edtrust 30 Years

A Nation of Promise

Fulfilling the promise of education for all students

I have been thinking a great deal about what this moment asks of those of us committed to building an excellent public education system for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

More than four decades ago, *A Nation at Risk* warned that America's education system was falling behind, shaping a generation of education policy. Today, public education is once again at risk — but for a fundamentally different reason. Forty years ago, the federal government sought to strengthen public education. Today, instead of responding to an education system in crisis, it is actively advancing policies that are making things worse. As advocates, parents and caregivers, partners, and researchers, we must respond with the same sense of urgency.

At EdTrust, we are recommitting ourselves to the promise at the heart of public education: that every student — regardless of race, income, ZIP code, immigration status, or disability, deserves an education that develops their talents, expands their opportunities, and empowers them to pursue their boldest dreams.

Too many students continue to face under-resourced schools, limited access to experienced and diverse educators, too few rigorous learning opportunities, and expectations that are set too low. At the same time, federal oversight is weakening, public dollars are being redirected to private schools, tax policy is increasingly shaping education policy, academic freedom and student free speech are under attack, and civil rights laws are being turned against the very communities they were created to protect.

Our students deserve more than a nation at risk. They deserve a nation of promise.

Denise Forte
President & CEO

Building that nation means defending students when their rights and opportunities are threatened while creating education systems where high expectations — and the resources to meet them — reach the students who have been denied both for generations. It means recognizing that education rights are civil rights.

When every child can read and do math well, learn in a safe and welcoming school, study with diverse and excellent teachers, take challenging courses, and choose from meaningful college and career pathways, students flourish. Our schools become engines of opportunity. Our democracy grows stronger. And we become a nation that keeps its promise.

That is why EdTrust is working to protect and expand public investments in under-resourced schools. Across the country, our state and national teams are advancing policies that direct resources to students with the greatest needs, defend investments in immigrant students and students from low-income backgrounds, and equip advocates with data to expose funding inequities and turn evidence into action. That commitment is also reflected in EdTrust's welcoming of the National Newcomer Network, which deepens our expertise and strengthens our connections to immigrant and newcomer students. Together, we are expanding our capacity to ensure that these students have the support, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed.

We are also responding to the administration's proposed implementation of the federal voucher tax credit program and other policies that threaten to weaken public education and civil rights protections. We will continue working with partners, communities, and policymakers to ensure that the promise of public education remains open to every underserved student.

When Secretary Linda McMahon proposed steering children toward skilled trades beginning in elementary school, we challenged the dangerous assumptions behind that idea. When states sought to lower standards to raise graduation rates, we made clear that lowering expectations does not help students; it limits their choices.

EdTrust will continue to speak plainly, advocate alongside students and families, equip policymakers with evidence-based solutions, and press leaders to do better.

As 2027 approaches, we must meet this moment with both fierce advocacy and bold imagination. We must defend civil rights, public schools, honest teaching, and affordable college — and we must build systems worthy of our students' brilliance.

The choice before us is clear: we can accept becoming a nation at risk again, or we can build a nation that keeps its promise. Our students deserve nothing less.

With fortitude,

Impact & Wins

- **Michigan invested more in students with the greatest needs.** EdTrust-Midwest advocacy helped secure increased FY27 funding for the Opportunity Index, English learners, dual enrollment, literacy, and other student supports.
- **California moved closer to expanding tools for educational equity.** EdTrust-West led a coalition of 85+ organizations to advance ACA 7, a proposed state constitutional amendment to remove the affirmative action ban in public education for the 2028 ballot.
- **Massachusetts enacted a major early literacy law.** Years of advocacy by EdTrust in Massachusetts and the Mass Reads Coalition helped deliver the Right to Read law, strengthening the state's approach to reading instruction.
- **Bipartisan education priorities advanced in Congress.** EdTrust advocacy helped move Senate legislation to protect key education programs and advance priorities in literacy, college outcomes data, and access for students with disabilities.
- **100 organizations came together to protect federal education programs.** Working with Education Protection War Room partners, EdTrust helped organize a joint statement opposing 10 bills related to the transfer of U.S. Department of Education programs.
- **EdTrust joined national civil rights and disability partners to protect Head Start.** Eight organizations called for preserving the quality standards and comprehensive services that support children and families.
- **EdTrust's advocacy earned national recognition.** At the 2026 PIE Network Eddie Awards, EdTrust in Massachusetts and the Mass Reads Coalition were honored with **Game Changer Campaign of the Year**; the Education Protection War Room Coalition received **Best Defense**; and EdTrust-West's **Black Student Success Data Tool** was recognized as **Best Kept Secret**.

On the Hill

From July through September 2026, EdTrust advanced a federal advocacy agenda focused on protecting public education, preserving the U.S. Department of Education, and defending critical investments in students. Throughout the quarter, EdTrust participated in congressional events highlighting the impact of recent federal education policy changes.

In July, Wil Del Pilar, EdTrust's senior vice president of higher education, served as a panelist at a House Education & Workforce forum on the student loan changes enacted through H.R. 1. During the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Annual Legislative Conference, Augustus Mays, EdTrust's vice president of partnerships and engagement, participated in panels on the dismantling of the Department of Education, the implications for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and the federal voucher tax credit program created by H.R. 1.

EdTrust also remained a leading voice on Capitol Hill through direct advocacy. Together with education and civil rights partners, we led two virtual briefings for congressional staff on ESSA waivers and the Department of Education's harmful interagency agreements (IAAs) affecting the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

Our advocacy helped advance a bipartisan package through the **Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee** that would reverse several **interagency agreements (IAAs) transferring education programs out of the U.S. Department of Education**. The committee also advanced legislation EdTrust has long championed to strengthen literacy, improve college outcomes data, and expand access and opportunities for students with disabilities.

EdTrust also continued building momentum for evidence-based solutions.

Through its partnership with AEI and Attendance Works, EdTrust convened state leaders to share evidence-based strategies for reducing chronic absenteeism and sustaining national attention on improving student attendance. EdTrust also mobilized partners and school leaders to defend federal education protections and advance strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism.

As the 119th Congress approaches its conclusion, EdTrust continues working with lawmakers, partners, and advocates to advance these priorities and protect educational opportunity for students nationwide.

IN THE NEWS

- When Black Communities Lose Their Vote, Schools Pay the Price, *Word in Black*
- Education Department Tells Schools Race Can't Factor Into Student Discipline, *EdWeek*
- Education Dept. Pivots on Discrimination in School Discipline, NPR
- Trump Administration Removes Gender Data From School Civil Rights Survey, AP News
- Treasury, IRS proposal threatens tax deduction for school donations, CNBC
- As Trump Pulls Back School Civil Rights Enforcement, Who Will Protect Black Students?, *The Grio*
- Ed. Dept. Releases Data on Schools' Racial Disparities Months Late, *EdWeek*
- Undocumented Students Face Loss of In-State Tuition, *Inside Higher Ed*
- Louisiana Is the Blueprint for Rolling Back Civil Rights, *The Root*
- Adolescent Literacy: About Half of Massachusetts Middle, High School Students Behind in English Testing, *Boston Herald*

ON THE BLOG

Private Student Lending Threatens a National Promise

Maryland Middle School Students Are Being Left Behind

Low Academic Standards Spare Adult Feelings at the Expense of Students' Futures

High-Quality Early Childhood Care and Education Is Magic for Children — and the Economy

How Graduate Education Loan Limits Will Hurt Students With Disabilities

Getting To & Through College: How Emergency Aid Helped a College Student in Baltimore

Closest to the Problem, Closest to the Solution: Five Years of the Justice Fellows Policy Program

edtrust NEW YORK

This quarter, EdTrust-New York advanced equity across school funding, literacy, and math. In July, we released an analysis finding that New York City's FY27 class size funding more equitably directed resources to schools serving Black and Latino students and students from low-income backgrounds, while warning that facilities, staffing, and implementation challenges could deepen inequities.

In August, we released *Scaling What Works in Multilingual Literacy*, highlighting evidence-based strategies to improve literacy outcomes for multilingual learners.

We also called for an independent audit of the state's English language arts assessments following significant score fluctuations and urged greater transparency.

In September, EdTrust-New York and Educators for Excellence released A Math State of Mind, outlining four priorities to strengthen math instruction, expand equitable access to advanced math, and improve teacher preparation. We also urged the New York State Education Department to pause the rollout of NY Inspires until it develops a credible, equitable alternative for measuring college and career readiness.

edtrust WEST

Across our work, EdTrust-West continues to show that when communities come together, advocacy works.

This summer, we built a coalition of over 85 organizations to advance ACA 7, a California constitutional amendment for the 2028 ballot. If approved by voters, ACA 7 would remove public education from California's affirmative action ban, giving education leaders greater flexibility to direct resources where students need them most while leaving college admissions policies unchanged.

We also issued an Equity Alert outlining how the federal voucher tax credit program threatens public education funding and launched a campaign urging Governor Gavin Newsom to reject it.

In September, hundreds of advocates gathered in San Diego for the sixth Education Equity Forum, which also marked EdTrust-West's 25th anniversary. To commemorate the milestone, we published our 25th Anniversary Impact Booklet and a blog from executive director Christopher Nellum, Ph.D., reflecting on 25 years of promoting educational equity and the work still ahead.

edtrust TENNESSEE

This summer, Southerners for Fair School Funding, powered by EdTrust-Tennessee, brought advocates from eight Southern states to Nashville for the 2026 School Finance Institute. Over two days, advocates and national experts tackled some of the most pressing questions in education finance and developed advocacy strategies to advance equitable school funding across the region.

In Tennessee, voters will elect a new governor and state legislators this November, and those leaders will make education funding and policy decisions that will shape students' opportunities for years to come. To help Tennesseans understand what's at stake, we hosted a webinar, "Every Student Matters, Every Vote Counts," connecting local, state, and federal elections to the decisions that affect students in their classrooms every day.

Showing up for students has always meant more than what happens inside a school building. From classrooms to the state Capitol to the ballot box, EdTrust-Tennessee will keep advocating for Tennessee's students wherever decisions about their education and future are made.

edtrust MIDWEST

EdTrust-Midwest celebrated a major policy victory in July as state director Brian L. Love joined Gov. Gretchen Whitmer for the signing of Michigan's FY27 education budget. Following months of advocacy by EdTrust-Midwest and partners, the budget increased funding for public schools and adopted a new weighted funding formula that directs additional resources to students with disabilities, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds. It also increased the Opportunity Index by $259 million — a 20% increase — bringing total funding to $1.55 billion for districts with high concentrations of poverty, while adding $12.5 million for English learners, raising total funding to more than $75 million.

EdTrust-Midwest also welcomed Stacey Deering, Ph.D., as manager of partnerships and engagement. She brings more than a decade of experience in public policy, higher education, advocacy, and community engagement, and will lead partnership efforts for the Michigan Partnership for Equity & Opportunity, strengthening collaboration to advance educational equity for Michigan students and families.

EdTrust in Louisiana

This quarter, EdTrust in Louisiana expanded its policy influence, strengthened student engagement, and elevated its national profile. Amplify LA grew into New Orleans by welcoming a new school partner and expanding its model for authentic student voice. Partnerships with the Men's Federation and Southern University also created new opportunities for college students to engage as advocates and leaders.

The team continued to push for equitable school funding through its engagement with the state's Minimum Foundation Program Task Force. Our state director also brought EdTrust's equity perspective to a national webinar hosted by The Princeton Review, urging district leaders to expand access to college entrance exams and postsecondary pathways.

EdTrust in Louisiana also earned national recognition for its literacy work, as Keiara Skipper was inducted into Dolly Parton's Dolly Diamonds, whose members promote literacy and a love of reading. The team also continued advancing its FY27 priorities in literacy, college and career pathways, fair funding, HBCUs, and expanded educational opportunity.

EdTrust in Texas

With funding from the new PREP Allotment supporting more than 8,200 paraprofessionals, teacher residents, and beginning teachers this year, we are identifying the districts and education preparation partners creating high-quality pathways into the profession. We are also leveraging the new Parent Access to Supplemental Supports (PASS) program to connect struggling readers with high-impact literacy tutoring while building the advocacy capacity of parent-led organizations statewide.

As Texas prepares for the next legislative session, we are positioning student leaders to highlight higher education investments that improve affordability and boost college completion. Members of the Student Advisory Council developed policy recommendations and provided testimony to inform a new performance-based funding proposal. At the same time, we are advancing new research examining how Texas institutions are improving student success through basic needs strategies, including emergency aid, SNAP benefits, and childcare.

EdTrust in Massachusetts

This quarter, EdTrust in Massachusetts celebrated a victory with the passage of the Right to Read Law, one of the nation's strongest early literacy laws and the culmination of years of advocacy alongside the Mass Reads Coalition. We also advanced our #LiteracyIsLiberation campaign with the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP) and expanded our work by releasing a report on adolescent literacy, publishing equity-centered recommendations for new statewide graduation standards, and conducting a statewide parent poll on college and career readiness.

Our report, *Beyond the Early Grades: The State of Adolescent Literacy in Massachusetts*, found that half of students in grades 6-8 and 10 aren't meeting grade-level benchmarks on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) ELA exam, with the largest disparities affecting multilingual learners, students of color, and students with disabilities. It also highlights districts demonstrating that educational excellence and equity can go hand in hand, as explored further in this blog post.

Coalition Work

- In **Maryland,** MAREE and its partners completed a multicounty listening tour, engaging families, students, and educators on the importance of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future and how to strengthen and protect it.

- In **Delaware,** the 2026 legislative session ended with lawmakers codifying the state's new school funding formula. Gov. Matt Meyer committed $100 million to support implementation, following advocacy from EdTrust and Rodel, which continue working to strengthen accountability and ensure resources reach students with the greatest needs.

- EdTrust is expanding its impact through new partnerships in **South Carolina** and **Kentucky.** With EdTrust's support, E3 is building a statewide coalition to advance equitable school funding, school discipline reform, and culturally relevant and affirming curricula in South Carolina. Meanwhile, the Kentucky Student Voice Team is developing a statewide postsecondary network to strengthen student leadership and advocacy across Kentucky.

P-12

Pathways and a Media Voice for Equity

This quarter, EdTrust's national P-12 team members were go-to sources for reporters covering school discipline, civil rights data, and literacy.

Policy director Eric Duncan was featured in trade media and joined Al Jazeera English and *Roland Martin Unfiltered* to discuss the dangers of new federal guidance encouraging schools to ignore the disparate impact of discipline policies, particularly on students of color. Ivy Morgan, director of data and research, spoke with the Associated Press, Education Week, and NPR about the limitations of the latest Civil Rights Data Collection release and how those shortcomings reflect broader attacks on data, research, and evidence. EdTrusters also appeared on or were quoted by Univision Noticias, Fox 5 DC, and other outlets on how this administration's immigration policies are impacting students in the classroom.

EdTrust also released *Building Better Futures: 5 Policy Principles for Equitable College and Career Advising and Pathways*, a landmark report establishing a framework for equitable pathways navigation and advising. Developed in partnership with leading civil rights organizations, the report argues that exposing students to the full array of pathways is just the first step. Students also need the advising, information, and sustained support to understand and access those opportunities. EdTrust's youth-led study with students in Montgomery County, Maryland, reinforced this finding, showing that middle schoolers want more hands-on career exploration to help prepare them for college and future careers.

Higher Ed

Shaping the National Conversation

This quarter, EdTrust's national higher education team helped shape national conversations on college affordability, graduate education, workforce pathways, and higher education policy through major conferences, webinars, policy events, and research.

Jinann Bitar, EdTrust's higher education research and data analytics director, spoke at the Jobs for the Future (JFF) Horizons conference on connecting adult learners to work and at The Postsecondary National Policy Institute's Federal Student Aid Bootcamp on debt and default, co-hosted with the Hope Center. Victoria Jackson, assistant director of higher education policy, represented EdTrust on national webinars hosted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and EqRC, where she discussed graduate education and free college.

The team also released several policy resources. An advocacy toolkit equips state policymakers and higher education leaders to protect diversity, equity, and inclusion programs on college campuses. Additional briefs examined proposed accreditation regulations and their implications for accountability and academic freedom, how eliminating Grad PLUS loans will limit access to advanced degrees and drive more students toward riskier private loans, and strategies for preparing students for an AI-driven economy while protecting them from emerging risks.

EdTrust's work would not be possible without the generosity of our donors. See the full list here.