

Advocating for Educational Equity & High Standards

A toolkit to help you ensure your child graduates high school ready for college and career



A Companion to The Leadership Conference Education Fund's
Grassroots Campaigns & Advocacy Toolkit



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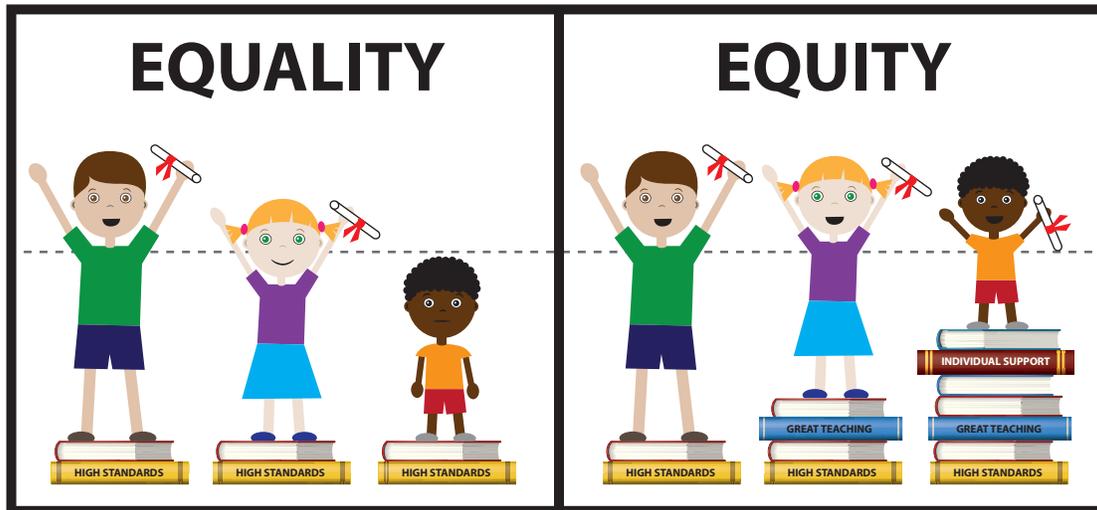
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Why Educational Equity Matters



Educational equity means ensuring that each child has the resources, teachers, interventions, and supports that they need to be successful.

For far too long, the zip code a student lives in has determined his or her potential for educational success. Between states, school districts, and schools, there are stark differences in expectations for students, funding, distribution of highly qualified teachers, access to rigorous courses, and a number of other important investments and resources that are vital to a student's success. These inequities particularly disadvantage many of the nation's districts where low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities, and English-language learners make up a significant part of the population.

The world is a more demanding place today than ever before. Not only do students have to compete with others in their community for colleges and jobs, but they must also compete with students around the country and the world. Our public schools must provide the knowledge and skills that students need to succeed. And they need the resources to do it.

Since 2010, states across the country have taken an important first step toward greater equity. More than 40 states have adopted new, high, and consistent standards to raise the bar for what each student should know and be able to do by the end of each grade so they can graduate high

school college- and career-ready. If implemented with the necessary, equitable resources and support, these rigorous standards can improve education for all students.

Since every child is being asked to meet higher standards, states and school districts have an obligation to provide every resource necessary to students, teachers, schools, and parents so that children can meet the standards and graduate high school ready for college or a career. **Parents and local leaders must be at the forefront of advocating for equity and holding school systems accountable to ensure every child graduates high school college- and career-ready.**

This toolkit was created to educate, equip, encourage, and empower you to advocate for greater education equity in your local community. It is designed to be used in conjunction with The Leadership Conference Education Fund's Grassroots Campaigns & Advocacy Toolkit. Find the toolkit here: http://civilrights.org/action_center/toolkit/.



Background on the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards were created through a bipartisan, state-led initiative made up of governors and state superintendents dedicated to supporting consistent standards-based education reform efforts across the states. Most states adopted the new standards in 2010 and began implementing them.

The standards spell out what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level. This helps to ensure higher expectations for students and provides clear, consistent guidelines for teachers and administrators who are tasked with instruction. These higher expectations will challenge students to develop a deeper understanding of subject matter, to learn how to think critically, and to apply what they are learning in real-world situations.

The standards also ensure that states, districts, and schools across the country have the **same standards** at each grade level in math and English so that students have to meet the **same expectations** no matter where their family lives, how much money their parents make, or their race or ethnicity.

Every parent wants their child to be ready for college and a career that pays a living wage. So parents have a lot at stake in making sure its state invests in every child and teacher in every school, to ensure that the promise of the new standards is realized.

What is a standard?

Standards spell out what every student should know and be able to do in each subject by the end of each grade. High and consistent standards prepare students to succeed in college and in the workforce. They help parents have a clearer idea of what their child should know and be able to do to get there.

It's important to have aligned assessments to measure how well students are meeting the standard. These assessments are a tool to help parents, teachers and schools know where to make adjustments to help all students succeed.

Examples of the Common Core State Standards

1. Every student should know how to count to 100 by ones and by 10s by the end of kindergarten.

one, two, three...
ten, twenty, thirty...

2. Every student should be able to tell and write time in hours and half-hours using analog and digital clocks by the end of first grade.



3. Every student should be able to describe characters in a story and explain how their actions contribute to the way the story progresses by the end of third grade.



Planning for Success with Your Educational Equity Advocacy

1. **Identify the problem in your community:** Determine what you want to change to make sure every student has what they need to succeed.
2. **Understand the Issue:** You don't have to be an expert on the issue in order to advocate for it. Find out as much about the issues as you can. Understand how an issue affects students, recent trends, how inequity may play a role, what decisionmakers influence the issue, etc. Determine your personal connection, or story, to the issue. How has it impacted you or your child? There are many places you can go to research and learn more about education issues. Check out our "additional resources" page in this toolkit, search online, and talk with local organizations who are doing this work.
3. **Identify the source(s) of the problem:** Education equity issues or problems often have multiple sources. For example, you may be concerned about a low graduation rate in your school district or a particular school. The sources may be multiple factors, starting from lack of access to early childhood education to lack of tutoring or extra learning time. When planning your advocacy, you will need to be clear about what problem you are addressing and plan your campaign around addressing this problem.
4. **Set SMART goals:** Your campaign should have clear goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed. *See Grassroots Campaigns and Advocacy Toolkit page 1.*
5. **Determine the strategies needed to reach your goal:**
 - a. **Organizing Your Community:** how can you get other people involved and mobilized around this issue? *See Grassroots Campaigns and Advocacy Toolkit page 14.*
 - b. **Engaging Public Officials:** who do you need to engage and how should you engage them? *See Grassroots Campaigns and Advocacy Toolkit page 31.*
 - c. **Communicating Effectively:** should you use media to get your message out to a wide audience? *See Grassroots Campaigns and Advocacy Toolkit page 18.*



You can use this worksheet to determine your campaign goals, who you will ask to help you, and what you will do to achieve your goals. Work together to create a written plan with dates and timelines to help you stay organized and accomplish your goals.

<p>Identify the problem (or issue) in your community What is the education equity issue, barrier or problem to be solved? What in your community prevents all children from achieving high standards?</p>	
<p>Understand the issue What relevant information have you learned about this issue from your research and talking with other parents, students, and school leaders?</p>	
<p>Identify the source(s) of the problem What is the root cause of the problem? What major factors contribute to this issue? What resources must be increased or what barriers can be removed to ensure that every child succeeds?</p>	
<p>Targets Who makes decisions around this issue?</p>	
<p>Set SMART goals What specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed goals can you set to impact or solve the problem?</p>	

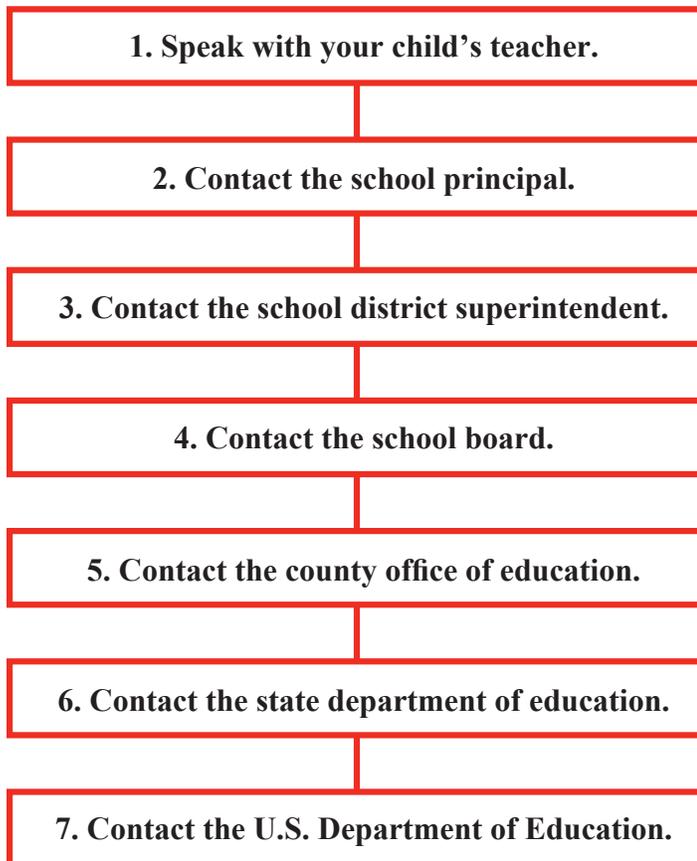
Determine the strategies needed to reach your goal(s)

<p>Organizing within your community: Who can you recruit to be part of this effort? Are there others in your community already doing this with whom you can work? Who are the people most affected by this issue and how can you get them involved? How will you recruit them? Are there other people or groups who are not directly impacted but may be helpful to this campaign?</p>	
<p>Engaging public officials: What can you do to make your targets act on your issue? Who or what will influence them? What do you want to say to these decision-makers?</p>	
<p>Communicating effectively: What communications strategies will amplify and support your goals?</p>	



Chain of Command: Solving a Problem in a School Setting

It is important to understand the steps to take in order to appropriately address a situation that may arise in the school setting. If an issue comes up in the classroom or school campus, be sure to document accurate information, act assertively, keep calm, and try your best to collaborate to find solutions to problems. The following is the usual “chain of command” and knowing this will help you determine who to speak to as you plan to voice a concern or resolve a problem:



More tips when addressing a situation in school:

Document the specifics before taking action: *Who, what, when, where, why?*

- Make sure to call or meet the appropriate person following this hierarchy, until the problem is solved and until all parties are satisfied with the results.
- Write dates, phone numbers, and names of people you speak with and the response or comments you receive.
- Remember to keep copies of letters, notes, memoranda, etc. This type of information is important because it can help prove a case.

A special thanks to MALDEF for use of this information from the MALDEF Parent School Partnership (PSP) program curriculum. MALDEF PSP was founded in 1989 as a national education-related civic engagement program for Latino parents to increase educational equity of opportunity for their children and become life-long community advocates for all children.



Role of Local, State and National Institutions and Elected Officials in Public Education

Many different government bodies play a role in how public education is implemented in the United States. A number of these decisionmakers are publically elected, so it's important that you vote in every election for candidates who reflect and champion your education priorities. Be sure to stay engaged with local decisionmakers by attending public meetings. You can also request a meeting to ask questions and discuss education issues that are important to you. The role of state and local institutions vary by state, but below is a list of local, state and national institutions that play key roles in public education.

LOCAL

Mayor

- Serves as the chief elected official of a city;
- Has authority over agencies and resources that impact children, such as public safety, health and social service agencies; and
- Can advocate at the state and federal level for programs and resources for the city.

City Council

- Approves budget to fund the city's public schools; and
- Holds public hearings on matters related to K-12 education.

Board of Education

- Establishes priorities for improving student learning and school performance;
- Sets district policies that may include school discipline, graduation requirements;
- Adopts school district budget and decides how money is allocated between schools;
- Holds public hearings regarding the schools; and
- Hires the superintendent and negotiates union contracts.

School Superintendent

- Is the highest official in the school district who implements the school board's plans;
- Hires and manages district staff;
- Works with principals to achieve district goals and serve the needs of students; and
- Responds to interests and inquiries of the local community.

Principal

- Oversees day-to-day functioning and educational success of a school;
- Monitors the performance of school employees;
- Sets educational goals for school that align with parental, school board, state and federal guidelines;
- Develops school code of conduct and educates parents and students on school discipline policies; and
- Serves as a community liaison and public spokesperson for the school.

Teacher

- Facilitates learning in the classroom and provides students with the information and tools to master a subject;
- Develops and teaches lesson plans based on state curriculum;
- Provides and arranges for additional academic support when students are struggling; and
- Communicates student progress with parents.

Tip

Review the Grassroots toolkit “engaging public officials” for ideas on how you can influence and connect with public officials.

STATE

State Legislature

- Represents their constituents when passing legislation;
- Assigns members to committees and the education bills start in the designated education committee;
- Sets state requirements relating to education at all levels—from preschool through high school to higher education and continuing education; and
- Appropriates funds for the state’s public schools.

State Board of Education

- Is responsible for the adoption of content standards, in many states.

State Department of Education

- Implements and oversees state and federal education law, including how funds are used;
- Sets accountability systems or expectations of what college and career readiness looks like in schools and districts; and
- Develops and implements programs for school improvement.

State Superintendent/Commissioner

- Is the leader and executive officer of the state’s department of education;
- Oversees implementation of the state’s education laws and policies; and
- Manages operations for the state’s public school system.

NATIONAL

U.S Congress

- Represent constituents before Congress;
- Assigns members to committees and the education bills start in the designated education committee;
- Oversees federal programs and initiatives dealing with education at all levels—from preschool through high school to higher education and continuing education; and
- Appropriates federal funding for the nation’s public schools.

U.S Department of Education

- Distributes funds to individuals and states;
- Ensures equal access to education for all children by prohibiting discrimination in programs receiving federal money;
- Enforces federal civil rights laws relating to public education, including for students with disabilities and English learners;
- Collects and publishes data and manages research on important education issues; and
- Assists the president and Congress in implementing education policies and laws.



How School Funding Works

The critical question of how to achieve student success is directly related to what resources are available to a school and to students. For example, financial resources could be needed to increase afterschool programs in your district.

Below is a review of how local education funding generally operates.

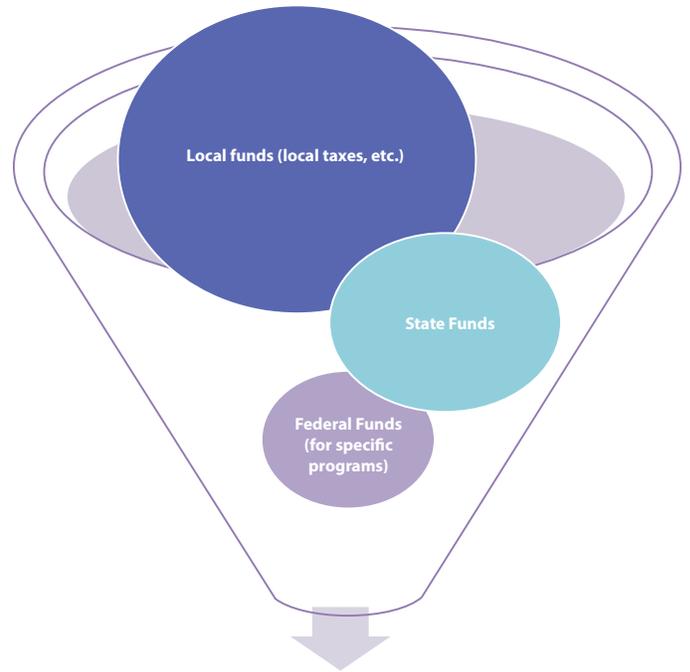
K-12 public education is funded by a mix of federal, state, and local governments. Every school, district, and state is a little different, but in general:

Local funding: In most states, local funding makes up the largest part of school revenue and is usually raised by property taxes. This heavy reliance on property taxes can produce large school funding inequities between districts with higher poverty and lower property tax revenue and districts with greater wealth. Some states attempt to address the inequity by developing formulas that help equalize disparities and increase funding to disadvantaged areas.

State funding: State governments also contribute revenue raised by sales taxes and other taxes to local districts.

Federal: The federal government provides assistance to the states and districts in an effort to ensure low-income students receive additional resources. The majority of federal funds are distributed to states and districts based on the number and concentration of students living in poverty in a given area. Decisions made at every point in the process can make funding more fair or less fair. But it is important to remember that budgets are public documents and you can get involved in the process by contacting your elected representatives. You have the right to understand how your tax dollars are being spent and to evaluate the use of resources.

Districts allocate the money from these sources throughout the school and district through a budgeting process.

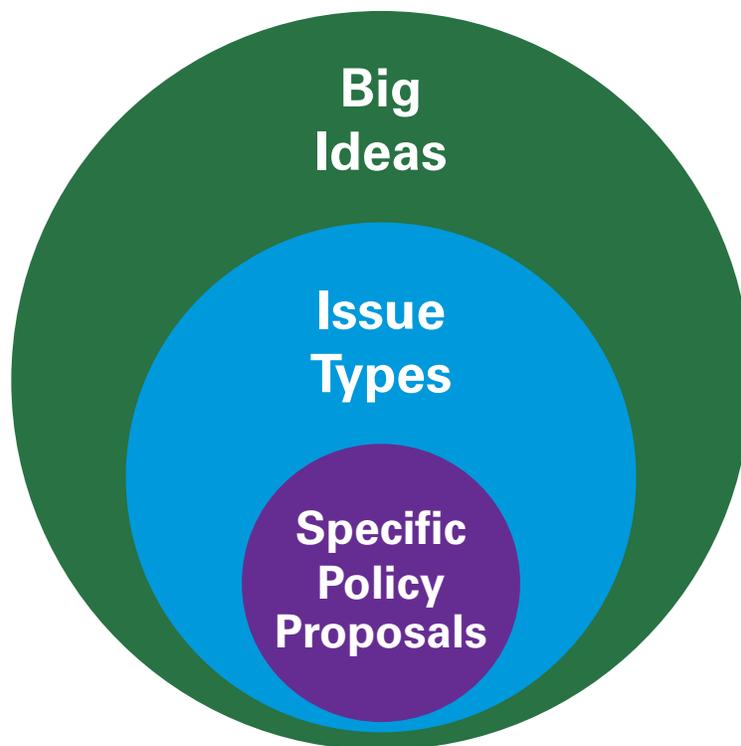


School districts take funding from these sources and allocate them to schools. Make sure your local officials hear your thoughts on how education funding should be prioritized.

Tip:

If you're advocating for a resource that requires funding, start by meeting with your local school board member and learning about how your local education funding works and how you can get the funds needed for this resource.

Tips for Creating Effective Educational Equity Messages



A message is what you say to move people to take action on your issue. Here are some tips for:

Framing

Framing your messages in moral terms is the *single most important thing* that you can do to create an effective message. Facts alone are not enough. You have to frame your facts with a moral argument—with values—that resonate with the people to whom you are communicating.

Audience

Knowing which audience you are speaking to at any given point—and tailoring your message to it—will determine the success of your message.

Most people tend to fall into one of three categories, which should help you to tailor your message – and how to think about what kinds of facts and information you should include.

Level One: Big ideas/values

Most people fit here. Framing your education messages with big ideas and values that most people hold (i.e. opportunity, fairness, equality, equity, community) makes it more likely to move people to your preferred policy proposal.

Level Two: Advocates

People who generally care about education issues fit here. You can use more data and specifics with this group because advocates are more interested in some of the details.

Level Three: Specific policy proposals

People interested in the specifics of policymaking fit here, which is typically not very many people. People in this group can include some legislators, policy analysts, lawyers, and journalists. Communicating to this group of people generally requires deep substantive information on education policy (e.g. the standards movement since the 1990s or school funding formulas).



How to Talk about Equity

“Equity” can be a difficult concept for people because it’s used in other contexts where it has a very different meaning (e.g. home equity). When we talk about equity in education, we are talking about *ensuring that every student has the resources, expectations, teachers, interventions, and supports that they need to be successful.*

Equity is at the intersection of two of the most powerful American values—“individuality” and “equality.” It is about taking into account *individual* circumstances and needs, rather than thinking about providing everyone with the same thing *equally.*

This makes equity tricky to message because you don’t want to write an equity message that conflicts with how people think of equality. You also don’t want to write an equity message that triggers people’s fear that resources are scarce and finite. If you do, people will reject your equity message even though they may believe in equity.

Example:

Good equity message: The Common Core State Standards have the potential to improve education for every child in the United States, as long as we’re making smart investments. States should allocate resources, teachers, and interventions to ensure equal opportunity for all children, and provide additional resources for children that need it most.

Bad equity message: The Common Core State Standards are raising expectations for all kids, so states should drive more resources to low-income and poor kids who are already behind.

The key is to create messages that animate other more strongly held beliefs about equality and opportunity, then articulate your message of equity.

In the above example, the good message works because it balances the equity message (additional resources) with the equality message (ensuring equal opportunity for all children). It will allay fears that some kids will lose out. The

bad message doesn’t work because it triggers people’s fears about scarcity. If you “drive resources” to one group, you must be driving them *away* from other groups.

Telling a Good Story

Personal stories are among the most effective tools for communicating. People can relate to individuals and circumstance more readily than they can relate to rhetoric (even if it’s framed in moral terms).

To tell a good story you need four elements:

Story of Me	Why do you care? Tell your story.
Story of Us	Why should we all care? Make your story relate to your community/audience.
Story of Now	Create urgency. Why do these stories mean we should DO something?
Collective Action	What should we do now?

Example:

From Head Start through 6th grade, I attended predominantly poor black schools. I did well, but there were no gifted and talented programs. My mother wanted to be able to give me more opportunities. So she sent me to live with extended family that lived in another state in a really great, predominantly white, school district. That’s where I went from 7th grade till I graduated high school. I got the education that every child should have. But I learned that too many other black kids like me aren’t as lucky as I was. We are the richest country in the world and our children must be able to compete with students from around the world right now. Surely we can make sure every school has what it needs to educate each child that comes in its doors. Let’s get it done.

Writing a Good Message about Policy

To write a good message (particularly for public speaking, interviews, or writing op-eds), you need four elements:

Shared Values	What links you and your audience (e.g. opportunity, community, fairness, etc.)?
Problem	What needs to be fixed from YOUR perspective?
Solution	Commonsense, easy-to understand solutions work best. Remember which audience you are addressing so you don't provide too much information.
Collective Action	What should we do now?

Example:

Each and every child in America deserves to receive an education that provides them the opportunity to achieve the American Dream. In a more demanding, global world, students are competing with students around the world, not just in their communities. And yet, we are not providing low-income and minority students, in particular, with the education they need to be ready to compete. Our schools must provide the knowledge and skills that **all** students need to succeed. We must ensure that resources are allocated to ensure equal educational opportunity for all students, and that additional resources go to students who need them the most.



Tips for Creating Media-Friendly Events

Events aren't automatically interesting to media. You have to make them media-friendly. Here are a few tips for how to ensure your event will be something a print or TV reporter would want to attend and hopefully cover.

Tell an interesting story. Always think about your event as an opportunity to tell a story for reporters to cover. Launching campaigns, releasing a report, or telling the story of a particular family that represents the broader issues you care about are all things that reporters find interesting. Think of an interesting angle (diverse people coming together for a common cause are usually interesting) or unusual suspects (local business people supporting educational equity) that will pique a reporter's interest.

Invite diverse, unexpected speakers or participants. Try to think about spokespersons who are interesting or surprising for your issue. Inviting local businesspeople to speak about education equity at your event might be interesting to reporters, particularly if you have more than one. Showing the diversity of support by having many different kinds of speakers also helps.

Think about the visual of your event. This is particularly important for television, but it's also important for print reporters who may bring a photographer. Use a banner

or some other kind of visual backdrop. Having a diverse panel of speakers is also visually appealing. Gimmicks also work (boxes of petitions or a big statement on poster board with signatures on it). Make sure you have the appropriate audio/visual equipment for TV reporters as well.

Pick a time that is media-friendly. Reporters have deadlines (usually they are in the afternoon). If your event is around the time that they are finalizing or filing their stories, they may not be able to come.

Give reporters access. Reporters will cover your prepared remarks, but it's also important to give them opportunities to ask specific questions to you or your fellow spokespersons. Make sure to build that time in. You can hold a Q&A session, or just allow reporters to pull aside a speaker to ask a follow-up question. Make sure you have a big enough space with seating. It's fine to have designated media area, but you don't necessarily have to do this.

Try not to have your program run too long. If reporters come to your event and they don't have time to ask their question before they have to get back to their office, they will be less likely to come to your events in the future. A 15- to 20-minute program is sufficient.



Communications Planning Worksheet

This worksheet provides a handy way to put together a communications plan. Ask yourself the following four questions and you'll be sure to build an effective communications plan.

Goals: What do you want your communications activities to accomplish?

Audience: Who must be moved to action to accomplish your goal? Who has the power to help?

Message: What is the message that will move your audience(s)?

Engagement: What tactics will you use?

See Grassroots Campaigns and Advocacy Toolkit pages 18-25 for examples of communications strategies and tactics that you can use to fill out this worksheet.

<p>What is your COMMUNICATIONS GOAL?</p> <p>What do you want your communications activities to accomplish?</p>	
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

<p>Who is your TARGET AUDIENCE?</p> <p><i>Policymakers, allies, influentials, constituents. Remember - the general public is not an audience!</i></p>
<p>Target 1:</p>
<p>Target 2:</p>
<p>Target 3:</p>



What are the **MESSAGES** that will move your targets?
Effective messages are short, values-based, and rooted in your goals.

Message 1:

Message 2:

Message 3:

ENGAGEMENT means the way you get your message out to move your targets.

Engagement - What are the tactics?

Earned media, paid media, social media? Radio? TV? Newspaper? Blog?

Timing

What is the best time to do this that advances your goal?

Partners?

Who can you work with to accomplish the tactical goal?



Sample Meeting Agenda

One way to organize your community is to bring people together to talk about relevant education issues and challenges so that attendees have common ground and are motivated to create a plan of action. This is a sample agenda for a community meeting to discuss education equity issues in your local area. To make the meeting a success, you can tailor the agenda to your local community; ask parents to bring other parents to the meeting; and make it a potluck.

Parents for Educational Equity Meeting Shepherd Park Library

July 1, 2015
AGENDA

1. **Welcome and introductions:** *Welcome everyone to the meeting and give each person a chance to introduce themselves and share something about themselves.*
2. **Purpose and goals for the meeting:** *Share the purpose of the meeting and solicit goals from the attendees.*
3. **Education equity in our schools:** *Have a conversation with parents and attendees about the challenges they are facing and the resources and supports needed to ensure that their child is on track to graduate high school college- and career-ready.*
4. **What can we do together to make a difference?** *After the challenges are identified, use this toolkit and the Grassroots Campaigns & Advocacy Toolkit to come up with a plan of how to work together to increase equity in your school or district.*
5. **Closing and action items:** *Thank people for coming, schedule the next meeting, and reiterate the action items.*

Notes:



Sample Action Alerts

Informing fellow parents and local leaders about urgent issues through email alerts is an important way to mobilize your community to take action to address inequities in education.

Below are two sample alerts that you may modify to engage family, friends and acquaintances in your own community to act on pressing education issues.

Sample Email Alert #1

Subject: URGENT: Call Superintendent Doe to ensure a quality education for our children

Dear Friend,

Have you heard the news this week? The local school board/superintendent **is considering cutting up to a third of the physics classes and also completely eliminating several other crucial math and science classes** such as AP Calculus and AP Biology. This would leave our students without the necessary courses and skillset to compete in a globalized world and leave them unprepared for college and their future careers.

This move would critically undermine the American value of equal opportunity in education. In a globalized society, our

district's children are competing against students from Massachusetts, Seoul and around the world, and need advanced placement and honors courses in order to become college- and career-ready.

Additionally, we know that cutting the number of basic science classes available would drastically increase class sizes, overwhelming teachers and failing to give each student the adequate attention and resources that they need to succeed in school.

Please join me in taking action right now: Call the office of Superintendent Jane Doe (xxx-xxx-xxxx) and urge her to call a public hearing in the next month so that community members can weigh in on the impact of this important issue on our district's K-12 students.

Sample Email Alert #2

Subject: Stop budget cuts to afterschool tutoring—sign the petition to Joe Jackson today!

Dear Friend,

As you know, I've been a parent advocate for education equity issues for most of my life. But the need to ensure a quality education for my child and all students took on even greater significance for me when I found out today that our **local school district is significantly cutting funding for free afterschool tutoring services at Richmond High School.**

It's appalling that local school boards are cutting funding for key services such as tutoring that assist underserved students—including students who are low-income, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities—at a time when students need even more resources to become college- and career-ready.

I know from personal experience that my son has benefited immensely from these tutoring services. As a working parent, I work long hours and am often unable to provide my child individual guidance on his homework on a nightly basis. In the past year since he's been enrolled in these tutoring services, his grades have increased dramatically in English and algebra. He feels empowered to make the most of his education and comes to school each day ready to learn.

Now all of that is at risk – not only for my son, but also for the countless other students in our local schools whose K-12 education could suffer as a result.

Please join me in taking action today: Sign our online petition to the local board of education member Joe Jackson [[link to petition here](#)] and ask the board to maintain current funding for tutoring and make it a higher priority in the budget for the next school year.

See *Grassroots Campaigns and Advocacy Toolkit* pages 14-17 for more examples of organizing strategies and tactics.

Sample Letters to the Editor

The letters page is one of the most widely read sections of any newspaper. It provides an opportunity for members of the community to respond to issues the paper has covered. All you have to do is write a short response to a news story (less than 200 words) and submit it. It's a great way to get your message out.

Sample Letter to the Editor (LTE) on Common Core

To the Editor:

The recent story on a federal court's rejection of Governor Joe Smith's executive orders blocking the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in Louisiana ("Court Blocks Smith's Bid to Ditch Common Core," June 18) does a great job of showing how Smith's opposition is purely political and harms the state's opportunity to improve the quality of education for all the children in Louisiana.

It's really a shame, because the governor is wasting valuable time that he could be using to ensure that the promise of higher, consistent standards are realized in the classroom. It is vital that resources be allocated to ensure equal educational opportunity for all students, and that additional resources be allocated to students who need them the most. Every child in our state is being asked to meet higher standards. Gov. Smith has an obligation with that expectation to provide every resource necessary for children to meet the standards.

John Doe

Sample Letter to the Editor (LTE) on Educational Equity

To the Editor:

Your recent story on the persistent disparities in dropout rates ("High School Dropout Rates Remain Flat," June 26) should be a call to policymakers everywhere to provide greater investment and interventions in low-income and minority students. We are simply losing too many to drop out each year.

These numbers will never change if we don't address the different challenges of all our students and if we don't invest more in the students who are not on grade level. Studies of school funding show that, overall, we spend less on low-income and minority students than we do on their more wealthy peers. If we don't start providing more equitable resources and the very best teachers we can find to our most underprivileged students, we'll never fix the dropout rate.

Jane Doe



Additional Resources

To learn more about educational equity as a civil right, visit: www.civilrights.org/education

To learn more about how you can ensure your child succeeds, review the National PTA's *Parents' Guide to Success*:
<http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>

To access general information on Common Core State Standards:
<http://www.corestandards.org> is an excellent source that includes the standards in each state.

To get a general overview of your legal right to an education:
The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has produced a FAQ page on the intersection between education and the law. While states may have additional laws, the ACLU has compiled a document that spells out some of the broader educational rights. Similarly, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund has developed a "Know Your K-12 Education Rights" pamphlet.
<https://www.aclu.org/your-right-equality-education>

http://maldef.org/assets/pdf/federal_education_rights_pamphlet.pdf

To research demographic data on a particular school or district:
The use of data is a key element to effective advocacy and is especially useful in understanding disparities within schools and districts. Every other year, the Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education releases an online database, sorted by schools and districts, entitled the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). Information in the CRDC includes access to gifted and talented programs, suspension data, and average teacher salary. Also, much of the data is disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, and English language proficiency so that you can see how well different kids are doing.
<http://ocrdata.ed.gov>

To see where your state ranks in the nation regarding school finance:
The Education Law Center (ELC) annually releases a report on school finance entitled "Is School Funding Fair?" The report goes into great detail on how different states choose to fund its public schools. Furthermore, the ELC grades each state's funding system, based on a variety of different factors.
<http://www.schoolfundingfairness.org>

To file a civil rights complaint:
The Office for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education has jurisdiction over every public K-12 and university in the country. If you perceive a violation of discrimination based on race, national origin, color, gender, age, or disability status, you can submit an online complaint here:
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintintro.html>

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