



## MAKE THE CASE DIVERSE CLASSROOMS & SCHOOLS



ALLIANCE FOR  
RESOURCE  
EQUITY

Your voice is important, and a necessary part of conversations on resource equity. The following slides will help you leverage your story and your community's data to “make the case” for diverse classrooms and schools.

The slides are broken down into three sections:

- Issue & Impact
- Building Your Message
- Dismantling Opposition

The next two slides will provide further background information and data on diverse classrooms and schools, and its impact on students. Consider utilizing these national trends as important context as you begin to craft your own local message on the slides immediately following these two. This information may also be helpful to refer back to as you consider ways to dismantle opposition, as discussed later in the slide deck.

## 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.<sup>1</sup>



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**.<sup>2</sup>




**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.<sup>3</sup>

- When a student attends a school or is in a classroom with a diverse array of racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds, they are able to gain exposure to different perspectives from their own, fostering critical thinking and appreciation an increasingly diverse world.
- Further, when students learn alongside their peers in a diverse environment, all students' gain a greater cultural awareness and dismantle prejudice, especially when all students' have an opportunity for their own identity to be validated and celebrated in school.

**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 of students attended schools where almost all the student body was of a single race/ethnicity.<sup>4</sup>

**14%**


Black students are **5X** as likely as White students to attend schools that are highly segregated by race/ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

Black students are **2X** as likely to attend economically segregated schools.<sup>7</sup>



**72%**  
of Black students attend a high-poverty school.<sup>8</sup>



**31%**  
of White students attend a high-poverty school.<sup>9</sup>

- By and large, our schools are not racially and economically diverse places of learning. Students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to attend highly segregated schools, perpetuating a systemic legacy of institutionalized marginalization and inequity.
- There is a complex web of factors that sustain school segregation, and segregation in schools is in large part due to historical factors like discriminatory housing policies, redlining, and socioeconomic disparities that concentrate students of color and students from low-income backgrounds in specific neighborhoods.

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



Keep it simple.

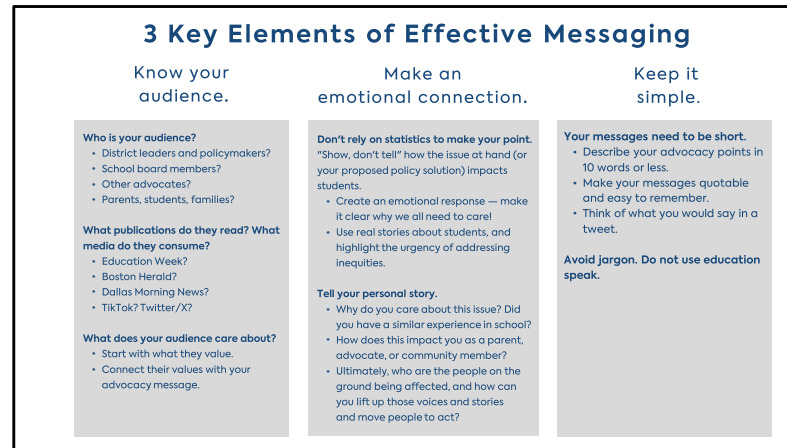


Know your audience.



Make an emotional connection.

The following slides will help you build an effective message to increase diverse classrooms and schools in your community. All effective messages have 3 key components. Adhering to these components is by no means easy given the complexity of resource equity work, but the more you can do so, the larger an impact your message is likely to have. These 3 components are: keeping it simple, knowing your audience, and making an emotional connection. The next slide will explain each in more detail.



### 1. Knowing your Audience

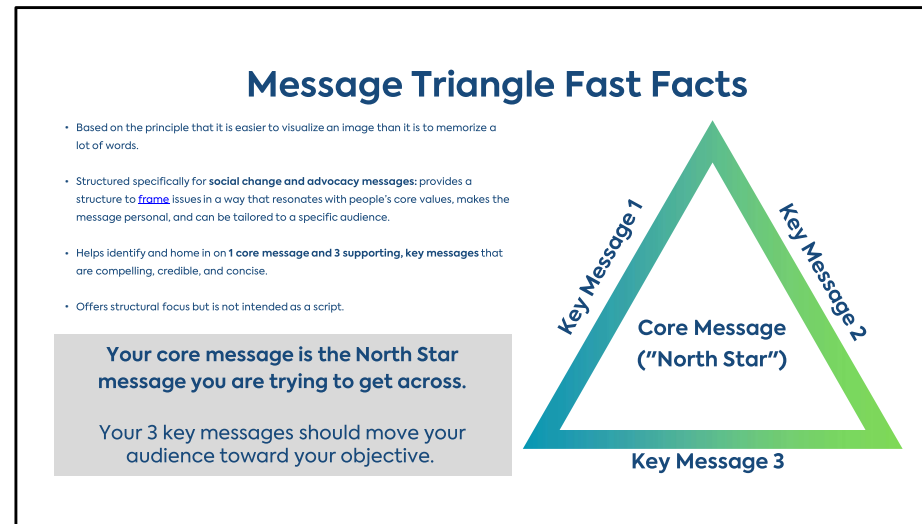
- While it may be tempting to label “everyone” as your audience, the more personalized you can make your message, the more likely it will be to have an impact. Once you’ve identified your specific audience, consider their values or what they cares deeply about, keeping in mind that this will likely differ from what you value most. Then, connect your message to your audiences’ values and priorities.
- Once you have your message, share it in places your audience frequents. Look for news outlets that cater to specific stakeholders, or public events your audience attends. Establishing trust is imperative for this strategy to be effective. Your audience will only listen to your message if they a) receive it and b) trust you as a reliable and accurate source of information.

### 2. Make an Emotional Connection

- People respond to emotion and passion, so use it in your messaging! The more personal and local you can make the issue, the more likely your audience will be to act. Stories are one of the most effective ways to do this. Often the most powerful stories come from the people most affected by the issue itself – in this case children and families. When asking these stakeholders to share their stories, make the process as easy as possible for them by offering training and removing barriers to participation like transportation and childcare. Offering multiple modes through which stakeholders can share their story, such as virtual or written options, is also helpful when feasible.

### 3. Keep It Simple

- Your audience can’t act on your message if they don’t understand what you’re asking of them. Your messaging should be simple, concise, and easy to understand. This means avoiding any language that requires advanced knowledge of the education field and being clear from the start about what you are asking your audience to do. It also means being consistent in your messaging over time and across coalitions to avoid confusing your targets.



The Message Triangle is one useful strategy for structuring your messaging. It distinguishes between two types of messages - "core" and "key" messages, which are outlined below. When building your Message Triangle, use asset framing to ensure you are placing the blame for inequity on systems and structures, instead of students or communities.

- **The Core Message:** The "Core Message" or "North Star" is your main point, goal, or value that you want to communicate to your audience. It drives all other messaging for your audience and is the message that, if nothing else, you want your audience to walk away remembering. If the message triangle is an essay, the core message serves as the essay's thesis.
- **The Key Messages:** There are three "Key Messages" in every Message Triangle, each of which intentionally build off one another to drive your audience to support and take action towards your main goal (or Core Message).
  - The first Key Message identifies and establishes the issue affecting your community that you want your audience to address. It breaks down the federal, state, and/or local inequity you have identified so that your audience, who will likely not be as well versed on the issue as you, has a full understanding of the topic you will go on to discuss.
  - The second Key Message showcases the impact of this issue, either broadly or on your specific community, and how addressing it will have a positive impact on students in your area. In doing so, the second Key Message demonstrates why your audience should care about the issue you have raised, and why they should act now to address it.
  - The third Key Message is your call to action, prompting your audience to act in service of your goal. It explains exactly what you want your audience to do about the issue you have brought to their attention.

## 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?

- Now that you know what a Message Triangle is, how do you create one? Start by reviewing the Alliance for Resource Equity's Key Questions on learning-ready facilities to ensure you have considered all facets of this topic. You can also turn to the Learning-Ready Facilities Section of the Education Combination (pgs. 35-37) for more information. Then, develop a goal or vision for your work. This overarching vision will become your Core Message – a succinct but comprehensive description of what it is you are advocating for and why.
- You can then move on to developing your Key Messages. To do so, first look at available data, such as your state department of education's School Report Card, in order to develop a thorough understanding of the state of learning-ready facilities in your community. Appendix A provides additional suggestions for data sources to explore. Then use your findings to craft your first two Key Messages, which define the scope and impact of the problem on your community. Build off these to create your third Key Message – your call to action – which tells your audience what to do in response to the problem you've identified. More information on drafting Key Messages can be found in the following slide.

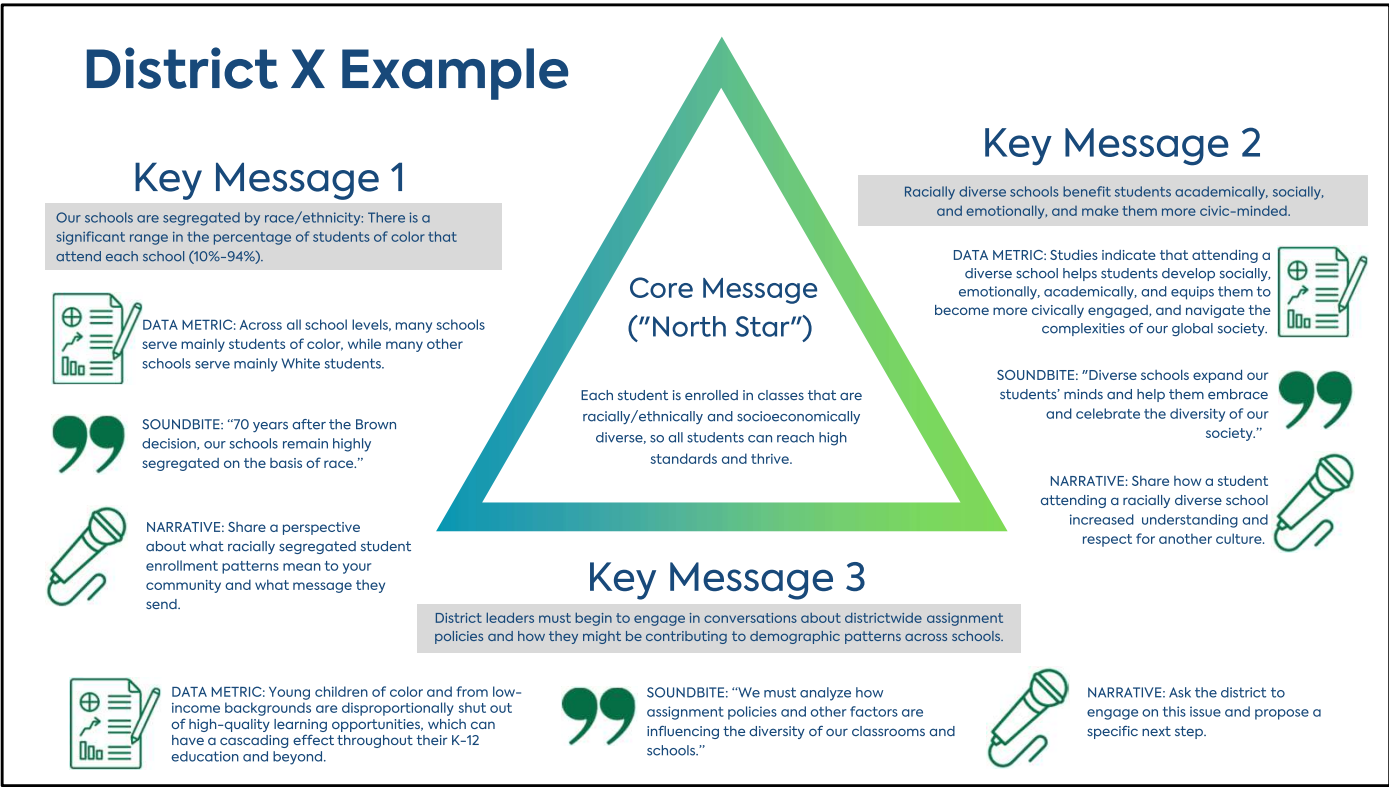
### Forming Key Messages 101

- 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.

This slide provides an example for the 3rd step from the previous slide: Forming Key Messages. As a reminder, these 3 Key Messages will form each side of your Message Triangle in the end!

- Step 1: First, consult Appendix A in this deck for suggested metrics and data sources that could help inform your message triangle. (You can also utilize district-specific data or materials you may have access to, or if you previously completed the Resource Equity Diagnostic, you could refer back to those data sources.)
- Step 2: Let's imagine that the first metric listed in Appendix A (Key Question 10.1) reveals a significant finding: the racial demographics across schools in your district vary drastically. Given this, you decide to use this data point to inform your Message Triangle, and later, you can reference it to help illustrate the issue.
- Step 3: It's now time for you to build your message! Now, you can go back and add more detail to each Key Message in the next step.
  - Key Message 1 states 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 identifies why the issue presented in the first Key Message matters. It answers the question of why your audience should care about this issue: **"Racially diverse schools benefit students academically, socially, emotionally, and make them more civic-minded."**
  - Key Message 3 presents a call to action to mobilize your audience. It answers the question of what you want my audience to do about it: **"District leaders must begin to engage in conversations about districtwide assignment policies and how they might be contributing to demographic patterns across schools."**
- Step 4: Return to each Key Message to add some supporting information.
  - Preparing an illustrative data metric, a punchy soundbite (a very brief, catchy statement intended to capture interest of audience and ideal for a media quote) , and a powerful narrative element (personal story, anecdote of a child's experience, etc.) can help you be ready when the right opportunities arise to leverage them.
  - See FAQ's (Slide 13) for more information on what makes for a compelling soundbite and effective narrative element.
  - You'll use the data metric, soundbite, and narrative element in the ways that will be most powerful to the specific audience you're engaging with. For instance, you may be likely to use soundbites when engaging with the media, share a personal story when in conversation with other advocates, and a data metric with district leaders.
  - Make sure the data metrics you are preparing are easily understood and explained in a straightforward manner.





- This is an example of a completed Message Triangle on diverse classrooms & schools. Notice the presence of a data metric, soundbite, and narrative under each of the key messages presented here. As discussed above, these different methods of communicating can be useful for ensuring your message “lands” with different audiences. It is up to you to determine what method (or combination of methods) will work best for your audience. For example, if you were using the message triangle here to make the case for a more diverse teacher workforce to your school board, you might first present Key Message 1 as a data metric to describe the overall issue to the school board. You might then choose to present Key Message 2 as a narrative to exemplify how the lack of a diverse teacher workforce impacts the experiences of many students in the district, bringing the statistic shared in Key Message 1 into clearer focus with a tangible and personal story with Key Message 2. Finally, you might close with a soundbite for Key Message 3 to leave the school board with a clear call to action that sticks in their minds.
- It is important to note that, while the Message Triangle is a powerful tool for visualizing your goal and all the arguments you can make to get there, it is not prescriptive. We encourage you to view the Message Triangle as a jumping off point; used to further refine your own messaging and tailor it to the needs of your community and the values of your audience.

# 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.


- Use this checklist to ensure your message triangle meets all the suggested criteria. Adjust as necessary.
- This is the last step in this section of the deck, Constructing Your Messaging. The next section discusses how to dismantle opposition.
- For more information on asset-based framing, see Slide 13 (FAQs).

# 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.



- It is inevitable that you will face criticism when presenting your message. The following slides will help you respond to criticism and focus attention back on your message. There are three main types of criticism: Bad Information, Speculation, and Irrelevant Questions. This slide offers best practices when responding to each.
- One tactic that is useful in responding to any type of criticism is bridging statements. These statements create a bridge between the opposition's argument and your own. Their goal is to bring the conversation back to, and therefore reinforce, your own points. When using a bridging statement, it is important to never reiterate the opposing argument. Instead, briefly acknowledge that your opposition's point was shared, before using a bridging statement to connect back to your messaging.

		
<p>Question/concern that ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distracts from key issues</li> <li>• Introduces dangerous line of opposition</li> <li>• Expresses different mission/goal</li> </ul>	<p><b>BRIDGING STATEMENT</b></p>	<p>Your response hits on your key messages in service of core "North Star" message</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>While all those factors play a role when it comes to the diversity of our schools, it boils down to this:</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Students' prior academic achievement and demonstrated readiness determine their course placement, not their race or family income.</p>	<p>I feel compelled to shift how we think about the underlying issue of "prior academic performance." I think it's important to clarify that...</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Even though our district is diverse, we can't do much without re-drawing school zones or introducing school choice policies.</p>	<p>If we consider this issue more broadly, we can better understand that...</p>	<p>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.</p>

This slide identifies some of the opposing narratives you may encounter, and how to use the bridging statement format to bring the conversation back to a place where you can emphasize your own messaging.

- For example, the misguided-yet-popular claim that if districts have few people of color to begin with it is fruitless to attempt to make their classrooms and schools more diverse, is found on the left-most column in this slide. As a suggested response to this opposition, advocates can use the bridging statement in the middle column to first, recognize that factors like residential segregation do play a role in school composition, and second, clarify how this doesn't mean districts work to make their classrooms and schools more diverse. This bridge allows advocates to then further dismantle the opposing claim and reinforce key messages about the benefits of diverse classrooms and schools, and the role districts can play in making them a reality (response in right-most column).
- These examples are intended to be representative in nature: they reflect the broad lines of opposition that advocates may often hear when engaging on this issue. However, it's important to note that opposing narratives might be framed differently as presented on this slide. When this is the case, you may still be able to use a bridging statement and response that is similar to what is presented on this slide. For instance:
  - You may encounter opposition that sounds like: "Our district prides itself on offering specialized magnet schools that allow students to pursue their passions. Entry to these schools is based on a lottery system and is completely random. We can't control the demographics of the students who end up attending these schools."
  - While this does not mention a lack of diversity in the district, it expresses a similar core claim to the first opposition statement on this slide: Both opposing narratives **cite a belief** that the demographics of schools are outside of the community's control as justification for **de-prioritizing the importance of creating diverse classrooms and schools**. Therefore, you could use the same general arguments as listed under the first example in this slide, even though the original opposing message is not identical. You could also utilize outside knowledge you may have about social capital and information gatekeeping to showcase how lottery policies may not be as equitable as they appear.

The image shows a document titled "FAQ's" with several sections of text. The sections are: "Why does this sample message triangle work?", "What if we don't have access to the information we need for the data metrics?", "What makes for an effective narrative element?", "What makes for a compelling soundbite?", "What do you mean by asset-framing? How do I do that?", "How do I use this message triangle?", and "What is the Alliance for Resource Equity? How do I learn more?". Each section contains bullet points providing detailed information and guidance.

We hope this resource acts as either a culmination of – or a jumping off point to – several additional resource equity conversations. Additional resources in the Alliance for Resource Equity toolkit can aid in these discussions:

- Want a primer on what resource equity means?
  - It's important to begin with a solid understanding of why resource equity is a necessary frame to consider how schools are providing supports to all students to learn and thrive. Review the [Education Combination](#) to break it down.
- Not sure which dimension of resource equity should be the focus of your message?
  - Use our [Resource Equity Diagnostic and Tools](#) to identify opportunities in all 10 dimensions of resource equity to improve equity and excellence.
- Not sure who your audience should be to craft your message around?
  - Your audience influences how to effectively develop your message. Use our [Advocating Across Government Guides](#) to help clarify various levels of education authority and governance.
- Not sure what to specifically ask your district (and/or other decisionmakers) in the call to action?
  - Our [Guidebooks](#), specific to each Dimension of Resource Equity, explores underlying causes and the potential actions based on underlying challenges.
  - The dimension-specific Diagnostic Blueprints break down the types of analyses that districts can conduct to learn more about resource equity in their district and includes a DIY Analysis Tool for districts to input and analyze their own data.
  - Propose using the [sample meeting agenda](#) to structure additional conversations with your district about resource equity.
- If you are interested in learning more about asset-based framing, you may find the following resources helpful:
  - [Video series](#) about “The Power of Asset Framing”
  - [Blog](#) about “The Power of Asset-Based Language”
  - [Blog](#) about “Asset Framing: The Harder Data Work”

## 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.

Appendix A: Data Resources Chart

Key Question	Data Metric	Data Notes	Data Source
<p><b>Key Question 10.1</b>                      Is each student enrolled in a school and attending classes that are racially/ ethnically and socioeconomically diverse?</p>	<p>Stacked Bar Chart: Racial/ethnic composition of schools by school type and school poverty level/quartile</p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Urban Institute/NCES</a></li> </ul>
	<p>Determine if school attendance boundaries promote integration, increase segregation, or replicate segregation relative to neighborhood racial composition.</p>	<p>Scroll to the middle of webpage to select your district.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">School Zones Drawer via Vox</a></li> </ul>
	<p>Determine if your district has school attendance boundaries that are more or less integrated than neighborhoods themselves.</p>	<p>Available for large districts only.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Segregated Neighborhoods. Segregated Schools?</a></li> </ul>
	<p>Additional resource: understand the factors driving segregation in the broader area using metro-level school segregation data.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Segregation in Cities, Mapped Across America</a></li> </ul>

Use this chart to identify data metrics useful to informing your key message(s), in addition to your own knowledge about what is happening in your community. Refer to the slide on how to form key messages for more information.

**Appendix B: Message Triangle Worksheet**


YOUR DISTRICT: \_\_\_\_\_


### Key Message 1


\_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_

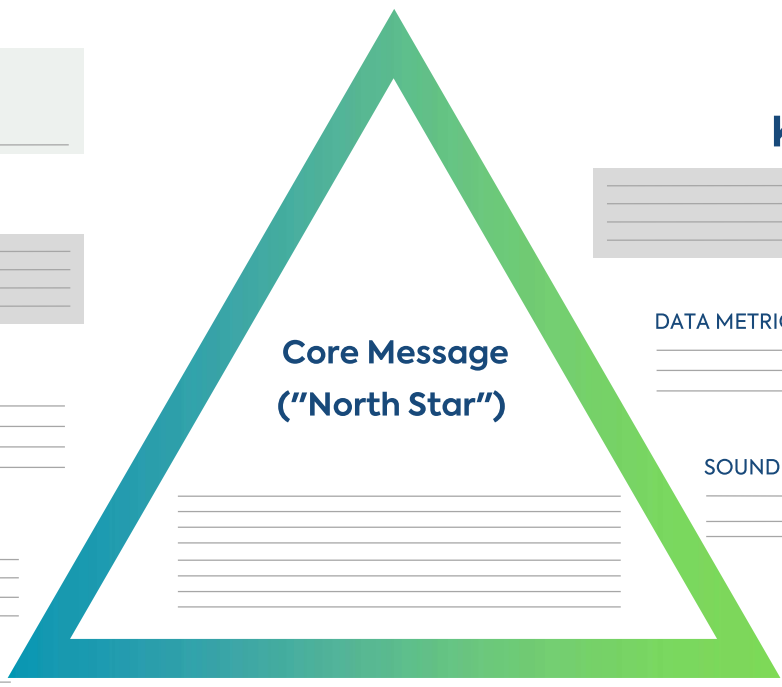
\_\_\_\_\_

 DATA METRIC: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

 SOUNDBITE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

 NARRATIVE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

 DATA METRIC: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



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

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Key Message 2

\_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_


\_\_\_\_\_


DATA METRIC: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

SOUNDBITE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

NARRATIVE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_









### Key Message 3

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

 SOUNDBITE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

 NARRATIVE: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Use this slide to form your own message triangle!