, EdTrust submitted [written testimony](#) to the Senate's Higher Education Spotlight Forum, highlighting the administration's withholding of over \$400 billion in FY25 education funds — including \$2.3 billion for higher education — which would destabilize colleges and harm students from low-income backgrounds. Concurrently, Roxanne Garza, director of higher education policy, testified at a Senate "shadow hearing" led by Sens. Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). The hearing focused on the perspectives of first-generation and low-income borrowers and the stakes of federal policy. EdTrust also issued a [statement](#) condemning the abrupt cancellation of grants for minority-serving institutions (MSIs), warning that these actions undermine congressional intent and deprive students of color of vital support.

In a [widely cited blog on Pell Grants](#), EdTrust detailed how a proposed \$1,700 cut in the maximum award would limit access for millions of students, particularly student-parents and justice-impacted students. An EdTrust report, ["Supporting Student-Parents at Two-Year Colleges: Addressing the Affordability Gap,"](#) revealed that student-parents at community colleges face, on average, \$13,000 more in attendance costs per year than peers without children when accounting for child care, housing, and other necessary supports. The report includes recommendations and a dashboard to guide policy and institutional responses. We also issued a brief analyzing the provision in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act that reforms the [higher ed accountability framework](#) affecting student debt.



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