

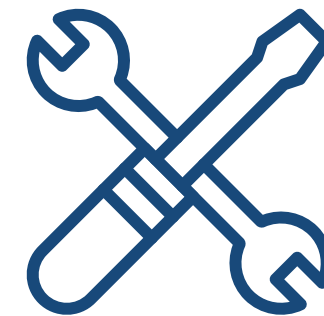


MAKE THE CASE
LEARNING-READY
FACILITIES

Well-kept, functioning facilities ensure schools can be spaces for high-quality learning and development.



Adequate space, functioning equipment, and materials (working printers, classrooms with enough paper, pencils, tissues, desks, and chairs for all the students in the class, etc.) impact student learning, teacher satisfaction, and student health.¹



New construction can improve student academic performance, attendance, and effort.³



Structurally sound and well-maintained schools can help students feel supported and valued. Students are generally better able to learn and remain engaged in instruction, and teachers are better able to do their jobs, in well-maintained classrooms that are well-lit, clean, and spacious.²



To support both learning and health, students must be in schools that meet air and water quality standards and are free of mold, lead, and asbestos.⁴

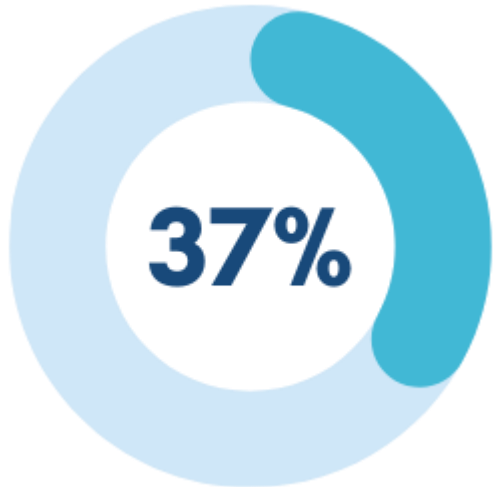
Communities with schools that are in most need of repair often receive the least amount of funding to improve and update their facilities.



1 in 2
school districts need to update or completely replace multiple building systems in their schools.⁵



This disproportionately impacts students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, who are more likely to attend schools that have unhealthy, unsafe, and educationally inadequate facilities in desperate need of modernization.⁶



High-poverty districts had 37% less invested in their school facilities improvements than low-poverty districts: an average of \$3.8 million per school for school construction from FY09-18, compared to \$5.2 million.⁷



Rural districts serving high-poverty public schools have funded capital improvements at almost half the level of the national average—\$2.3 million, on average, per school compared to \$4.3 million per school.⁸

Districts with higher concentrations of poverty also spend significantly less on school facilities improvements.

Making the case for improving access to **Learning-Ready Facilities** 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 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 each of your advocacy points in 10 words or less.
- Make them easy to remember and quotable.
- Think of what you would say in a tweet.

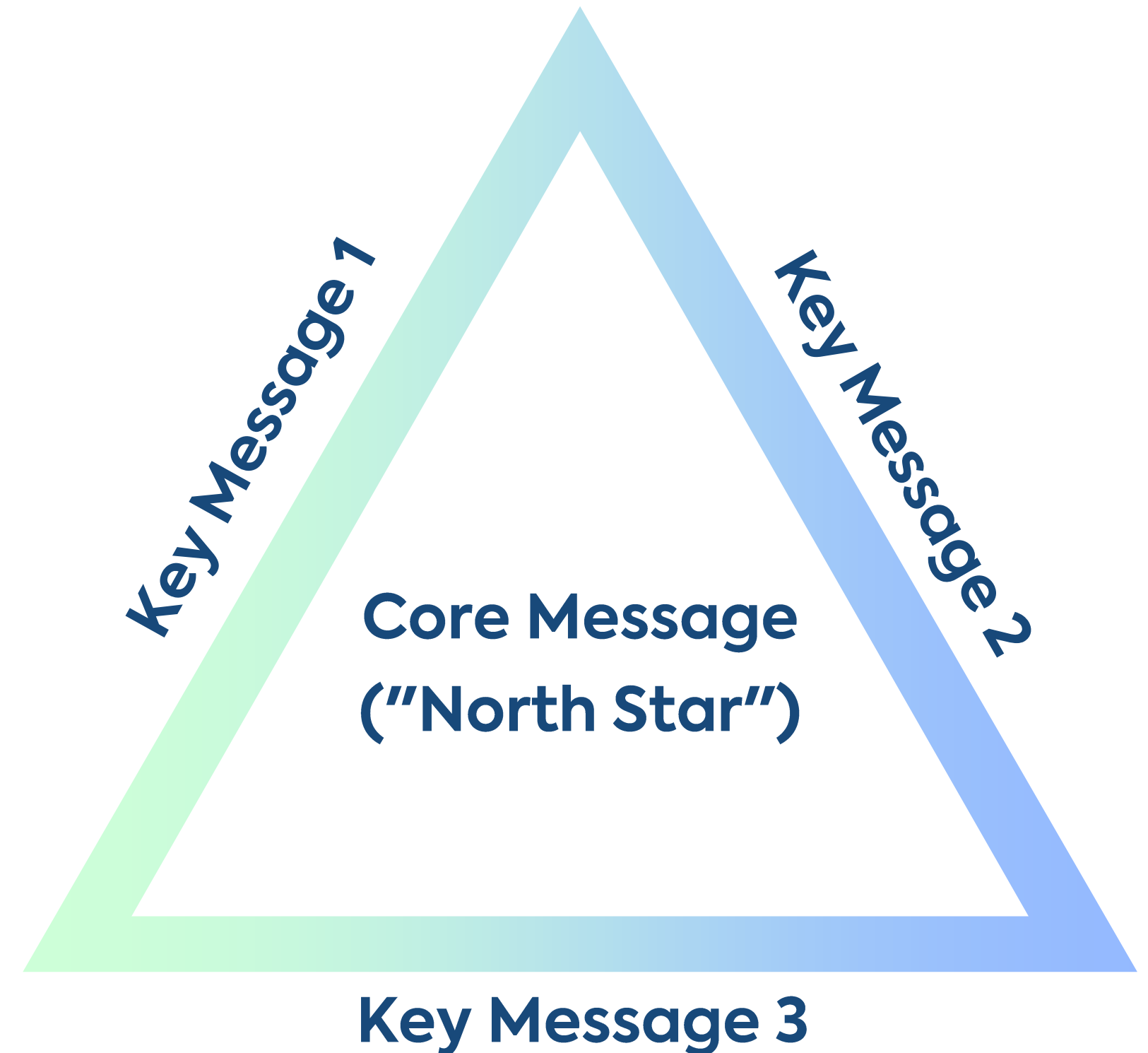
Avoid jargon and education speak.

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 Learning-Ready Facilities:

- **Key Question 9.1:** Does each student have access to adequate facilities that are safe and well-maintained and facilitate student learning and meet student needs?
- **Key Question 9.2:** Does each student have access to adequate equipment that facilitates student learning and meets student needs?

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 vision:

Each student attends school in buildings that are structurally sound, provide a safe and appropriate physical environment for learning, and have effective equipment to meet student needs, 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 question in the dimension.

For instance, analyzing teacher survey results on facility maintenance and access to supplies can help determine the answer to Key Question 9.2: “Does each student have access to adequate equipment that facilitates student learning and meets student needs?”

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 11% of teachers indicate they do not believe their classroom consistently has functioning equipment and/or adequate supplies. **We decide to use these data points to inform our key messages.**

3

Solidify the message:

- **Key Message 1 identifies the issue:** “Not every student in our district attends a school with functioning equipment and adequate materials.”
- **Key Message 2 explains why this matters:** “Functioning equipment and proper supplies impact student learning, teacher satisfaction, and student health.”
- **Key Message 3 advances a call to action:** “The district should develop systems and processes to ensure every classroom has functioning equipment and sufficient supplies.”

4

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

- **An illustrative data metric:** “Only 89% of our district’s teachers indicate they believe their classrooms have consistently functioning equipment and the adequate supplies to support learning.”
- **A punchy soundbite to use for an interview:** “We must equip every student with the equipment and supplies they need to be successful in their learning.”
- **A powerful narrative element:** Share a personal experience of a student attending school with broken equipment or inadequate supplies.

District X Example

Key Message 1

Not every student in our district attends a school with functioning equipment and adequate materials.



DATA METRIC: Only 89% of our district’s teachers indicate they believe their classrooms have consistently functioning equipment and the adequate supplies to support learning.



SOUNDBITE: “We must equip every student with the equipment and supplies they need to be successful in their learning.”



NARRATIVE: Share a personal experience of a student attending school with broken equipment or inadequate supplies.

Key Message 2

Functioning equipment and proper supplies impact student learning, teacher satisfaction, and student health.



DATA METRIC: When schools are properly outfitted with adequate equipment and materials, teachers and students can dedicate their time towards teaching and learning.



SOUNDBITE: “Properly outfitted schools allow for productive learning spaces.”



NARRATIVE: Share how the district could ensure all classrooms have proper materials and functioning equipment.

Core Message (“North Star”)

Each student attends school in buildings that are structurally sound, provide a safe and appropriate physical environment for learning, and have effective equipment to meet student needs, so all students can reach high standards and thrive.

Key Message 3

The district should develop systems and processes to ensure every classroom has functioning equipment and sufficient supplies.



DATA METRIC: Research indicates that adequate space, functioning equipment and materials impact student learning, teacher satisfaction, and student health.



SOUND BITE: Adequate, functioning spaces are one of many important building blocks that contribute to healthy learning environment for our students.”



NARRATIVE: Ask the district to develop equitable systems and processes to ensure every classroom has proper materials and functioning equipment.

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 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 the information you know and your key message.
- **Irrelevant Question:** Use a bridging statement to connect back to your key message.



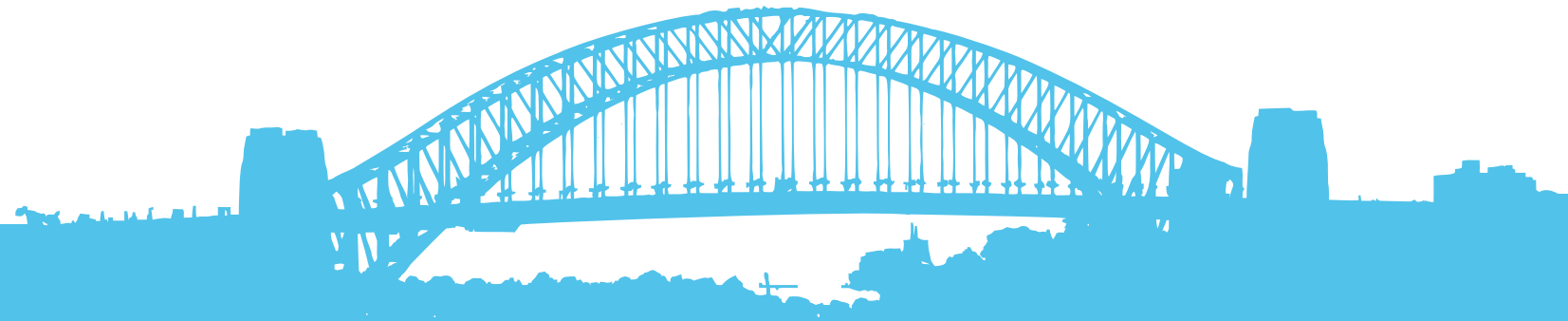
Question/concern that ...

- 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

We should not spend resources ensuring that each student has a personal computer and home internet access. These are huge cost burdens and are not the responsibility of the school or district.

Using and leveraging technology and the internet are a part of the fabric of schooling and life in the 21st century, and students need to be able to access these online resources.

However, many students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, do not have the devices (computer, tablet) or reliable home internet necessary to support online learning and homework. And to be mindful of cost, our district can leverage bulk purchasing power and partner with businesses and internet providers to provide laptops/tablets and expanded internet services.

Obviously, we'd love to provide all students with access to state-of-the-art school buildings and facilities, but construction costs are just too high! There isn't enough money to go around.

I completely understand that construction is expensive and that it's not possible for all students to attend school in brand new buildings, but...

It's crucial that, at a minimum, we provide all students with a safe place to learn. To do so, we must consider what necessary upgrades and partial renovations are needed, and where. Improving the state of our facilities does not only mean completely new builds. We can also consider applying for state or federal grants to supplement our current facilities budget to help offset these costs.

Investing in shiny new school facilities is a luxury, rather than a need. We should be focused on investing in things that directly impact student learning.

While some types of school facility spending could be considered a luxury, it's important to remember that...

The state of school buildings do have a direct impact on students' ability to access student instruction and can have an impact on student effort and engagement since structurally sound and well-maintained schools can help students feel supported and valued. Again, this does not necessarily mean completely new builds, but rather, ensuring we are making the necessary upgrades to ensure a functioning, safe building.

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 asset-framed.
- 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 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 throw you off course.
- Use it alongside the Alliance for Resource Equity [diagnostic tool](#) to more thoroughly assess the state of [learning-ready facilities](#) 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

1. Earthman, G., Lemasters, L. (1996). *“Review of Research on the Relationship Between School Buildings, Student Achievement, and Student Behavior.”* Council of Educational Facility Planners, International. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED416666>
2. United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. 2014. “Dear Colleague Letter: Resource Comparability.” Washington, DC. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-resourcecomp-201410.pdf>
3. Lafortune, J., Schonholzer, D. (2018). “Do School Facilities Matter? Measuring the Effects of Capital Expenditures on Student and Neighborhood Outcomes.” *American Economic Association*. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Do-School-Facilities-Matter-Measuring-the-Effects-Lafortune-Sch%C3%B6nholzer/a39a2bb90b2381a6dbd4772edfb0c08276058776>
4. National Cooperative Education Statistics System, National Forum on Education Statistics, and the Association of School Business Officials International. (2003). *“The Planning Guide for Maintaining School Facilities.”* Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Education Statistics, 2003. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/maintenance/index.asp>
5. U.S. Government Accountability Office (2020). “K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement.” <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-494>.
6. Ibid.
7. “2021 State of Our Schools.” (2021). National Council on School Facilities. <https://www.wellcertified.com/state-of-our-schools>.
8. Ibid.

Key Question	Data Metric	Data Source
<p>Key Question 9.1 Does each student have access to adequate facilities that are safe and well-maintained to facilitate student learning and meet student needs?</p>	<p>Percentage of school buildings that need significant repairs and demographics of students who use these buildings, disaggregated by school type and proportion of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.</p>	<p>No federal data sources here.</p>
	<p>Scatterplot of Facility Utilization Index (FUI) scores (y-axis) and percentage of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds (x-axis). Calculate the FUI by dividing the number of enrolled students by total enrollment capacity.</p>	<p>Use DOE school report card for enrollment totals.</p>
<p>Key Question 9.2 Does each student have access to adequate equipment to facilitate student learning and meet student needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of students who report having access to high-quality equipment, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and economic status of respondents. • % of teachers who report being able to access high-quality equipment 	<p>No federal data sources here. Your district or state may have publicly available student or teacher survey data that can help answer this question. Check DOE school report card.</p>



For the key questions in this dimension, there are no strong federally-maintained data sources. Districts are also unlikely to track data on student access to high-quality equipment. 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 access to devices that provide insight into Key Question 9.2. Advocates can also lean more heavily on narrative and anecdotes from their community to illuminate this issue.

YOUR DISTRICT:

Key Message 1



DATA METRIC: _____



SOUNDBITE: _____



NARRATIVE: _____



DATA METRIC: _____



SOUNDBITE: _____



NARRATIVE: _____

Key Message 2

DATA METRIC: _____

SOUNDBITE: _____

NARRATIVE: _____



Core Message ("North Star")

Key Message 3

