MAKE THE CASE

DIVERSE CLASSROOMS & SCHOOLS

ALLIANCE FOR
RESOURCE
EQUITY

Socioeconomically and racially diverse schools benefit students **academically, socially**, and **emotionally**, and make them more **civic-minded.**

Socioeconomically and racially diverse schools are associated with **higher student test scores, graduation rates**, and **college enrollment**, as well as **improved cognitive skills**, including critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.[1]

Exposure to different people, perspectives, and ideas **promotes civic engagement and reduces prejudice** among students, and increases the likelihood that they will **seek out integrated settings as adults.**[2]

Diversity makes us smarter and promotes creativity: Racially diverse groups significantly outperformed groups without diversity in a problem-solving scenario, and more prominently displayed traits such as diligence and a strong work ethic.[3]

Yet, U.S. schools remain divided along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines — even as the K–12 public school student population grows more diverse — perpetuating a historic legacy of systemic inequity and segregation within and across schools.

Students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to attend highly segregated schools.

more than

1 in 3

students attended a predominantly same-race/ethnicity school during SY2020–21, and

14%

of students attended schools where almost all the student body was of a single race/ethnicity.[4]

Black students are

5X

as likely as White students to attend schools that are highly segregated by race/ethnicity.[5]

Additionally, most schools serving students of color are in low-income areas, and due to school funding formulas that rely on local taxes, these schools receive much less money.[6]

Black students are

2X

as likely to attend economically segregated schools.[7]

72%
of Black students attend a high-poverty school.[8]

31%
of White students attend a high-poverty school.[9]

Making the case for improving access to **Diverse Classrooms and Schools** hinges on effectively communicating their importance, urgency, and connection to your community.

3 Key Elements of Effective Messaging

1 Keep it simple.

2 Know your audience.

3 Make an emotional connection.

3 Key Elements of Effective Messaging

Know your audience.

Who is your audience?
- District leaders and policymakers?
- School board members?
- Other advocates?
- Parents, students, families?

What publications do they read? What media do they consume?
- Education Week?
- Boston Herald?
- Dallas Morning News?
- TikTok? Twitter/X?

What does your audience care about?
- Start with what they value.
- Connect their values with your advocacy message.

Make an emotional connection.

Don't rely on statistics to make your point. "Show, don't tell" how the issue at hand (or your proposed policy solution) impacts students.
- Create an emotional response — make it clear why we all need to care!
- Use real stories about students, and highlight the urgency of addressing inequities.

Tell your personal story.
- Why do you care about this issue? Did you have a similar experience in school?
- How does this impact you as a parent, advocate, or community member?
- Ultimately, who are the people on the ground being affected, and how can you lift up those voices and stories and move people to act?

Keep it simple.

Your messages need to be short.
- Describe your advocacy points in 10 words or less.
- Make your messages quotable and easy to remember.
- Think of what you would say in a tweet.

Avoid jargon. Do not use education speak.

Message Triangle Fast Facts

- Based on the principle that it is easier to visualize an image than it is to memorize a lot of words.

- Structured specifically for **social change and advocacy messages:** provides a structure to [frame](#) issues in a way that resonates with people's core values, makes the message personal, and can be tailored to a specific audience.

- Helps identify and home in on **1 core message and 3 supporting, key messages** that are compelling, credible, and concise.

- Offers structural focus but is not intended as a script.

Your core message is the North Star message you are trying to get across.

Your 3 key messages should move your audience toward your objective.

Key Message 1

Key Message 2

Core Message ("North Star")

Key Message 3
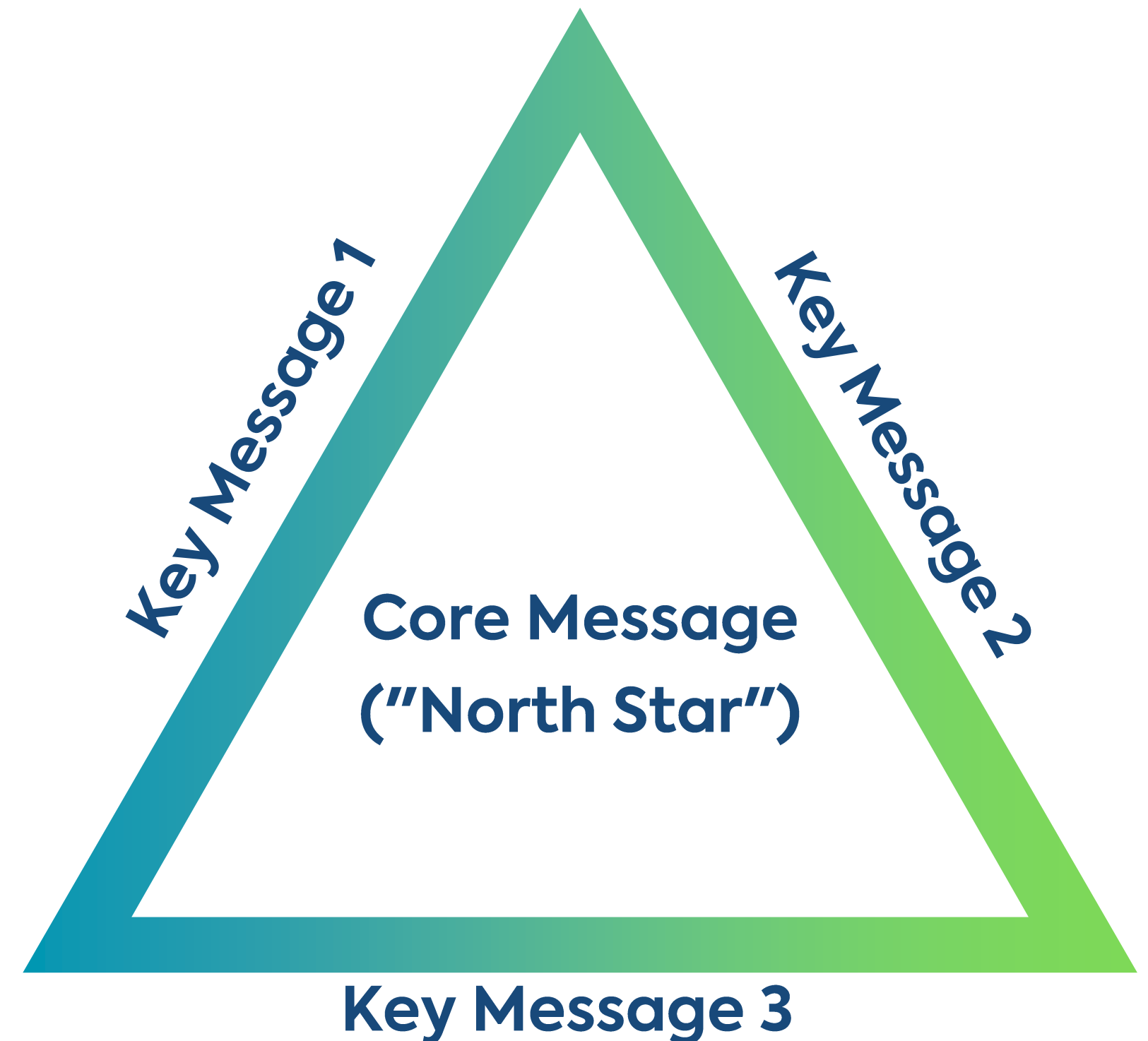
Creating a Message Triangle to Tell Your District's Story

Review Key Questions

Review the Alliance for Resource Equity's Key Questions on Diverse Classrooms and Schools:

- **Key Question 10.1:** Is each student enrolled in a school and attending classes that are racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse?

Identify your "North Star" or Core Message

Determine what you want to communicate. What is the underlying vision?

- Consider reiterating the Alliance for Resource Equity's vision:

  Each student is enrolled in classes that are racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.

Support Messages With Data

Use available data to form 2 messages that outline the problem and its impact or relevance.

- See Appendix A for list of data metrics.
- Prepare a powerful data metric, soundbite, and narrative for your key messages.

Create a Call to Action

Use the last key message to outline your call to action.

- What action are you requesting from your district?
- What is the most immediate next step?
- What do you want your audience to do?

Forming Key Messages 101

1 — **Start by analyzing metrics (Appendix A) to help answer the key question in the dimension.**
For instance, looking at the composition of % of students of color enrolled across schools could help determine the answer to Key Question 10.1: **"Is each student enrolled in a school and attending classes that are racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse?"**

2 — **Consider the available data points.**
What story do they tell? How directly do they speak to the issue? Let's suppose we confirm there is wide variability in racial demographics across schools in the district. **We decide to use these data points to inform our key messages.**

3 — **Solidify the message.**
- **Key Message 1 identifies the issue:** "Our schools are segregated by racial/ethnic demographics: There is a significant range in the percentage of students of color that attend each school (10%–94%)."
- **Key Message 2 explains why this matters:** "Racially diverse schools benefit students academically, socially, emotionally, and make them more civic-minded."
- **Key Message 3 advances a call to action:** "District leaders must begin to engage in conversations about districtwide assignment policies and how they might be contributing to demographic patterns across schools."

4 — **Use additional elements to support each of your key messages.** For Key Message 1, this could look like:
- **An illustrative data metric:** "Across all school levels, many schools serve nearly all students of color, while many other schools serve nearly all White students."
- **A punchy soundbite to use for an interview:** "70 years after the *Brown* decision, our schools remain highly segregated on the basis of race."
- **A powerful narrative element:** Share a perspective about racially segregated student enrollment patterns and what message that sends to your community.

District X Example

Key Message 1

Our schools are segregated by race/ethnicity: There is a significant range in the percentage of students of color that attend each school (10%-94%).

DATA METRIC: Across all school levels, many schools serve mainly students of color, while many other schools serve mainly White students.

SOUNDBITE: "70 years after the Brown decision, our schools remain highly segregated on the basis of race."

NARRATIVE: Share a perspective about what racially segregated student enrollment patterns mean to your community and what message they send.

Core Message ("North Star")

Each student is enrolled in classes that are racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.

Key Message 2

Racially diverse schools benefit students academically, socially, and emotionally, and make them more civic-minded.

DATA METRIC: Studies indicate that attending a diverse school helps students develop socially, emotionally, academically, and equips them to become more civically engaged, and navigate the complexities of our global society.

SOUNDBITE: "Diverse schools expand our students' minds and help them embrace and celebrate the diversity of our society."

NARRATIVE: Share how a student attending a racially diverse school increased understanding and respect for another culture.

Key Message 3

District leaders must begin to engage in conversations about districtwide assignment policies and how they might be contributing to demographic patterns across schools.

DATA METRIC: Young children of color and from low-income backgrounds are disproportionally shut out of high-quality learning opportunities, which can have a cascading effect throughout their K-12 education and beyond.

SOUNDBITE: "We must analyze how assignment policies and other factors are influencing the diversity of our classrooms and schools."

NARRATIVE: Ask the district to engage on this issue and propose a specific next step.

Message Triangle Checklist

Does your message triangle do ALL of the following?

✓ **Align with the shared values of your audience?**
- Shared values allow the conversation to start from a place of agreement.
- This requires knowing your audience first!

✓ **Define the impact?**
- Do your supporting facts (data metrics, narratives, soundbites) explain how those shared values are being undermined? Clearly outlining the consequences and inequities helps convey a sense of urgency without exaggerating the problem.

✓ **Asset-frame the issue?**
- Define the scope of the issue in terms of systems and structures, not students, and avoid defining marginalized communities using deficit-based language.

✓ **Highlight the benefits?**
- After establishing the issue/problem, explain how your solution SUPPORTS your shared values. Explicitly stating the value helps reaffirm tangible outputs your stakeholder cares about.

✓ **Include a call to action?**
- A positive vision helps your audience realize what's possible and recognize the role they play in sparking the change.

Dismantling Opposition and Avoiding Traps

- **Bad information:** Don't repeat negative, incorrect, or inflammatory language. Instead, find a positive spin in your response and/or calmly correct any misinformation before moving to your positive response.
- **Speculation:** Instead of trying to predict the future, reiterate the information you know and your key message.
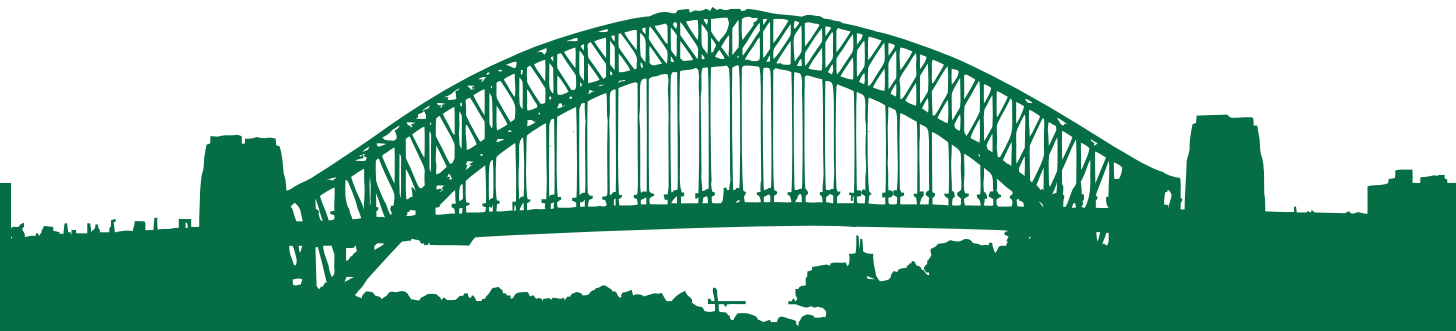- **Irrelevant Question:** Use a bridging statement to connect back to your key message.
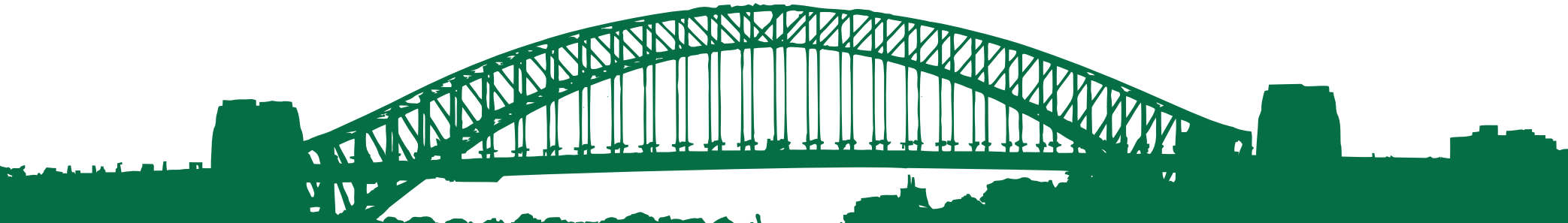
Question/concern that …
- Distracts from key issue,
- Introduces dangerous line of opposition
- Expresses different mission/goal

Your response hits on your key messages in service of core "north star" message

BRIDGING STATEMENT

"I find the more important issue to be…"

"Let me emphasize again…"

"What matters most in this situation is this: …"

"What I've said comes down to this…"

"And that reminds me…"

"Here's the real problem…"

I think it would be more accurate (or correct) to say…"

"It all boils down to this…"

"While ___ is important, it's also important to remember that…"

"Before we leave this subject, I need to add…"

BRIDGING STATEMENT

Question/concern that ...
- Distracts from key issue
- Introduces dangerous line of opposition
- Expresses different mission/goal

Your response hits on your key messages in service of core "North Star" message

This is outside our control. Patterns of residential segregation, such as historic redlining practices and other factors, mean we do not have a lot of diversity to begin with.	While all those factors play a role when it comes to the diversity of our schools, it boils down to this:	School and classroom diversity is beneficial to all students. While some direct actions may be outside of our control, district leaders can play an important role in breaking up existing pockets of segregation and preventing further segregation. Examining and revising enrollment policies within our district is a good place to start. We can also explore inter-district transfer programs or support other initiatives that promote cross-district integration, which is also incredibly important.
Students' prior academic achievement and demonstrated readiness determine their course placement, not their race or family income.	I feel compelled to shift how we think about the underlying issue of "prior academic performance." I think it's important to clarify that...	There are many more students ready for advanced coursework than most schools think! Research suggests that schools may have up to three times more students who are ready for advanced coursework than are enrolled in advanced classes. However, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds may be consistently under-identified and under-enrolled. Access to advanced coursework opportunities must be more equitable (e.g., implement automatic enrollment policies, ensure that students and families have information about advanced coursework opportunities and benefits, and make students feel like they belong in advanced classes), so these students can thrive.
Even though our district is diverse, we can't do much without re-drawing school zones or introducing school choice policies.	If we consider this issue more broadly, we can better understand that...	Our district's school needs are constantly evolving as our population changes, so no matter what, we're going to have to look at attendance boundaries and adjust facilities to meet capacity. Each time we make a decision about enrollment and/or school planning is an opportunity to look for ways to give more students access to diverse classrooms.

FAQ's

Why does this sample message triangle work?
- All key messages connect to one another.
- Each key message includes a data metric, soundbite, and narrative element.
- Each element is concise and uses asset–framing.
- Each key message speaks directly to the core message in center of triangle.

What if we don't have access to the information we need for the data metrics?
- Ask your district if they will provide the data to you.
- Use this message triangle to push for better data transparency.
- In the meantime, rely on national data trends instead.

What makes for an effective narrative element?
- The best story to share is your own!
- But don't get bogged down by the details. Ask yourself what you are trying to communicate, what emotions you want to evoke, and why this specific issue matters to you.

What makes for a compelling soundbite?
- Define your objectives — what do you want others to remember?
- Be concise (aim for 10 seconds or less), clear (avoid jargon, acronyms, technical terms), and catchy (consider using a quick story, anecdote, metaphor, etc. to help illustrate your point.)
- Practice! The best sound bites are authentic but not off the cuff.

What do you mean by asset-framing? How do I do that?
- Data doesn't frame itself … and is susceptible to misinterpretation.
- This misinterpretation is especially harmful to historically marginalized communities.
- Key messages should highlight the systems and structures within your district that act as barriers to equitable opportunities and outcomes. This "structure–not–student" approach is known as **asset-framing.**
- Asset-framing places the responsibility on leaders and systems, emphasizing system–level action, and does not blame or fault students.

How do I use this message triangle?
- Make it the backbone of your messaging efforts.
- Use it to practice, practice, practice articulating the issue.
- Use it to stay focused on key points, especially when the opposition tries to throw you off course.
- Use it alongside the Alliance for Resource Equity Diagnostic Tool to more thoroughly assess the state of diverse classrooms and schools in your district, as well as in combination with our guidebooks to dig deeper into root causes and potential actions.

What is the Alliance for Resource Equity? How do I learn more?
- The Alliance for Resource Equity is a partnership between EdTrust and Education Resource Strategies.
- We focus on 10 key dimensions of resource equity — providing tools and resources to help advocates and districts work together to consider how resources (people, time, and money) are spent and distributed.
- Learn more at www.educationresourceequity.org.

Endnotes

1. The Century Foundation. (2019). "The Benefits of Socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms." The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/facts/the-benefits-of-socioeconomically-and-racially-integrated-schools-and-classrooms/; Ayscue, J., Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G. (2017). Research Brief: "The Complementary Benefits of Racial and Socioeconomic Diversity in Schools." The National Coalition on School Diversity. https://school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo10.pdf

2. The Century Foundation. (2019).

3. Phillips, K. (2014). *"How Diversity Makes Us Smarter."* Scientific American. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter/

4. Government Accountability Office. (2022). "K-12 Education: Student Population Has Significantly Diversified, but Many Schools Remain Divided Along Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Lines." https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-104737.

5. Garcia, E. (2020). "Schools are still segregated, and black children are paying a price." Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/schools-are-still-segregated-and-black-children-are-paying-a-price/

6. EdBuild. (2019). *$23 Billion.* https://edbuild.org/content/23-billion.

7. Garcia, E. (2020).

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

Key Question	Data Metric	Data Notes	Data Source
Key Question 10.1 Is each student enrolled in a school and attending classes that are racially/ ethnically and socioeconomically diverse?	Stacked Bar Chart: Racial/ethnic composition of schools by school type and school poverty level/quartile	Advocates in large school districts should likely stick to comparisons by school type and poverty quartile, but smaller school systems could look at composition across all schools.	• Urban Institute/NCES
	Determine if school attendance boundaries promote integration, increase segregation, or replicate segregation relative to neighborhood racial composition.	Scroll to the middle of webpage to select your district.	• School Zones Drawer via Vox
	Determine if your district has school attendance boundaries that are more or less integrated than neighborhoods themselves.	Available for large districts only.	• Segregated Neighborhoods, Segregated Schools?
	Additional resource: understand the factors driving segregation in the broader area using metro-level school segregation data.		• Segregation in Cities, Mapped Across America

YOUR DISTRICT:

Key Message 1
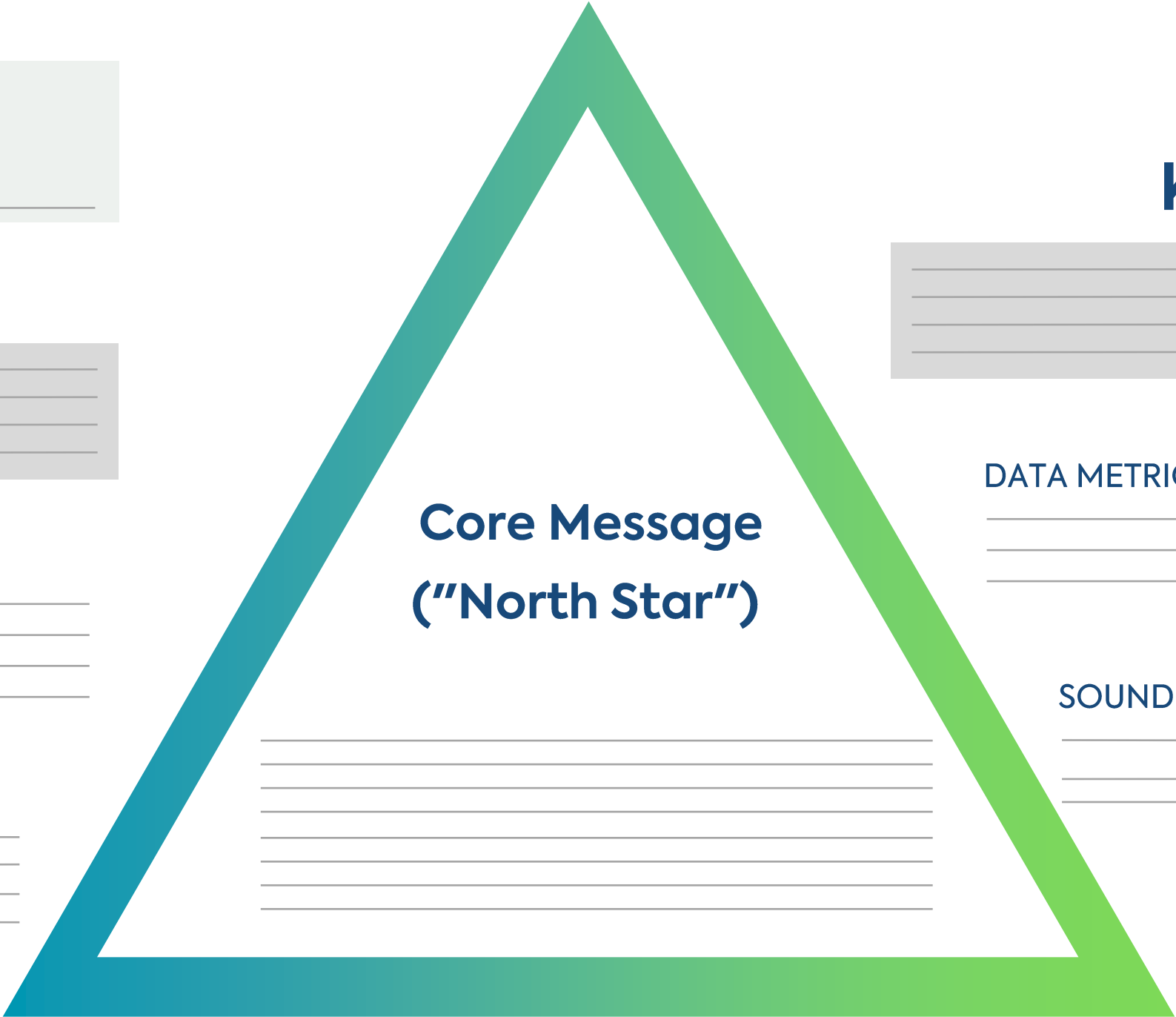
DATA METRIC:

SOUNDBITE:

NARRATIVE:

Key Message 2

DATA METRIC:

SOUNDBITE:

NARRATIVE:

**Core Message
("North Star")**

Key Message 3

DATA METRIC:

SOUNDBITE:

NARRATIVE: