



# Fierce Advocacy. Bold Change.

## *30 Years of Advancing Student Excellence*

By EdTrust Staff

EdTrust is 30, and we will be celebrating all year. Recently, we gathered advocates, partners, funders, and past and present EdTrusters to reaffirm our commitment to the fight for education equity. We remain fierce advocates for students of color and traditionally underserved communities. We refuse to shy away from anything less than bold change and from demanding equity and excellence for our students. Decades of hard-won advocacy have helped millions of students access college and career opportunities and demonstrate their excellence, but we also know significant work and challenges lie ahead.

As part of our 30th anniversary dedication to fierce advocacy and bold change, we are doubling down on two priorities that we know will transform outcomes for students around the country: literacy and pathways.

Literacy is a civil right and a gateway to all future learning, civic participation, and economic opportunity. Without strong literacy skills, students are locked out of effective learning in their classrooms, postsecondary opportunities, and meaningful careers. Ensuring that every student can read, write, and engage deeply with complex text is foundational to any educational system.

In multiple states where we are active, including Louisiana, Michigan, New York, and Tennessee, we are already seeing substantial changes and investments in literacy. When state and district leaders employ evidence-based and equity-focused actions, like literacy screenings, explicit research-based reading instruction from teachers with literacy training, and early intervention, the results are higher academic achievement, increased student



**Denise Forte**

President & CEO 

engagement, and expanded economic and civic opportunities. In other words, literacy benefits not just students but American democracy.

Additionally, math must be included in this work. Literacy without numeracy is insufficient. Yet, math, despite being a critical equity pathway, has too often been used as a gatekeeping tool rather than a gateway to opportunity — for example, when students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are not automatically enrolled in Algebra I and other advanced math courses. We recently hosted a convening, “Math Matters: Don’t Count Us Out,” at our national headquarters to chart a path forward. We are committed to transforming math learning for all students in this country.

Pathways are critical because they ensure that the skills and knowledge students gain in schools lead to successful post-high school outcomes. Pathways are about agency and possibilities. They are about giving students real access to futures they can see, choose, and pursue — whether that's college, a career, or both. Pathways communicate to students that their learning and goals matter, and that there are many ways to build a meaningful life.

For students to excel, literacy and numeracy skills need to work in tandem with pathways. And it is only when these priorities move together that we truly change student trajectories.

We are going to put these issues front and center in policy and advocacy agendas at both the state and federal levels, in our toolkits and research, and in classrooms across the country; they will be central to policy and practice; and to budgets, accountability systems, curricula, and instructional supports.

At the same time, we are not letting up in any of our other priority areas. We are once again stepping up to protect the Pell Grant program, which currently has a projected shortfall of approximately \$17 billion over the next two fiscal years. We are also working to ensure that the administration's Workforce Pell program delivers the benefits that have been promised.

And as the administration continues its push to dismantle the Department of Education and privatize education in the U.S., our state teams are

meeting with governors and policymakers to highlight the risks of the federal voucher program, and we continue to notify advocates and partners when states request [ESSA waivers](#) to skirt requirements designed to protect student civil rights. We have also been warning about the effects of the president's proposed budget — making clear that it cuts pathways to higher education and further threatens students' civil rights.

I could not be prouder of EdTrust's state teams and offices as they continue to be leading voices on education equity in their states. I will share just a few of the many examples here. [EdTrust-Tennessee](#) led a coalition to defeat a pair of bills seeking to strip immigrant students of the right to a free public education. [EdTrust in Louisiana](#) illuminated the investment gap between wealthy and low-income school districts. [EdTrust-New York](#) revealed the obstacles students from low-income backgrounds face in graduating from college. And [EdTrust in Texas](#) published a blueprint for advancing college and career readiness.

After 30 years, we remain fierce advocates for students of color and students from low-income communities. As I reminded the graduates of the [University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education](#), our work preserves and strengthens a more just, humane, and worthy democracy. Thank you for joining us in this work.

With fortitude,



## Impact & Wins

- In the leadup to our 30th anniversary celebration, we held our annual Equity Matters bootcamp, featuring a Hill Day, where 60+ advocates from 10 states met with both Republican and Democratic members of Congress and their staff to discuss how federal policies are affecting them at the state level and push for the preservation of the Department of Education.
- Massachusetts passed the PROTECT Act, which prohibits immigration arrests at schools, childcare facilities, hospitals, houses of worship and courthouses — bringing it one step closer to being codified into law.
- Maryland passed an update to the DREAM Act, easing tax-filing requirements for DREAM Act students. This means barriers are lowered for undocumented students to access in-state tuition.
- Tennessee blocked legislation that would have denied enrollment to students based on their immigration status.
- New York Gov. Kathy Hochul included Plyler protections in the state's budget proposal, which, if passed, could serve as a model for future provisions in other states.



## 30 Year Anniversary Highlights

### Fierce Advocacy. Bold Change.

#### A Night Honoring 30 Years — and Igniting What's Next

From the moment guests stepped into the iconic Mellon Auditorium, it was clear this was not just a celebration. It was a movement. EdTrust's 30th anniversary brought together leaders, advocates, partners, and friends for a night filled with purpose, joy, and possibilities, with every moment — from the music to the remarks to the unexpected surprises — energizing the room and leaving guests wanting more.

After opening remarks from our board chair, Lisa Gelobter, the evening was hosted by ABC News senior political correspondent Rachel Scott, who kept the program dynamic, engaging, and tied to the stakes of the moment.

Keynote speaker Angelique Power, president and CEO of The Skillman Foundation, spoke with clarity and conviction. She reminded the audience that progress is not accidental but the result of people choosing to use their power to shape systems that work for everyone. Her words landed as both affirmation and challenge.

EdTrust's founder, Kati Haycock, was honored for laying the foundation that has shaped the field for three decades, while current President and CEO Denise Forte cast a bold, forward-looking vision rooted in urgency, connection, and an unwavering belief in what students deserve. Her closing remarks generated a moment of collective energy that felt as much like a beginning as a milestone.

Young people were at the center of it all. The DMV Music Academy Jazz Band kicked off the evening with vibrant, joyful sound; the Eleanor Roosevelt High School Boys Step Team electrified the audience with a high-energy performance; and the night closed with an a cappella student group's rendition of "Rise Up," accompanied by a modern dance performance. Special video cameos by Jasmine Guy and Kadeem Hardison of *A Different World* offered a cultural touchpoint, bridging generations and reinforcing the enduring influence of education and storytelling.

A standout "Fierce Advocacy in Action" segment spotlighted leaders driving change across the country, bringing our three pillars—fair funding, literacy, and pathways — to life through real stories of impact. Immersive installations throughout the space captured 30 years of progress and invited guests to reflect on how far the work has come, and how much further it must go.

This was more than an anniversary. It was a night of energy, connection, and unmistakable momentum — the kind you wish you could experience again. The next 30 years will demand bold leadership, collective action, and fierce advocacy. EdTrust is ready, and the movement is just getting started.





## On the Hill

From March through June 2026, EdTrust advanced an advocacy agenda focused on protecting federal education investments and the Department of Education (ED). A centerpiece of this work was our Hill Day, which convened advocates from 10 states for in-person meetings with 40 Republican and Democratic congressional offices, including congressional leadership staff. Over 60 participants — students, advocates, educators, and policy experts — shared firsthand perspectives on the importance of protecting federal funding, preserving ED, and their state's reliance on federal investment. These meetings reinforced bipartisan awareness of the consequences of funding cuts and weakened oversight on students.

Also, EdTrust's senior leadership joined a press conference and a Senate Democratic Steering and

Policy Committee roundtable, both of which focused on pushing back against mass firings across federal education programs, proposed education defunding, and efforts to dismantle ED's core functions. We underscored the risks to program implementation, research capacity, and students' civil rights protections.

Finally, EdTrust conducted a detailed analysis of the president's budget request, identifying provisions that would reduce support for key programs and weaken federal safeguards. We issued [a statement](#) opposing many of these proposals and called on Congress to reject them. Additionally, during Secretary Linda McMahon's most recent congressional appearances, we provided real-time responses challenging her assertions that minimized the impact of cuts and advocated for greater transparency and accountability."

## IN THE NEWS

- [Education Dept. Caps Graduate School Loans](#) (The Hill)
- [This Teaching Method, Backed by Conservatives, Is on the Rise](#) (Washington Post)
- [Treasury Taking Over Federal Student Loans](#) (ABC News)
- [America's Economic Future Starts with Diverse Teachers](#) (Word in Black)
- [Trump Admin OK's Another State's Ask for School Funding Leeway](#) (EdWeek)
- [When Black Communities Lost Their Vote, Schools Pay the Price](#) (Word in Black)

## ON THE BLOG

- [For 30 Years, We've Chosen Students — Every Time](#)
- [Will Private Dollars Fund Public Education? Only in Dreams](#)
- [What's at Stake with Pell Grants](#)
- [When Schools Stop Feeling Safe: The Hidden Learning Crisis Driven by ICE](#)



In March, EdTrust-New York released an [analysis using its To & Through data tool](#) showing that many students, particularly those from high-poverty high schools, leave college without earning a degree. Only one-third graduate on time, underscoring persistent gaps in college readiness and the need for stronger alignment between K-12 and higher education. ET-NY also published a [literacy analysis](#) finding that more than 400,000 students remain in districts using curricula not fully aligned with the science of reading, despite progress under the 2024 Back to Basics law. The organization additionally raised concerns that [NYC's class size reduction law](#) could deepen inequities if implementation disproportionately benefits more advantaged schools.

In April, we supported efforts to protect [undocumented students' right](#) to a public education and promote safe, inclusive schools. Additionally, the New York Equity Coalition's new [report](#) found that thousands of qualified students still lack access to eighth grade Algebra I. In May, we released a report finding that New York's advanced literacy reforms largely fail to address the needs of [multilingual learners](#), who continue to face alarmingly low reading proficiency rates.



This spring, EdTrust-West organized community forums with candidates for Superintendent of Public Instruction in [Los Angeles](#), San Diego, and Fresno. By engaging candidates directly with communities, we established early relationships to foster EdTrust-West's long-term influence and ensured voters could hear the candidates' visions for leading the California Department of Education.

In May, EdTrust-West hosted "Advocacy Day 2026: Leaders Affirm That Black Minds Matter" in Sacramento. We convened nearly 100 advocates who participated in advocacy training and visited legislative offices, sharing personal stories to champion legislative priorities from our [Equity 8](#), including \$1 billion for community schools and diversifying the teacher workforce.

EdTrust-West launched a first-of-its-kind [Student-Parent Resource Hub](#). This digital tool transforms a daunting college search into a streamlined experience, allowing student-parents and other adult learners to easily find and compare campuses based on programs and services critical for parenting students. The Hub also includes a dashboard that provides accountability measures to ensure campuses are meeting legal requirements.



Throughout Tennessee's 2026 legislative session, EdTrust-Tennessee and our partners demonstrated the power of uniting research, advocacy, and community voice.

For the second year in a row, EdTrust-Tennessee helped lead the [Education for All-Tennessee](#) campaign and blocked efforts to exclude children from public education based on immigration status. Legislation that would have required students to prove immigration status and turned educators into immigration enforcers failed. This outcome illustrates the tangible difference that can be made when communities organize and speak up.

We also made progress on school funding. Tennessee has long undercounted students from low-income backgrounds, limiting the essential resources available to their schools. Our [Undercount Report](#) informed bipartisan legislation that requires the state's funding review committee to study and recommend improvements for identifying economically disadvantaged students by November 2026. Now that the bill is law, EdTrust-Tennessee is engaged in the review process, collaborating with partners, advocates, and decision-makers to recommend policy changes that enhance Tennessee's funding system and ensure it truly meets student needs.



EdTrust-Midwest has been leading conversations in Michigan about equitable school funding, stronger and more diverse teacher pipelines, and access to rigorous coursework. In May, ET-M released [Ready for Rigor](#), a report showing that many Michigan students — especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities — still lack access to advanced coursework and the resources that support college and career readiness. The report makes clear that these gaps reflect inequities in opportunity, not students' ability or interest, and offers actionable recommendations for change. ET-M has since briefed media, policymakers, and partners and convened a coalition retreat to advance solutions.

In April, ET-M also released new analysis on equitable funding, including the [2026 Student Opportunity Tracker](#) and the revamped [Opportunity for All](#) website. More than two dozen advocates joined ET-M in Lansing to push for fair funding. State budget proposals now include increased support for students from low-income backgrounds and English learners. ET-M also highlighted teacher pipeline gaps in its March brief, [Strong Start, Strong Teachers](#).

## EdTrust in Louisiana

EdTrust in Louisiana continues to advance advocacy and literacy for equity, opportunity, and student outcomes statewide. This spring, Louisiana [ranked first nationally in reading growth](#), a result of investments in evidence-based literacy strategies and statewide reading supports.

Our team convenes advocates, school leaders, higher education partners, and community organizations through initiatives like the Capital Region Literacy Coalition and statewide leadership roundtables, focusing on educational equity, student voice, and pathways to opportunity. We also engage partners on statewide redistricting and voting rights battles, recognizing the link between civic representation and educational outcomes. These decisions shape school funding, accountability systems, and student opportunity statewide.

As the state legislature debates funding priorities, EdTrust in Louisiana advocates for protecting public education investments, literacy interventions, and equitable access for historically underserved students.

## EdTrust in Texas

EdTrust in Texas is seeing the fruits of prior policy wins ahead of the January legislative session. More than 500 school systems opted into the state's new "PREP Allotment," and [recent statewide data](#) shows improvements in teacher certification and retention. Landmark reforms to how the state funds community colleges are translating into improved student outcomes, with Texas now [outpacing the nation in credential production](#) and rising completion rates among Pell recipients.

Student, parent, and educator leaders continue to propel our work forward. Equipped with [model policies to improve college and career readiness](#), coalition partners are winning district-level policy changes. Members of our [Higher Education Student Advisory Council](#) are analyzing funding and outcomes at their four-year universities and are influencing a new performance-based funding model expected to impact more than 700,000 students. And we are lifting up colleges that are driving completion by meeting students' basic needs and [replicating proven models like ASAP](#).

## EdTrust in Massachusetts

EdTrust in Massachusetts drives policy and advocacy for students. With the Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership (MEEP), we submitted a [FY27 State Budget Advocacy Letter](#) urging greater investments in Early Education and Care, full funding for Literacy Launch, expanded Early College and SUCCESS Program access, and sustained universal free school meals. Our higher education coalition (CHEAO) submitted a [FY27 Higher Education Budget Recommendations Letter](#) and a [FY26 Supplemental Budget Letter](#), focused on affordability, access, and student supports in public higher education. We shaped statewide conversations on AI in education. Using findings from [our statewide parent poll](#), we published a blog with EdTrust President and CEO Denise Forte and secured [EdTech Magazine](#) coverage on building family trust as AI reshapes classrooms. We also sent a [memo to the Statewide Graduation Council](#) outlining equity-centered guardrails for the state's new graduation framework, ensuring it prepares students for college, career, and civic life.

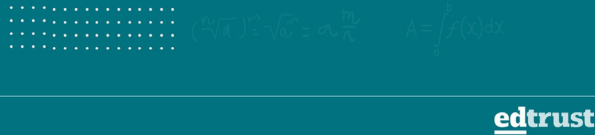
## Coalition Work

In Maryland, MAREE's advocacy led to passage of four priority bills increasing student protections and educational access. These bills included a ban on 287g Agreements; the Youth Charging Reform Act (SB323), ending automatic charging of 14- and 15-year-olds as adults; the Maryland Community Trust Act (SB 791), limiting local law enforcement's cooperation with ICE; and the DREAM Act expansion, increasing in-state tuition access for undocumented students. The session ended with a celebration attended by over 60 advocates, students, and community leaders. MAREE also submitted testimony on Maryland's proposed comprehensive adolescent literacy policy, expanding the literacy framework to grades 4-12.

In Kentucky, the Prichard Committee concluded the legislative session with passage of [HB253](#), requiring statewide evidence-based reading curricula and dyslexia supports.

In Delaware, EdTrust and Rodel submitted testimony on the first in a series of bills creating a more equitable school funding formula, an important step toward long-overdue reform.

## Math Matters: Don't Count Us Out



## School Improvement & Math Equity

The P-12 team made its mark this spring in several key areas from school improvement to curriculum diversity to math equity.

In March, we published [Examining State Education Agency Perspectives on School Improvement Supports](#), which examines school improvement approaches and recommends ways to advance equity. We also launched a related blog series.

In April, William Rodick, P-12 practice lead, was quoted in [The Washington Post](#) on the dangers of the “classical education” movement, which narrows the student curriculum. In late May, we held “Math Matters: Don’t Count Us Out,” to mark the work of EdTrust’s [Math Learning Network](#), preview our forthcoming math policy agenda, and discuss math equity with local educators and students.

## Higher Ed

### Addressing Affordability and Student Success

Despite mounting federal threats to higher education access, affordability, and equity, EdTrust’s higher education work helped equip advocates, policymakers, and institutions with the research, policy guidance, and strategic support needed to push back against harmful rollbacks and advance student-centered reforms. As the Trump administration and its allies intensified efforts to weaken federal oversight, restrict aid pathways, and dismantle equity-focused initiatives, EdTrust positioned itself as a leading voice defending higher education as a civil rights and economic mobility issue.

This quarter, the team produced impactful research and actionable policy recommendations that directly informed state and institutional discussions on affordability and student success, including [Supporting Student-Parents at Two-Year Colleges: Addressing the Affordability Gap](#), [Strengthening the Emergency Student Safety Net](#), [How Land-Grant Institutions Can Better Serve Indigenous Students](#), and [A Guide for States on Implementing Workforce Pell Grants](#). These resources helped states and advocates navigate rapidly shifting federal policy landscapes while advancing protections for underserved students. We also responded to Congress’ negotiated rulemaking on Workforce Pell, accountability, student loan repayment, and accreditation.

EdTrust deepened partnerships across Texas, New York, Tennessee, Louisiana, and California to strengthen emergency aid strategies, student-parent supports, affordability initiatives, and equitable completion efforts.

We also elevated our influence nationally through presentations and policy leadership at NCAN, Complete College America, SHEEO, Lumina Ready States, and international convenings, helping shape field-wide conversations on graduate affordability, Workforce Pell implementation, Native student success, and equitable student outcomes. This work strengthened cross-sector coalitions, informed state policy responses, and advanced practical solutions that protect pathways to degree attainment and economic mobility for historically underserved students.



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