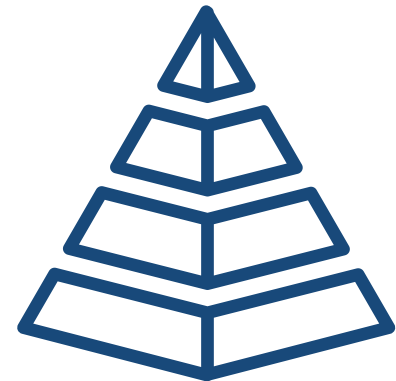




MAKE THE CASE

STUDENT SUPPORTS & INTERVENTIONS

Targeted student supports encourage holistic and academic development; these supports and interventions build positive academic mindsets, sustain students' backgrounds, and help overcome barriers that lead to success in school and life.¹



Equitable, **multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)** that address students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional well-being in ways that are culturally sustaining **support student learning by eliminating or mitigating barriers to success.**²



Students with disabilities who have IEPs and receive **effective guidance from school counselors and transition services** have better outcomes in both college and career.⁴



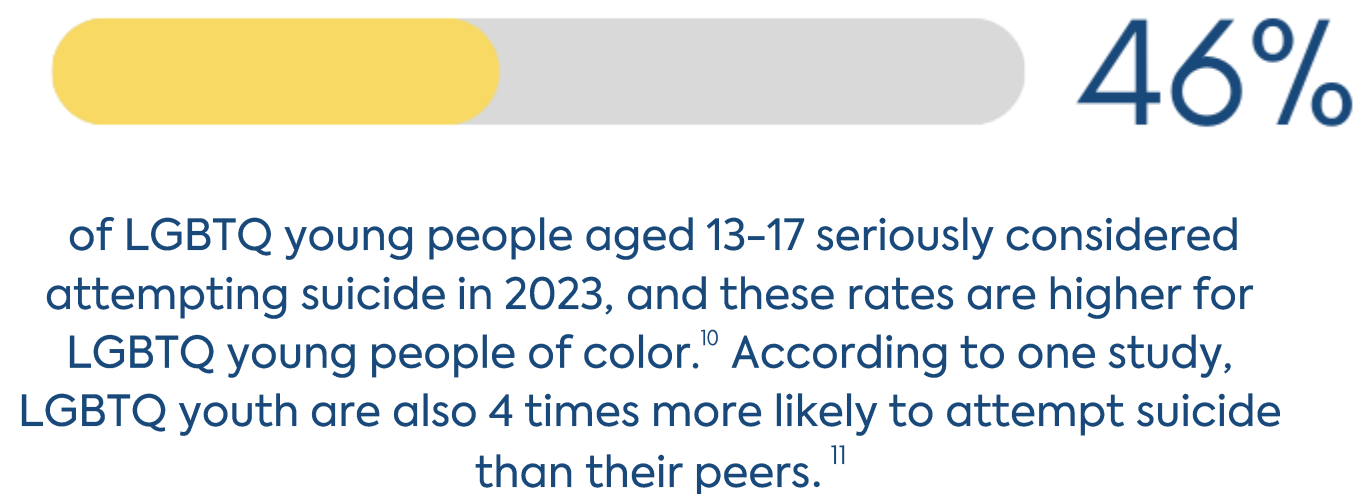
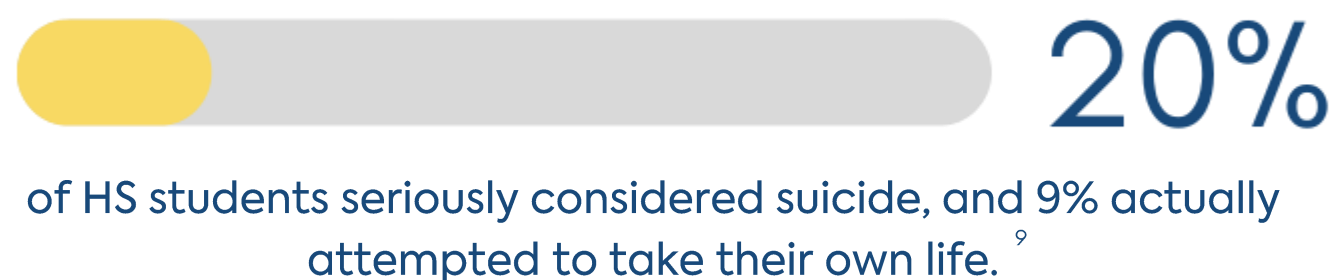
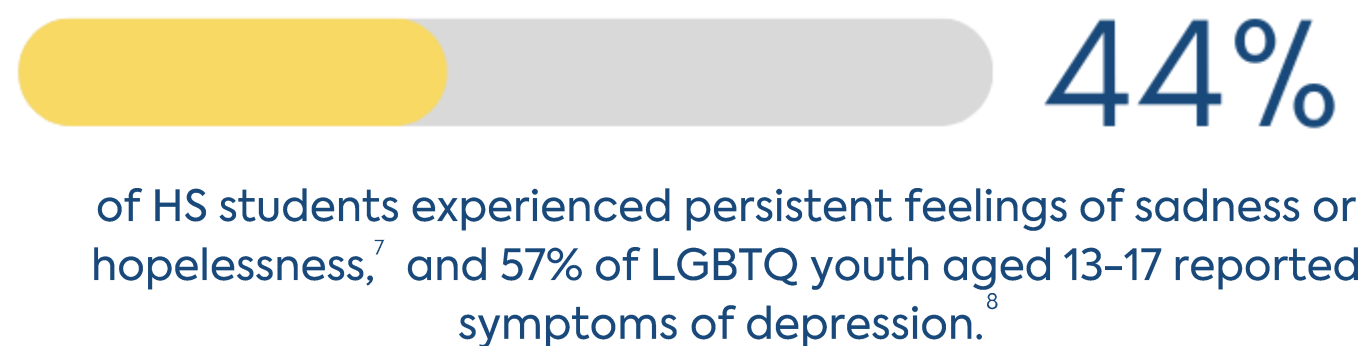
Students who have **access to high-quality, holistic mental health supports in schools** — including access to mental health professionals, such as school counselors, psychologists, and more — are not only **healthier physically, but are also more likely to graduate from high school and successfully complete a postsecondary education.**³



Individualized **social-emotional learning supports** — such as individual and small-group supports provided by counselors, social workers, or psychologists — **improve students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes.**⁵

Students across the U.S — particularly students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities — are less likely to have **access to crucial mental health supports**, such as school psychologists, school counselors, or social workers.

We're experiencing a mental health crisis in our classrooms.



61%

of Black and Hispanic students said they would not feel comfortable reaching out to a counselor if they needed mental health support.¹²

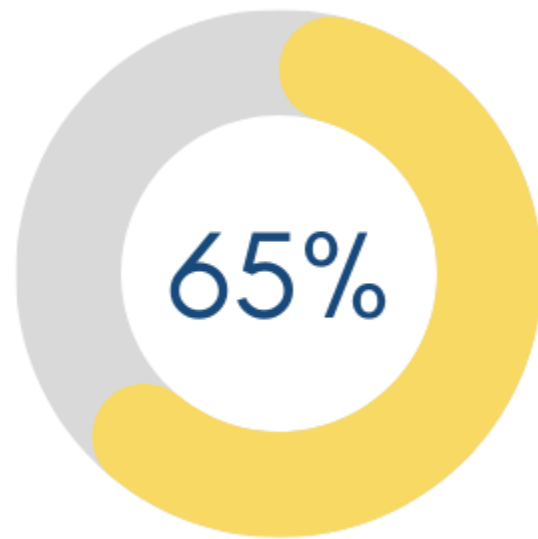


LGBTQ youth reported being verbally harassed at school because others thought they were LGBTQ.¹³

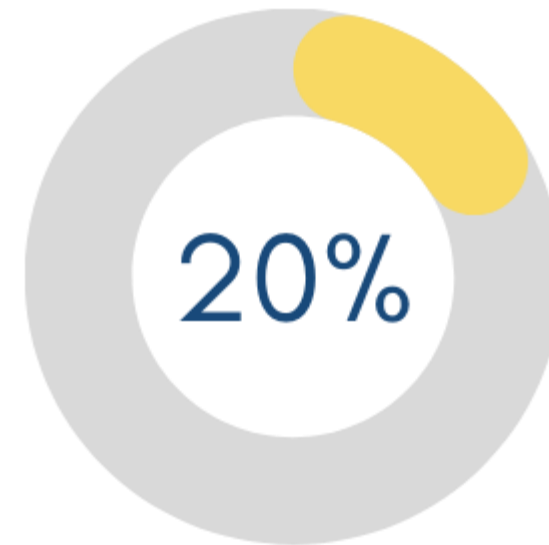


students reported perceiving racism.¹⁴

Despite this student mental health crisis, schools are not adequately providing high quality supports to our students, especially students of color.



of schools **DO NOT** provide outreach services, including universal mental health screenings for all students:¹⁵ a best practice that allows schools to better identify all students with needs and tailor services to their specific student population.¹⁶



of schools **DO NOT** have access to a school counselor.¹⁷

and **7% of all students** attend a school with a Special Law Enforcement Officer (SLEO) or security guard (but do not have access to a school counselor).¹⁸

Across high schools, a school counselor who serves predominantly students of color serves

34 more students

every year than a school counselor who serves fewer students of color.¹⁹

Making the case for improving access to **Student Supports and Interventions** hinges on effectively communicating their 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 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 them 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 should be designed to 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 Student Supports and Interventions:

- **Key Question 7.1:** Does each student who needs targeted social-emotional support receive it?
- **Key Question 7.2:** Does each student who needs targeted physical and mental health support receive it?
- **Key Question 7.3:** Does each student who needs targeted family support receive it?
- **Key Question 7.4:** Does each student have access to effective guidance to support postsecondary success?

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 has access to an effective integrated system of supports (which includes an accurate and unbiased identification process) to address their individualized needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive. Each student has access to meaningful guidance to set them up for success beyond high school.

Support Your Messages With Data

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

- 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 question in the dimension.

For instance, looking at the ratio of school social workers by % of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds could help determine **the answer to all Key Questions outlined in Dimension 7** of the Alliance for Resource Equity framework.

2

Consider the available data points.

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

Let's suppose we learn there is no strategic relationship in our district between close access to a social worker and schools that serve a higher proportion of students from low-income backgrounds. We decide to use these data points to inform our key messages.

3

Solidify the message.

- **Key Message 1 identifies the issue:** "Access to holistic supports that foster students' social, emotional, and academic development varies significantly by school."
- **Key Message 2 explains why this matters:** "Students with access to a range of mental and social supports benefit immensely."
- **Key Message 3 advances a call to action:** "Our district must do a better job of strategically deploying student support personnel, such as social workers, to students who stand to benefit the most."

4

Use additional elements as needed for each of your key messages. For Key Message 1, this could look like:

- **An illustrative data metric:** "There is no strategic relationship in our district between close access to a social worker and schools that serve a higher proportion of students from low-income backgrounds."
- **A punchy soundbite to use for an interview:** "Despite being more likely to benefit from the range of social services offered, students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have close access to a social worker than their more affluent peers."
- **A powerful narrative element:** Share how having close access to social workers in schools can support students' holistic needs.

District X Example

Key Message 1

Access to holistic supports that foster students' social, emotional, and academic development varies significantly by school.



DATA METRIC: There is no strategic relationship in our district between close access to a social worker and schools that serve a higher proportion of students from low-income backgrounds.



SOUNDBITE: “Despite being more likely to benefit from the range of social services offered, students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have close access to a social worker than their more affluent peers.”



NARRATIVE: Share how having close access to social workers in schools can support students' holistic needs.



DATA METRIC: 79% of students from low-income backgrounds in our district do not have access to a full-time social worker.



SOUNDBITE: “District leadership must invest in a strategic approach to holistic student supports, starting with a more targeted investment in school social workers.



NARRATIVE: Ask the district to consider to more strategically assign social workers in schools.

Key Message 2

Students with access to a range of mental and social supports benefit immensely.



DATA METRIC: Studies indicate that mental health supports in schools — including access to mental health professionals, such as school counselors, psychologists, and social workers, support students' social, emotional, and academic development.



SOUNDBITE: “Investing in social service supports and the mental health of our students means investing in a brighter future for our students.”



NARRATIVE: Share some of the mental health concerns of students in the community to demonstrate how holistic student services can support students.

Core Message (“North Star”)

Each student has access to an effective integrated system of supports (which includes an accurate and unbiased identification process) to address their individualized needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive. Each student has access to meaningful guidance to set them up for success beyond high school.

Key Message 3

Our district must do a better job of strategically deploying student support personnel, such as social workers, to students who stand to benefit the most.

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 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 a 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 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

BRIDGING STATEMENT

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

Our counselors and educators are too focused on mental health instead of helping students prepare for college. We need to now hire tutors instead of counselors just doing their job in the first place.

They are focused on mental health for good reason. Academic preparedness and mental/social-emotional health are not mutually exclusive or opposing aims — both are necessary for student success. It boils down to this:

When schools can identify and provide targeted supports to each student, when the health and well-being of students are priorities, and when efforts are made to ensure students feel like they belong, students can better engage in schools — which is linked to more positive social, emotional, and academic development.

Schools should be focusing on academics: reading, math, science. Schools need to leave the mental health support and parenting to parents.

If we take a broader perspective to understand what enables strong academic learning in the first place, we can recognize that...

Children need more than just learning a specific set of skills and information. They are growing human beings with developing emotions and social skills that need support too. Academics and holistic emotional development go hand in hand: When students' mental health needs are supported by school counselors, school psychologists, and strong relationships with their teachers, they do better in school.

IEP accommodations set a different standard than what they will be responsible for knowing and doing in the real world.

It's more accurate to think of IEP accommodations as the following:

IEP accommodations provide the additional supports that each student needs to learn. Accommodations do not change the content being taught; they help students learn in a different way.

FAQ's

Why does this example 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 to the core message in the center of the 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.
- Push for better data transparency using this message triangle.
- 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 sound bite?

- 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 of leaders and systems, emphasizing systems-level action and does not place blame or fault on 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 [student supports & interventions](#) 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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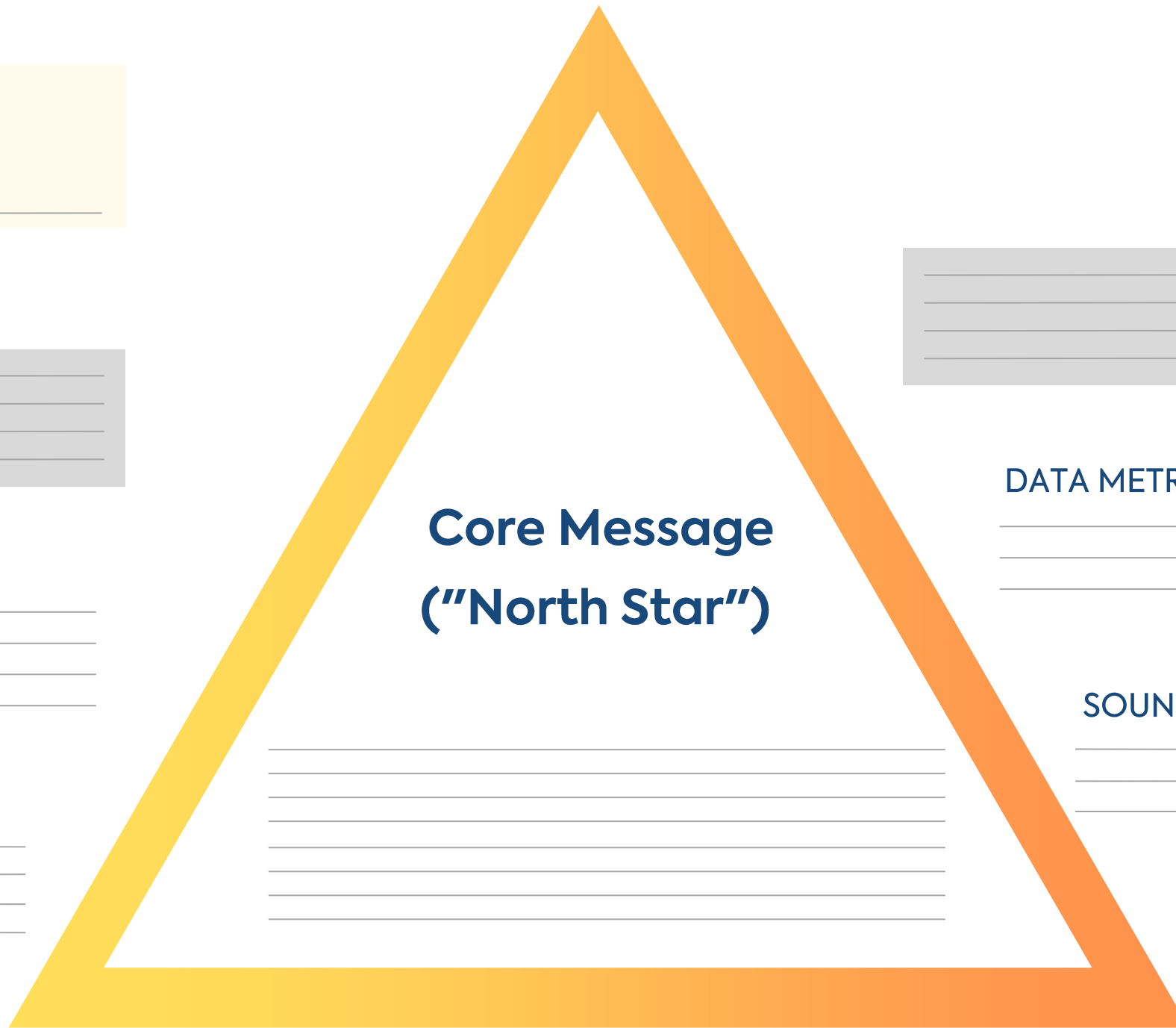
Key Question	Data Metric	Data Source
<p>Key Question 7.1 Does each student who needs targeted social-emotional support receive it?</p>	<p>FTE of school psychologists, school counselors, and social workers, by school poverty level, % students of color (or by racial/ethnic subgroup), and school type (elementary, middle, high).</p>	<p>Urban Institute/NCES</p>
<p>Key Question 7.2 Does each student who needs targeted physical and mental health support receive it?</p>		
<p>Key Question 7.3 Does each student who needs targeted family support receive it?</p>		
<p>Key Question 7.4 Does each student have access to effective guidance to support postsecondary success?</p>		

DATA NOTE: Looking at the breakdown by school demographics, as well as by school type, will be key to understanding equitable student access across all of these key questions.

YOUR DISTRICT:

Key Message 1

Key Message 2



Core Message
("North Star")



DATA METRIC:

DATA METRIC:



SOUNDBITE:

SOUNDBITE:



NARRATIVE:

NARRATIVE:



Key Message 3



DATA METRIC:



SOUNDBITE:



NARRATIVE:

