



MAKE THE CASE

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME & ATTENTION

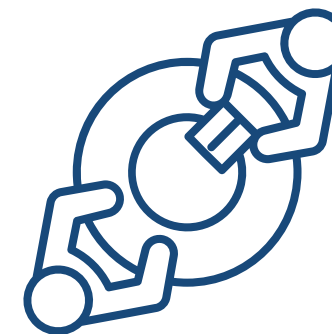
Increasing high-quality instructional time (the amount of time a student receives instruction from their teacher) and teacher attention (the amount of individualized attention a student receives during this instructional time) based on a student's needs can significantly boost learning, especially for students who are behind.

Adding hours to the school day or year can boost student achievement — particularly for students who are most at risk of falling behind — because it provides opportunities for students to accelerate their learning in the subjects in which they are struggling.¹

At its most effective, **targeted intensive tutoring**, often referred to as high-dosage tutoring, allows 1-2 students to receive specialized attention **to build skills aligned with their curriculum and targeted to their academic needs.**



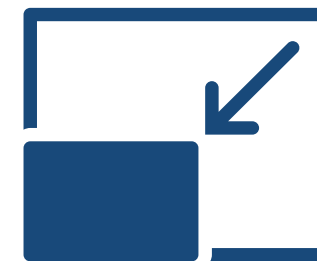
When effectively implemented, **expanded learning time** (interventions such as scheduling adjustments for double blocking and acceleration camps) is **associated with improved student outcomes that are equivalent to four to eight extra regular months of school.**²



Effective high-dosage tutoring can double the amount of learning students typically gain during the school year.⁴



In after-school settings, **high-quality expanded learning programs** have been shown to increase **average student test scores** by up to 12 percentile points.³



Significantly smaller class and group sizes (e.g., reductions of 8 to 15 students per class) can also improve student performance: The greatest gains are for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color, particularly in grades K-3.⁵

Many students need **non-traditional in-school instructional support**: longstanding inequities have been exacerbated by the pandemic, while stringent discipline policies and chronic absenteeism continue to undercut instructional opportunities.

Test-score gaps between students in low-poverty and high-poverty elementary schools grew by staggering amounts during the pandemic.⁶

20%

percentage of mathematics test-score gap that grew between students attending low-/high-poverty elementary schools in SY2020-2021.⁷

15%

percentage of reading test-score gap that grew between students attending low-/high-poverty elementary schools in SY2020-2021.⁸

Families, especially in communities with more students from low-income backgrounds, more English learners, and more students of color, face additional barriers to participating in distance learning opportunities, for reasons ranging from:⁹



inadequate access to technology at home



competing responsibilities such as a need to work or provide child care



other commitments that limit available time outside school day

Additionally, disciplinary suspension reduces the instructional time and attention students receive, and disproportionately impacts students of color. Chronic absenteeism also lessens instructional time/attention.

11 million

estimated instructional days lost due to disciplinary suspensions in SY 2015-16.¹⁰

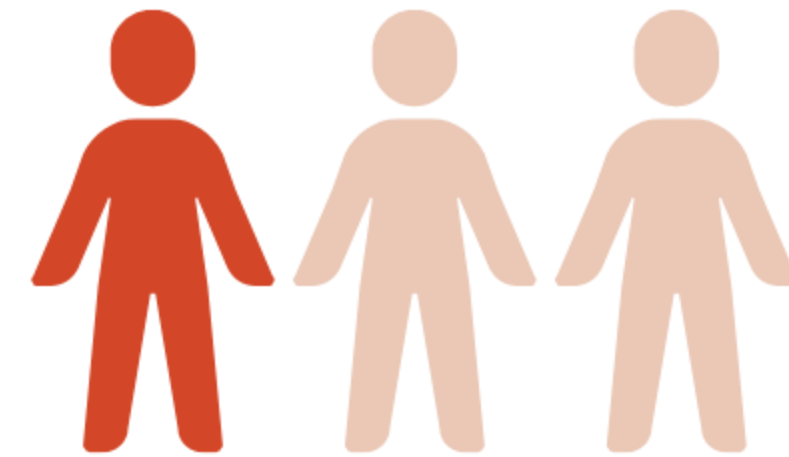
103

vs.

21

estimated instructional days lost for Black students, per 100 students.

estimated instructional days lost for White students, per 100 students.¹¹



1 in 3 students are considered “chronically absent”¹²

Impacts from chronic absenteeism can build on each other: students lose instructional time, may miss assignments, and may be subjected to disciplinary responses that make matters worse, including detention or suspension, where the “punishment is the same as the crime.”¹³

Making the case for improving access to **Instructional Time and Attention** hinges on effectively communicating its importance, urgency, and connection to your community.

3 Key Elements of Effective Messaging



Keep it simple.



Know your audience.



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 this current issue (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 their voices and stories and move people to act?

Keep it simple.

Your messages need to be short.

- Describe your main advocacy point in 10 words or less.
- Make your messages quotable and easy to remember.
- Think of what you would say in a tweet.

Avoid jargon and 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 are what will move your audience toward your objective.



Creating a Message Triangle to Tell Your District's Story



Review Key Questions

Review the Alliance for Resource Equity's Key Questions on Instructional Time & Attention:

- **Key Question 5.1:** Does each student who needs more high-quality instructional time receive it?
- **Key Question 5.2:** Does each student who needs more high-quality instructional attention receive it?

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 gets the combination of high-quality instructional time and teacher attention they need through evidence-based approaches, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.

Support Your 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

The last key message should prompt people to act.

- 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 questions in the dimension.

For instance, looking at the percentage of students receiving additional instructional time, by racial and economic demographics, and school grade/type could help determine the answer to **Key Question 5.1**: “Does each student who needs more high-quality instructional time receive it?”

2

Consider the available data points.

What story do they tell? How directly do they speak to the issue?

Let’s suppose we learn that a significant number of students who need additional math support in 8th grade are not enrolled in an additional math course, even though most schools offer this as an option, and 8th-grade advanced math classes have smaller class sizes than standard classes. We can use these data points to inform our key messages.

3

Solidify the message.

- **Key Message 1 identifies the issue:** “Most 8th-grade students do not receive the additional time and attention they need to meet grade level math standards.”
- **Key Message 2 explains why this matters:** “This makes it harder for our students to get the extra support they need.”
- **Key Message 3 advances a call to action:** “The district must examine the barriers that prevent students from receiving additional time and attention and work with the community to address these inequities.”

4

Use additional elements to support each of your key messages. For Key Message 1, this could look like:

- **An illustrative data metric:** “1 in 3 (or 2,100) of our 8th-grade students who did not pass their 7th-grade end-of-year exam are not enrolled in an additional math course, and a quarter of our schools do not even provide that as an option.”
- **A punchy soundbite to use for an interview:** “It’s as simple as this: students who need additional math support must get additional math support. But this is not what is happening right now.”
- **A powerful narrative element:** Find a spokesperson who can articulate how this issue has impacted them.

District X Example

Key Message 1

Most 8th-grade students do not receive the additional time and attention they need to meet grade-level math standards.



DATA METRIC: 1 in 3 (or 2,100) of our 8th-grade students who did not pass their 7th-grade end-of-year exam are not enrolled in an additional math course, and two-thirds of our schools do not even provide that as an option.



SOUNDBITE: It's as simple as this: students who need additional math support must get additional math support. But this is not what is happening right now.



NARRATIVE: Share how this has impacted your student's academic development in math.



DATA METRIC: At a recent PTA meeting, many attendees expressed concerns over whether their child is receiving appropriate instructional supports based on their learning progress.



SOUNDBITE: "We are eager to work with district leaders to understand barriers that may be preventing a more strategic use of instructional time and attention in our schools."



NARRATIVE: Share the specific and relevant concerns raised by community members.

Key Message 2

This is making it harder for our students to get the extra support they need.

DATA METRIC: Additional instruction (through double blocking, for example) helps students make important strides in their learning: studies have shown affording additional time can be equivalent to 4-8 extra regular months of school.



SOUNDBITE: "Making adjustments that allow for extra instructional time is a strategic investment in our students' academic progress."



NARRATIVE: Share how additional instructional time has helped a student in your district.



Core Message ("North Star")

All students deserve high-quality instructional time and the teacher attention they need, so all students can meet high standards and thrive.

Key Message 3

The district must examine the barriers that prevent students from receiving additional time and attention and work with the community to address these inequities.

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 in 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 misinformation before moving to your positive response.
- **Speculation:** Instead of trying to predict the future, reiterate your key message and the information you know.
- **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

BRIDGING STATEMENT

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

- "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..."



Question/concern that ...

- Distracts from key issue
- Introduces dangerous line of opposition
- Expresses different mission/goal

BRIDGING STATEMENT

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

We should be focusing on the regular instruction that happens during the school day. If schools were doing their job in the first place, we wouldn't need extended learning time.

I agree that this instruction is fundamental to student learning, and that we should be paying close attention to ensure it is high quality. However, I think it's more accurate to recognize that...

Many students need additional support, even with high-quality whole-group instruction. Long-standing inequities, unfinished learning due to the pandemic, as well as stringent discipline policies and high rates of chronic absenteeism have exacerbated this need.

Expanded learning time has not been shown to be a worthy investment of resources.

If we consider the evidence and research on the topic, it becomes clear that...

For expanded learning time to be most effective, it must be paired with a student-centered, comprehensive approach that is closely aligned to a high-quality and engaging curriculum, integrated within the school day, enable consistent and frequent participation, and conducted in small groups by highly trained teachers. Additionally, expanded learning time can only be effective if time during the school day is also used to efficiently and effectively accelerate learning.

Parents also need to be invested in their child attending school. We can't expect schools to be able to tackle this issue alone, and schools should focus on things they can control.

I agree that parents play an important role in addressing high rates of absenteeism. However, schools still have an important role to play. This is because...

High rates of chronic absence at a particular school or district often [suggest](#) that there are larger systemic issues, including that students may not feel a sense of belonging, may not be academically engaged or challenged, or may not feel physically and emotionally healthy and safe.

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 soundbites 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 [instructional time & attention](#) in your district, as well as in combination with the [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

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7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. The Education Trust. (2020). COVID-19 Education Equity Guide: Expanding Learning Time. Available at: <https://edtrust.org/resource/covid-19-education-equity-guide-expanding-learning-time>.
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11. Ibid.
12. Vazquez Toness, B. (2023). "Millions of kids are missing weeks of school as attendance tanks across the US." *The Associated Press*. https://apnews.com/article/back-to-school-attendance-pandemic-chronic-absenteeism-90c05e3013b72802439565250d1adc33_2
13. Garcia Mathewson, T., Poletta, M. (2022). "When the punishment is the same as the crime: Suspended for missing class." *The Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org/when-the-punishment-is-the-same-as-the-crime-suspended-for-missing-class/>

Key Question	Data Metric	Data Source
<p>Key Question 5.1 Does each student who needs more high-quality instructional time receive it?</p>	<p>Policies and availability of “double-blocking” 8th grade math courses, afterschool programs, and other expanded learning-time opportunities for students who did not reach proficiency at end of prior year.</p>	<p>Afterschool Alliance</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of high-dosage tutoring opportunities for students • Percentage of students enrolled in tutoring or afterschool opportunities, as compared to the number students who scored at the lowest proficiency level on prior year’s statewide assessment and could benefit from these additional supports. 	
<p>Key Question 5.2 Does each student who needs more high-quality instructional attention receive it?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Range of tutoring group size across high-dosage tutoring programs (or other additional instructional support opportunities.) 	<p>Student Pulse Survey</p>

For the key questions in this dimension, there are few strong federally maintained data sources. Rely more heavily on your own personal experiences, general knowledge, and popular news sources to help fill out the gaps in data. For instance, there may an ESSER-related spending report on expanded learning time and high-dosage tutoring opportunities. Advocates can also lean more heavily on narratives and anecdotes from their community to illuminate this issue when engaging with their district.

YOUR DISTRICT:

Key Message 1

Key Message 2

Core Message
("North Star")

Key Message 3



DATA METRIC:



DATA METRIC:



SOUNDBITE:



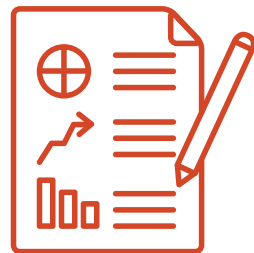
SOUNDBITE:



NARRATIVE:



NARRATIVE:



DATA METRIC:



SOUNDBITE:



NARRATIVE: