EDUCATION RESOURCE EQUITY

COMMUNICATIONS

Toolkit

ALLIANCE FOR
RESOURCE
EQUITY

Uniting advocates and education leaders
to unlock excellence for every student

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, an economic recession, and a renewed national recognition of systemic racism have only compounded the toll of rampant educational inequity in American schools. School closures, large anticipated budget cuts, and extraordinary stress on families place the American people at an educational crossroads. Without urgent action, this moment will exacerbate barriers to opportunity for students of color and students with higher needs, including students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, English learners, and students experiencing homelessness, foster care, or engaged in the juvenile justice system. The work ahead cannot be trivialized, but our nation can emerge stronger if schools, districts, and leaders act swiftly for **education resource equity** — mobilizing the right combination of resources that create high-quality learning experiences and meet the distinct needs of every student.

We can all do our part by advocating for education resource equity in our own communities.

Key Tips to Talk About Resource Equity in Your Own Communities

■ **Don't rely on jargon; simply tell people what you mean.** For many people, education resource equity — and how it plays out in their community — feels like a complex and confusing issue. There are many phrases that are used to describe it (e.g., resource equity, funding allocation). And each phrase means different things to different people. It's most persuasive to simply describe the world you're trying to create and why in words that everyone can understand.

"Everyone deserves a good education. But different kids have different needs and schools need the right resources to address those individual needs."

"Schools need money. Schools also need the other things that we know make a big difference in the type of education kids receive — like strong and diverse school leaders, rigorous and engaging content, and a positive and inviting school climate."

■ **Spell out what "resources" means for schools.** "Resources" can sound abstract; make the concept more vivid by describing what it means for students. "Resources" includes funding, but it also includes other aspects of school that impact students' experiences, such as personnel, facilities, time, and more. Use examples that feel familiar and that most people will see as beneficial: strong teachers, trained counselors and nurses, challenging instruction and assignments, internet access, safe and clean facilities, etc.

"Leaders need to act urgently to support students' needs with counselors, social workers, and quality social-emotional curriculum."

"Only 65% of students at Gilbert Elementary School have regular access to laptops and tablets to do their schoolwork and attend virtual class. Without more support from the IT department, dozens of students are missing out on their learning."

Key Tips, Continued

■ **Include families and teachers in the narrative, and contrast their smart, differentiated approach to working with students with the existing one-size-fits-all approach that too many systems still use.** Teachers differentiate instruction in their classrooms and families differentiate how they interact with their children at home all the time, based on children's unique needs. Reminding people of this is a powerful way to introduce people to the concept of distributing resources based on need in a way they're already familiar with. After introducing the concept with that analogy, your audience may be more able to consider applying the same concept to groups of students and systems.

> *"Schools need to meet students where they are and provide support when and where it's needed. Teachers do this when they support individual students' learning in a large class. Parents do this when they embrace each of their children's unique strengths and styles. But by and large, our education systems don't currently do a good job of accounting for students' different needs — they use a one-size-fits-all approach."*

■ **Illustrate resource equity with relatable examples.** Along similar lines, bring resource equity concepts into focus with everyday experiences. When we surveyed people across the country, many shared that they didn't know what resources other schools had, making it difficult to see any unfair patterns. Telling real stories about specific schools, their staff, and their students and families can make the issue come alive. This might be anecdotes from your own experience or data points, news stories, photos, or videos.

> *"This is Ms. C. She is only in her third year of teaching, but she is one of the more experienced teachers at her school, which has had three different principals this year. Her district's curriculum doesn't reflect her students' daily lives, so she spends a lot of time on Pinterest finding ways to adapt her lessons. As a result, she has very little time for the other ways she'd like to support her students. If the district adopted a better curriculum, she would have more time to support students by giving better feedback on assignments, building stronger relationships, and generally taking care of herself so that she can be there for her students."*

> *"Appleville High School serves a student body in which 22 percent qualify for free and reduced-price lunch; 2 miles away, 87 percent of students at Bates High School qualify for free and reduced-priced lunch. Many Bates High School students are currently concerned about their health or their family's health because many of them or their family members are essential workers who come into regular physical contact with the public. It's also common for students to be juggling multiple responsibilities, such as caring for siblings who are home during school closures. Appleville High has a counseling team of three for its 700 students, while Bates High only has one counselor for all 600 students. The Bates counselor's caseload is more than double that of her colleagues' at Appleville High."*

Key Tips, Continued

- **Intentionally use language and images that reaffirm and uplift the humanity of communities of color and/or low-income communities, and clearly place the onus of responsibility for the inequities these students and families experience on the systems and policy decisions that have created the injustices and inequities.** For example, use "underserved," which places responsibility on the system instead of "underachieving," which places blame with students. Being asset-based in framing resource equity issues also serves to intentionally disrupt the long-standing ways stereotypes and beliefs around individual meritocracy are reinforced through our language and undermine equitable policymaking.

In framing resource equity work and in choosing images in our work, focus attention on rejecting the dangerous tendency to paint students in monolithic and often deficit-based ways. Instead, focus on showcasing the breadth of knowledge and intersectional lived experiences of people of color and people from low-income backgrounds. Framing around resource equity should also acknowledge the lack of resources and opportunities available to many of these communities in a way that acknowledges the systemic oppression and lack of investment that created and maintains these conditions, rather than blaming these communities.

Even well-intentioned attempts to describe students' and families' experiences can contribute to larger mainstream narratives that negatively impact the very students resource equity work serves to support. **Take a moment to review the ways you are communicating about students and families before you communicate something publicly, and ask yourself if the images and descriptions serve to reinforce stereotypes. If so, change them.**

"Trina is excited about learning science this year as she has a goal to be a marine biologist when she grows up. Her school is completely online this fall, but the school district is struggling to find enough funding to provide devices for all students; so, she shares the family's laptop with her younger brother. A community center in her neighborhood is working to set up a socially-distanced drop-in program where computers will be available, but the city's grant program for community programs was forced to lay off staff last year so the processing time for new grants is long."

Key Tips, Continued

"Victor's dad is an essential worker at a hospital and has been working a lot of overtime every week. He hopes Victor's school will provide ways for him to communicate with his son's teacher regularly during distance learning, but so far, the district just offered one two-hour townhall for parents. The district across town, however, used some of their additional funding from local property taxes to set up an easy online portal for parents to share comments and questions regarding their child's distance learning work."

- **Reject zero-sum framing.** Education resource equity doesn't seek to take from some to give to others. It seeks to ensure every student receives the combination of resources needed to meet their distinct needs so all students can reach high standards and thrive. Providing an excellent education to all students may require investing more resources in the system overall.

  "We can emerge stronger if we reject a one-size-fits-all approach and direct resources where they are needed most."

  "No two students are alike; no two schools are alike. Every student can thrive if we allocate resources based on their needs."

  "Every child deserves to have their unique needs met."

Fast Facts (Last Updated September 2020)

The COVID-19 crisis has upended the American educational system and is likely to continue to do so.

- By some estimates, students missed 30% to a full year of learning while school buildings were closed.

- Nearly 90% of parents are worried that their children will fall behind academically because of school closings.

- The recession is now projected to cause K-12 budget shortfalls of up to $230 billion during the 2020-21 school year.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made pre-existing challenges more visible and far worse.

- Even before COVID-19, districts serving high populations of students of color spent $1,800 per student less than other districts.

- Students of color and students from low-income backgrounds frequently have the least access to school counselors and advanced coursework.

- And Black students are disproportionately suspended, expelled, and arrested at school, despite studies showing they do not misbehave more frequently than other students.

- Before the pandemic, 79% of White households had broadband access, compared with only 66% of Black families and 61% of Latino families.

- More than one-third of all households with school age children that earn less than $30,000 annually lack high-speed internet access. Now, 24% of teenagers from lower-income households say they lack access to a computer at home versus 9% of teenagers from higher income households.
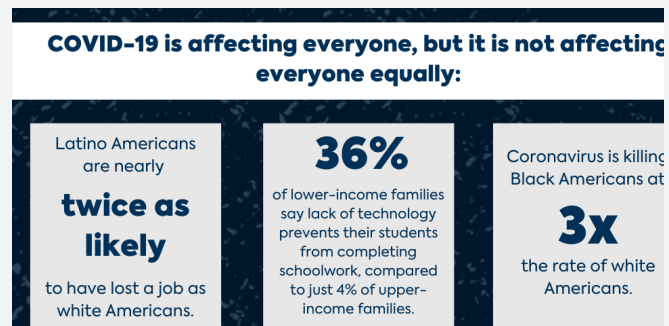
The COVID-19 crisis is affecting everyone, but it is not affecting everyone equally.

- The coronavirus is killing Black Americans at 3.6 times the rate of White Americans. Predominantly Black counties account for over half of coronavirus cases in the U.S., and nearly 60% of total deaths.

- Only roughly 1 in 5 Black workers and 1 in 6 Latino workers are able to work from home, compared with nearly 1 in 3 White workers.

- Latino Americans are nearly twice as likely to have lost a job as White Americans.

- While 37% of Latino Americans and 27% of Black Americans say they've been unable to pay at least one type of bill as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, only 17% of White Americans say the same.

Social Media Content

One key platform to advocate for education resource equity in your own community is through social media.
Here are sample images and text you could use.

For more, see [here](#).

#COVID19 is affecting everyone, but it is not affecting everyone equally.
This school year, living our values means directing resources where they are needed most. **bit.ly/edcombo2020**

#edequity   #edpolicy

Polling data shows that when it comes to the 2020–21 school year, most Americans agree: more resources for the students most impacted by **#coronavirus. bit.ly/edcombo2020**

#k12   #edequity   #edpolicy

Education Resource Strategies is a national nonprofit that partners with district, school, and state leaders to transform how they use resources (people, time, and money) so that every school prepares every child for tomorrow — no matter their race or income. Since 2004, ERS has worked with more than 40 school systems and states to improve resource equity for students by analyzing data, exploring trade-offs, planning strategically, building consensus, and monitoring progress.

The Education Trust is a national nonprofit that works to close opportunity gaps that disproportionately affect students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Through research and advocacy, Ed Trust supports efforts that expand excellence and equity in education from preschool through college; increase college access and completion, particularly for historically underserved students; engage diverse communities dedicated to education equity; and increase political and public will to act on equity issues.

ERS

The Education Trust

WHY AN ALLIANCE?

Across the nation, local decision makers and equity advocates are committed to improving schools, including school board members, state and district leaders, civil rights advocates, families, educators, and even students themselves. However, a lack of coordination can limit the impact of these efforts. The Alliance for Resource Equity works to bring many combinations of stakeholders together around a framework for shared understanding and a plan for collaborative action.