



Fierce Advocacy. Bold Change.

30 Years of Advancing Student Excellence

By EdTrust Staff



Denise Forte

President & CEO 

We have reached an extraordinary and exciting milestone: [EdTrust's 30th anniversary](#). During that time, EdTrust has stood for fierce advocacy and bold change, and has advanced student excellence through advocacy building, uplifting student voices, and using data to speak the truth.

Despite the challenges of the past year, we have not backed down. We remain steadfast in our pursuit of equity and justice. We sounded the alarm on the administration's ruthless attacks on students and the professionals who support them, including the firing of civil rights lawyers and special education advocates. We supported the efforts of states to make sure their students

feel safe and secure, even as ICE officers infiltrate our communities. Through our policy platforms, advocacy networks, media presence, and federal and state legislative testimonies, we are challenging policymakers to do better.

As states begin their legislative sessions, we are informing policymakers about threats to student success, including attempts to undermine public education and deny access to undocumented students. We are supporting programs and systems that will improve student access to high-quality learning environments focused on improving math and literacy outcomes. We are also sharing our research and highlighting bright spots in states that are seeing the benefits of overhauling unfair disciplinary practices and policies, increasing access to advanced coursework, expanding pathways, and creating equitable school funding formulas.

As a key part of our advocacy, we continue to provide rapid analyses of federal actions and offer tools to help inform education stakeholders, such as a new [state ESSA waiver watchdog site](#) and a [tool to highlight the tuition gap](#) faced by student-parents at

Impact & Wins

EdTrust's federal advocacy helped secure a [strong bipartisan bill](#) for FY26 that maintains investments in crucial federal education programs and includes a legal prohibition and report language regarding ED's ongoing illegal dismantling.

Bipartisan Fiscal Year (FY26) Labor-HHS-ED Bill Released



Impact & Wins

As Congress negotiated legislation to fund the Department of Homeland Security, EdTrust helped elevate urgent concerns about whether the bill would include explicit protections for schools and other sensitive locations from immigration enforcement. We mobilized a national coalition —issuing coordinated calls to action with UnidosUS, the National Newcomer Network, Protect Public Education, National Parents Union, and others —and co-hosted a nationwide briefing for 150+ advocates and a Hill briefing reaching 55 congressional offices. This advocacy pushed Democratic leaders to include clear protections for students, families, and educators in their negotiating demands, with DHS negotiations ongoing.

EdTrust led a [joint statement signed by more than 80 national and state civil rights and education organizations](#) denouncing the unlawful transfer of core responsibilities from the Department of Education to other federal agencies. The statement elevated serious concerns about proposed plans to move critical functions, including the Office for Civil Rights, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and the Office of Federal Student Aid, out of the Department. This coordinated pressure raised alarms among federal and state policymakers and legislators and helped slow momentum around these proposals, with those offices remaining within the Department of Education.

community colleges. We are also working closely with state partners to explain the dangers of the upcoming federal [voucher program](#) and its risks to students and public education. The fact is this program will exclude many students, and we need to make sure that every student has access to an exceptional public education.

EdTrust is equally focused on the affordability of higher education and the administration's attacks on it. The administration and its allies in Congress are taking steps to price out all but the wealthiest students from accessing higher education. This includes [changes to the student loan repayment system](#), imposing [strict loan limits](#) that are likely to push students toward private lenders, [diverting grant funding](#) from programs that directly support student success, [cutting programs that support minority-serving institutions](#), and [proposing rules](#) that lower the bar for accountability in higher education.

In December, I was honored to take this work directly to Congress, where I [testified](#) to urge its members to stop the Trump administration's dangerous, illegal, and unconstitutional efforts to sell off the Department of Education for parts. And EdTrust experts remain in high demand. Our senior vice president, Wil Del Pilar, Ph.D., [testified](#) before the House Education and Workforce Committee to oppose the dismantling of higher education systems and to advocate for innovative ways to support student success and

degree attainment. Roxanne Garza, director of higher education policy, and Augustus Mays, vice president for partnerships and engagement, have also been called upon to help members of Congress understand the devastating impact of certain federal actions. We partnered with The Century Foundation to [highlight the administration's threat to higher education](#) through the destruction and transfer of key programs. I am also excited that at this year's Equity Matters Bootcamp in May, we will welcome our first cohort of student advocates. With our new Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), where students not only participate in our research but also partner with us as co-researchers, our work can only improve as we elevate voices and center students in the fight for equity and justice.

Thirty years is a time for celebration but it is also a time for reflection. Students, families, and public education face unprecedented attacks. Recent lawsuits out of California challenging [school integration](#) and [medical school admissions](#) highlight the stakes of our current era. But as we look toward the future, we can learn from the past. And after 30 years, I can confidently say that we will persevere and ensure that educational opportunity and excellence are available to all students, not just the privileged few.

With fortitude,





On the Hill

EdTrust remained a key player in the national conversation about the federal role in education and the impact of the ongoing dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education. This winter, EdTrust leadership was prominently featured in numerous congressional events. In November, Wil Del Pilar, EdTrust's senior vice president, [testified](#) during an Education and Workforce Full Committee Hearing on innovation and the cost of college. In December, Denise Forte was invited to speak with House members of Congress about the link between education and the nation's affordability crisis. She also [testified](#) before a Senate Spotlight Forum on the harms posed by the Department's Interagency Agreements (IAAs).

Behind the scenes, EdTrust helped shape the federal response to the IAAs. EdTrust staff worked closely with congressional appropriators

and national partners to secure the introduction of [strong amendment language](#) from Sens. Tammy Baldwin and Patty Murray to block the IAAs. While that language was unfortunately not adopted, EdTrust's ongoing advocacy helped secure a [strong bipartisan bill](#) for FY26 that preserves investments in crucial federal education programs and includes both a legal prohibition and report language regarding the Department's continued illegal dismantling. Finally, EdTrust continues to play a [leading role](#) in monitoring ED's concerning efforts to grant states flexibility regarding federal funding, assessment, and accountability requirements. Through the Rapid Response Desk, EdTrust and national partners hosted a webinar for Hill staff on the implications of various state waiver requests. They also issued a [statement](#) earlier this year on Iowa's recently approved waiver submission.

IN THE MEDIA

- Why Schools Are Less Likely to Offer Early Algebra to Black & Latino Students, [CNN](#)
- As Shutdown Ends, Education Dept. Resumes Efforts to Downsize, [The 74](#)
- How Florida lost track of 30,000 students, a 'cautionary tale' for vouchers, [The Washington Post](#)
- What Breaking Up The Education Department Means For Colleges, [Forbes](#)
- Fewer students are missing school. These state policies may have helped, [NPR](#)
- Giving States Waivers From Accountability Is a Dangerous Step Backward for Kids, [The 74](#)
- Race is linked to who gets to take algebra, data shows, [The Washington Post](#)
- States Must Step Up as Federal College Aid Crumbles, New Report Warns, [The EDU Ledger](#)

ON THE BLOG

- [Separating Families. Terrorizing Communities. Upending Schools.](#)
- [Remembering IDEA — and Fighting to Keep its Promise to Students With Disabilities](#)
- [Getting To & Through College: Notes From a Student-Parent](#)
- [How Family Engagement Can Reduce Chronic Absenteeism](#)



In November, EdTrust-New York called on New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani to [take bold, equity-driven action](#) to protect students' rights and expand opportunities across New York City Public Schools. We partnered with Educators for Excellence and Robin Hood to urge officials to pause the implementation of the class size mandate, warning that [New York City's \\$1 billion law could deepen inequities](#) and strain the education budget. We also strongly [opposed the Rockefeller Institute's proposed changes to ELL funding](#), which would exacerbate inequities and jeopardize student success.

In December, we released [Solving the Equation: What Families Think About Math Instruction, Access, and Opportunity in New York](#). The report underscores the urgent need to strengthen math teaching and learning, particularly for students of color, those from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners. We also urged state leaders to address [persistent achievement gaps](#) and expand evidence-based practices following the [2024–25 assessment results](#).

In January, we [supported Gov. Kathy Hochul's Universal Child Care vision](#) and Mayor Mamdani's [3K and 2-Care expansion](#) and praised the [2026 State of the State proposals](#) that advance educational equity through child care, data systems, tutoring, emergency aid, and science-of-reading-aligned professional learning.



In a new blog post, Christopher J. Nellum, Ph.D., kicks off [EdTrust-West's 25th anniversary](#) with a reflection on a year filled with challenges met by collective wins that remind us all that advocacy works. From expanding college access to strengthening the teacher workforce, Nellum makes the case for why our impact as education equity advocates continues to grow.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's 2026-27 budget proposal included a \$100 million investment in dual enrollment — a win we championed to open new college pathways for thousands of students. Read our full statement [here](#).

The EdTrust-West TK-12 policy team presented at the California Educator Diversity Action Network (CEDAN) Building Bridges Summit II. This summit brought together over 125 educators, advocates, researchers, state leaders, and community partners to collaborate on solutions for recruitment, retention, pathways, and compensation. The EdTrust-West team led the compensation workgroup, grounding discussions in real educator experiences and policy-focused questions to shape a shared policy agenda for California's educators.



Over the past quarter, EdTrust-Tennessee has deepened its role as a statewide and regional convener, creating space for policymakers, advocates, and community leaders to engage directly with the most pressing education equity challenges facing Tennessee and the South. Through a series of [Regional Roundtables](#), we connected federal and state policy shifts to local impacts, elevating on-the-ground perspectives and aligning partners working to advance student-centered solutions.

This period also marked the release of [The Undercount](#), an analysis that examines how Tennessee's narrow definition of economically disadvantaged students limits access to resources for schools serving the highest-need populations. The report has become a cornerstone of our legislative advocacy, informing conversations with lawmakers and stakeholders as we advance efforts to modernize accountability and funding systems to more accurately reflect student needs.

As federal flexibility under ESSA and accountability debates continue to evolve, EdTrust-Tennessee has remained a leading voice in translating these shifts for advocates and decision-makers, emphasizing the importance of transparency, equity, and guardrails to protect underserved students. Concurrently, through our Southerners for Fair School Funding initiative, we released updated [State Rating Rubrics](#) to support advocates across the region in assessing how well state funding systems align with equity principles and in advancing coordinated, data-informed policy agendas. Alongside this work, we strengthened the [Education For All](#) coalition by mobilizing partners, honing shared messaging, and reinforcing a unified narrative around the policies needed to protect every student's access to a public education.



Our new report, [Hope and Hard Work Ahead: Building a Strong and Diverse Teacher Workforce for Michigan's Students](#), examines Michigan's struggles to attract and retain teacher candidates of color. ETM researchers identified where the greatest gaps lie and presented evidence-informed strategies to expand access, prepare educators equitably, and retain talented teachers long-term. This report, which garnered [significant media attention](#), accompanied our [#TeachersWeNeed](#) campaign, which lifted the voices of diverse educators. During Michigan's school aid budget season, ETM and partners advocated for increased fair funding for students with disabilities, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds through coalition-building, [guest commentary](#) in the media, meetings with policymakers, a letter to the governor, and [public testimony](#) before the Michigan Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for PreK-12.

In January, EdTrust [announced](#) Brian L. Love as EdTrust-Midwest's new state director. In this role, Love will lead ETM's policy and advocacy agenda focused on ensuring educational access and opportunity for all Michigan students, from early learning through higher education, while strengthening partnerships, advancing evidence-based policy, and delivering equitable results statewide. Previously, Love served as EdTrust-Midwest's director of community engagement, where he led community relations and partnership-building efforts.

EdTrust in Louisiana

EdTrust in LA advanced its advocacy, coalition-building, and narrative-change priorities this quarter through coordinated engagement across K-12, higher education, and community partners. We published two op-eds elevating student voices — one on [HBCUs](#) and another on [TRIO](#). Amplify Louisiana continued its monthly programming, reaching over 200 students across five high schools in underserved communities, with plans to expand to college campuses. We launched a statewide Leadership Roundtable Cohort, convening 15 school leaders to strengthen advocacy capacity and leadership legacy. The team also formalized the Capital Region Literacy Coalition, convening over 30 partners to assess regional literacy needs, align resources, and expand family support, including piloting a parent-facing literacy app with community groups. Additionally, the Bayou Classic Experience Cohort convened over 25 education partners to recognize HBCU advocacy efforts. Across five active coalitions, the team increased visibility, deepened partnerships, and enhanced statewide impact.

EdTrust in Texas

Following the end of a second special [legislative session](#) in September, we shifted to implementing new state policies. Having secured new funding to expand and incentivize high-quality teacher preparation, we engaged with partners to influence rulemaking and launched a unique [PREP Allotment Budget Workbook](#) that is being used by school leaders statewide to support planning efforts. As the legislature moves into its interim work, we are using research to inform priorities for the 2027 session. We released briefs focused on ensuring [paraprofessionals](#) and [apprentices](#) have access to pathways for teacher certification and are conducting research to address students' unmet financial needs in higher education. We are also selecting members for our [Texas Higher Education Student Advisory Council](#) to engage state leaders as they consider performance-based funding for public universities. Finally, we are informing state decisions resulting from Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill." Most notably, we are raising awareness among partners and state leaders to influence the implementation of the new [voucher tax credit](#) and Workforce Pell programs.

EdTrust in Massachusetts

By putting early literacy front and center, EdTrust in MA helped spark statewide momentum for change. Through our work with the [MassReads](#) coalition, we advanced landmark legislation to ensure every child has access to high-quality, evidence-based reading instruction. The bill recently passed in both the House and Senate and now heads to a conference committee — and with strong signals of support from the governor, we're optimistic about its path forward. In December, we released [The State of Math Instruction: Equity, Access, and Outcomes](#), a brief that highlighted the pressing need for stronger math curricula and better support for educators across the Commonwealth. Simultaneously, we elevated equity in higher education by co-releasing [Laying the Groundwork: A Policy Roadmap for Massachusetts Public Higher Education](#), built around four core pillars to strengthen the state's public higher education system. Together, these efforts reflect our commitment to advancing opportunity from early learning through college completion.

Coalition Work

In Maryland, the Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education (MAREE) began the legislative session by launching its [2025-26 advocacy agenda](#). This year, MAREE will support three pieces of legislation that 1) ensure immigrant students feel safe by ending 287(g) agreements; 2) decrease disparities in school discipline rates; and 3) combat the criminalization of Black and Latino students.

In Delaware, EdTrust continues to support our partner Rodel in developing a student-centered funding formula. With a new formula expected to be introduced to the legislature this year, EdTrust is working with Rodel on how best to engage the community in these discussions to create a formula that benefits all students.

Following legislative wins in the 2025 session, the Prichard Committee in Kentucky is advocating to strengthen the automatic enrollment bill HB190 to include placement in advanced Algebra. EdTrust is boosting the advocacy capacity of the Prichard Committee and its members through strategic state advocacy training.

P-12



A Public Voice for Equity

This winter, the national P-12 team highlighted two long-standing EdTrust policy issues: the need for strong federal accountability guardrails and equitable access to advanced coursework. With states across the country applying for waivers of federal accountability laws, we [launched a website](#) with partners All4Ed and the National Parents Union to provide important information about these waivers and resources for advocates in various states. After Iowa's waiver was the [first approved](#) by the Trump administration, Nicholas

Munyan-Penney, assistant director for P-12 policy, was quoted in [Chalkbeat](#) and [The Hill](#), sharing important equity perspectives with trade and Capitol Hill media.

Allison Rose Socol, vice president for P-12 policy, spoke in two national outlets — [The Washington Post](#) and [CNN](#) — about new research indicating that schools are less likely to offer Algebra I to Black and Latino students in middle school. These media appearances follow a [substantial body of EdTrust research on the subject](#) and an [award for our work with partners](#) to expand policies that automatically enroll high-achieving students in advanced coursework. EdTrust experts also conveyed the message of equity and fairness in interviews on vouchers with [The Washington Post](#) and on chronic absenteeism with [NPR](#).

Higher Ed

Fighting for the Future of Higher Ed

In November, EdTrust helped shape a national public policy conversation about the future of higher education at the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO) Conference in Las Vegas — joining Illinois State Sen. Celina Villanueva, City Colleges of Chicago Chancellor Juan Salgado, and Emily Labandera of Excelencia in Education for a panel discussion. This conversation outlined the threats to the historic value proposition of higher education — economic mobility, civic engagement, and community resilience — and how state leaders can defend and strengthen these outcomes.



Our advocacy also included rigorous policy research on emerging threats to student opportunity. We published two briefs analyzing how the implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act's provisions will reshape federal student aid and accountability systems. One brief explains how the [elimination of GRAD Plus loans](#) and the imposition of new loan caps will disproportionately restrict access to graduate education for women and students of color, especially in fields like nursing, social work, and education, undermining workforce pipelines and equity in essential professions. We also documented the administration's plan to [move the federal CCAMPIS child-care support program](#) out of the Department of Education — a maneuver that jeopardizes one of the few federal supports enabling low-income student-parents to complete their degrees, despite evidence that student-parents face extraordinary financial barriers requiring targeted support to succeed. Together, this work underscores our commitment to advancing policy solutions that protect opportunity, expand equitable pathways to economic mobility, and ensure that federal investments in higher education result in tangible outcomes for students, families, and communities.

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