



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 empowering, rigorous content.

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 empowering, rigorous content 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.

Curriculum and instructional materials that are culturally responsive and aligned with grade-level standards are crucial to students' learning and academic trajectory.

Students are more engaged when they see people like themselves in school materials.¹

Access to rigorous, advanced coursework is essential to equip students with 21st-century skills like creativity, critical thinking, and technological literacy.⁵



Increased engagement from representation leads to improved academic outcomes like **sharper critical thinking skills and increases in test scores,**² as well as **higher rates of course completion, graduation, and school attendance.**³



A curriculum that is **comprehensive, aligned to high standards, and appropriately rigorous can improve learning,** especially for students with less-effective teachers, who are often concentrated in high-need schools and assigned to students of color.⁷



Students reap **many benefits from a representative curriculum,** such as improved self-esteem, stronger sense of belonging, socioemotional well-being, empathy, and a greater appreciation for cultural differences.⁴



Enrollment in advanced coursework—such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate programs in high school—can **improve test scores, as well as higher-education readiness and success.**⁸

- Empowering, rigorous content in schools equips students with the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to navigate a diverse and dynamic world.
- When schools provide students with challenging and culturally relevant content, students are empowered to be engaged in their learning. Further, school materials that reflect the diverse identities validates students' unique range of experiences and can contribute to a more equitable and enriching educational environment by fostering a sense of belonging in school environments.
- Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality, rigorous, and culturally relevant content contributes to students' academic success, allowing students to build important critical thinking skills, and form skills necessary to adapt to a rapidly changing economy and society.

Curriculum and instructional materials are not representative of all students' lives and community experiences. Students — especially those from historically marginalized backgrounds — are also not given the opportunities to succeed in rigorous educational environments.

Most curricular materials do not allow students of color to see themselves represented in the books they read in school. In a study of 300 books:

30% of the books feature diverse characters that are Black, Asian, Latino, Native American, Middle Eastern, or mixed race.¹

of these 30% of books:



1 in 2

includes a complex central character of color²



1 in 3

represents groups and cultures in a complex way³



1 in 6

discuss historical/social topics in complex way²

Many of the books that honestly represent people, cultures, and topics are at risk of being banned. From July 2021 to June 2022, PEN America's Index of School Book Bans listed **2,532** instances of individual books being banned.³

- While research indicates that culturally relevant curricular materials positively impacts student attitudes and contribute to student learning, the majority of students of color do not see themselves or their lived experiences represented in the books and other materials they use in school.

**Students of color and students in high-poverty schools
are underrepresented in advanced courses.**

225,000

Black and Latino students are under-identified for AP courses they should otherwise have access to while in high school.⁴

43,000 Black students
60,000 Latino students

Number of additional students who would be enrolled in 8th grade algebra courses if Black and Latino students had a fair opportunity to participate in these courses in the U.S.⁵

- Additionally, many students of color and students from low income backgrounds are denied opportunities to partake and succeed in rigorous educational environments. For instance, high-performing students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are not given the same access to advanced courses as their more affluent or White peers.

Making the case for improving access to **Empowering, Rigorous Content** hinges on effectively communicating its importance, urgency, and connection to your community.

3 Key Elements of Effective Messaging



Keep it simple.

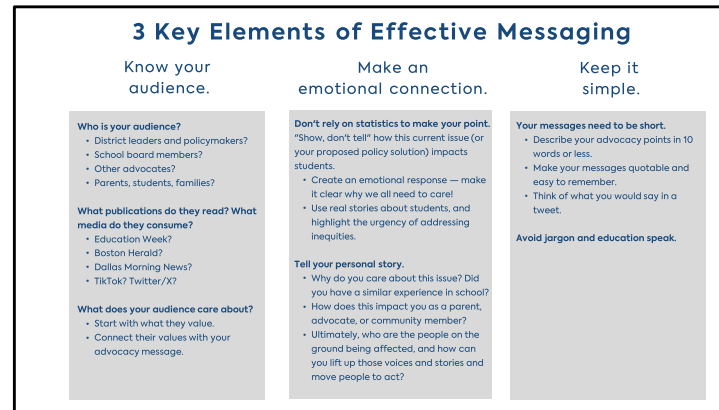


Know your audience.



Make an emotional connection.

The following slides will help you build an effective message to increase empowering, rigorous content 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

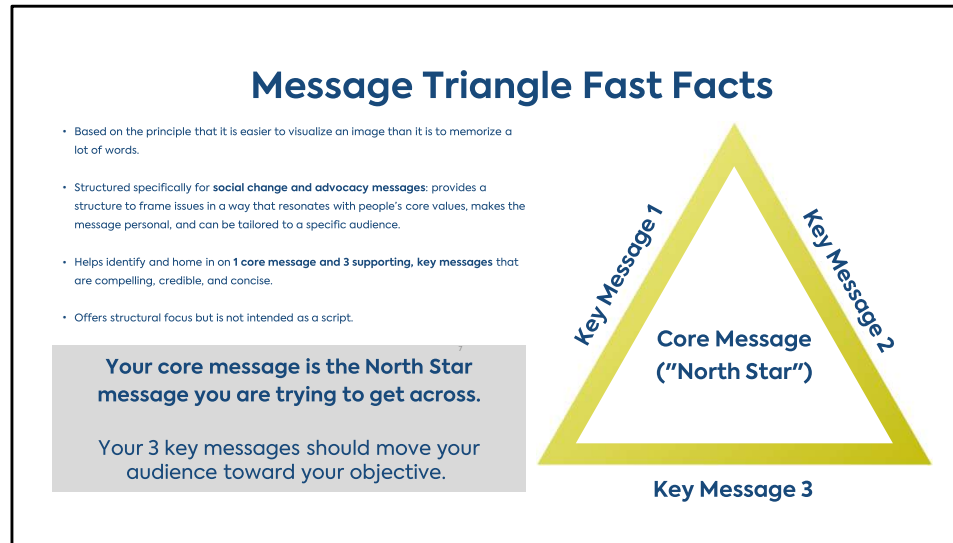
- While it may be tempting to label “everyone” as your audience, the more personalized you can make your message, the more likely it will be to have an impact. Once you’ve identified your specific audience, consider their values or what they cares deeply about, keeping in mind that this will likely differ 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.

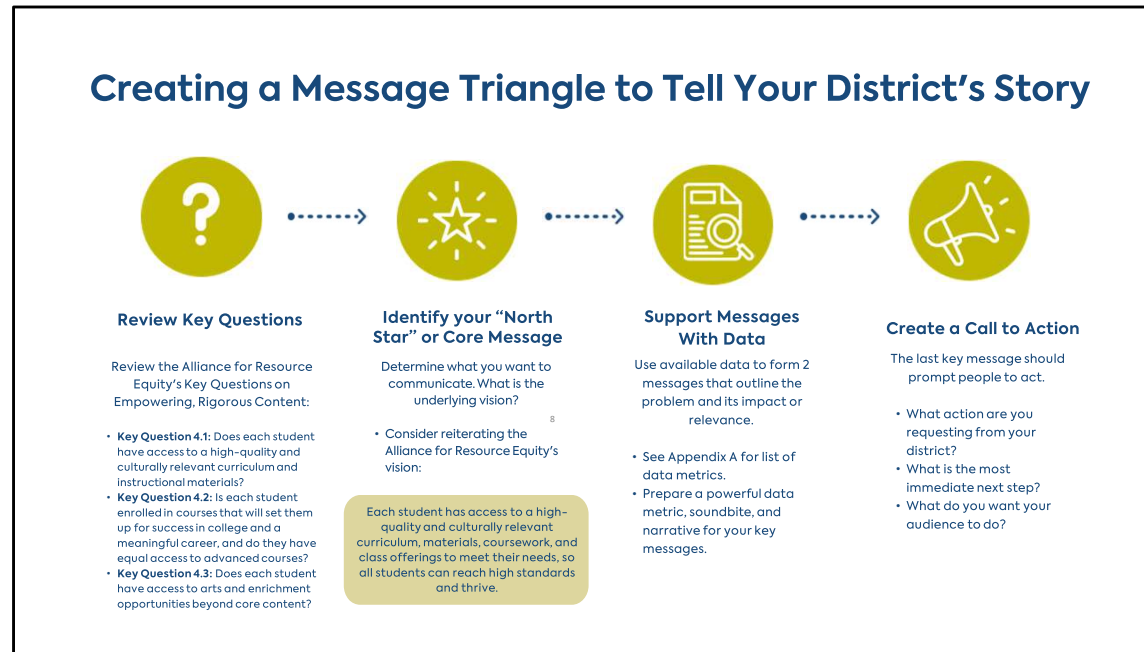
3. Keep It Simple

- 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.



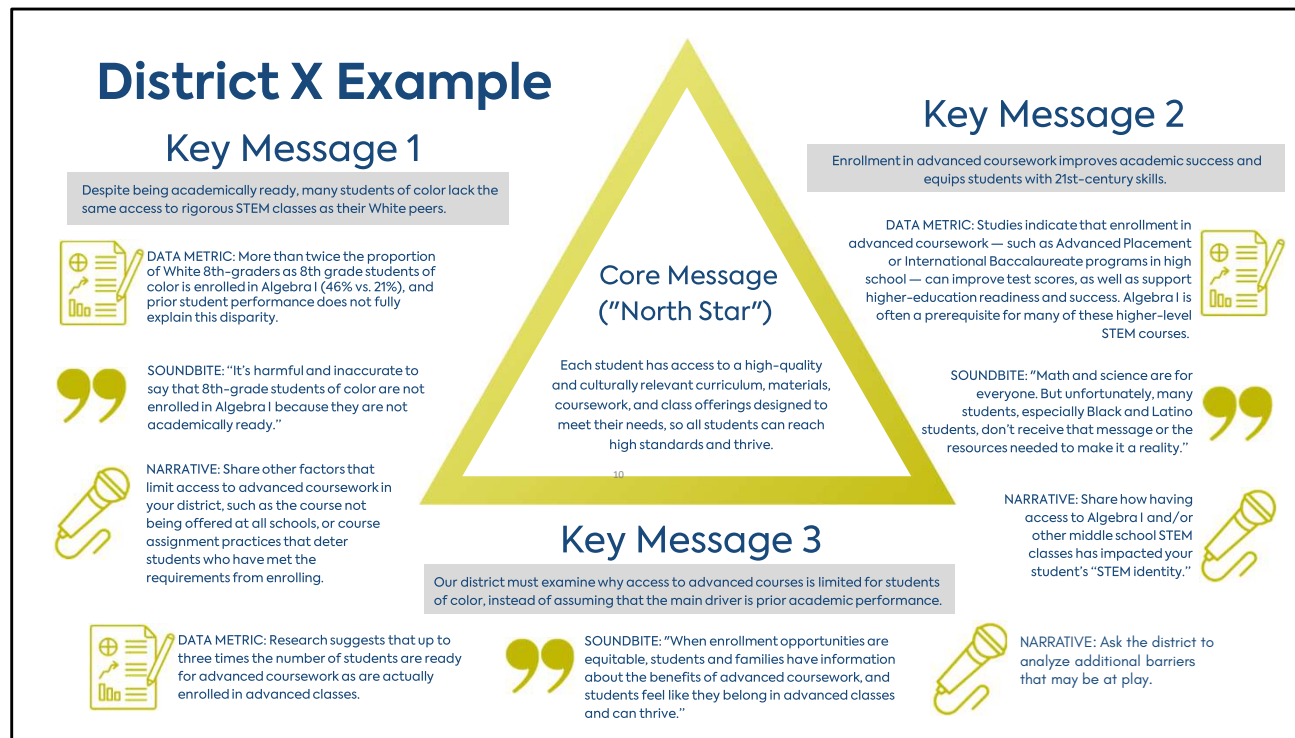
- Now that you know what a Message Triangle is, how do you create one? Start by reviewing the Alliance for Resource Equity's Key Questions on empowering, rigorous content to ensure you have considered all facets of this topic. You can also turn to the Empowering, Rigorous Content Section of the Education Combination (pgs. 18-20) 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 the research available through EdReports, in order to develop a thorough understanding of the availability of empowering, rigorous content 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 % of students enrolled/passing Algebra I in 8th grade by school poverty, by % students of color (or by individual racial/ethnic subgroup) could help determine the answer to Key Question 4.2: "Is each student enrolled in courses that will set them up for success in college and a meaningful career, and do they have equal access to advanced courses?"
- 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 21% of students of color in the district are enrolled in Algebra I, versus 46% of White students. Suppose we also learn that Algebra I isn't offered at every middle school in the district. **We can use these data points to inform our key messages.**
- 3** **Solidify the message.**
 - **Key Message 1 identifies the issue:** "Despite being academically ready, many students of color do not have the same access to rigorous STEM classes as their White peers."
 - **Key Message 2 explains why this matters:** "Enrollment in advanced coursework improves academic success and equips students with 21st-century skills."
 - **Key Message 3 advances a call to action:** "Our district must examine why access to advanced courses is limited for students of color, instead of assuming that the main driver is prior academic performance."
- 4** **Use additional elements to support your key messages. For Key Message 1, this could look like:**
 - **An illustrative data metric:** "More than twice as many White 8th-graders as 8th grade students of color are enrolled in Algebra I (46% vs. 21%), and prior student performance does not fully explain this disparity in enrollment."
 - **A punchy soundbite to use for an interview:** "It's harmful and inaccurate to say that 8th-grade students of color are not enrolled in Algebra I because they are not academically ready."
 - **A powerful narrative element:** Highlight other factors that limit access to advanced coursework in your district, such as the course not being offered at all schools, or course assignment practices that deter students who have met the requirements from enrolling.

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 second metric listed in Appendix A (Key Question 4.2) reveals a significant finding: there's a big difference between the percentage of students color (21%) and the percentage of White students (46%) in the district who are enrolled in Algebra 1. 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: "**Despite being academically ready, many students of color do not have the same access to rigorous STEM classes as their White peers.**"
 - 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: "**Enrollment in advanced coursework improves academic success and equips students with 21st-century skills.**"
 - 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: "**Our district must examine why access to advanced courses is limited for students of color, instead of assuming that the main driver is prior academic performance.**"
- 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 14) 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 empowering, rigorous content. 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 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.



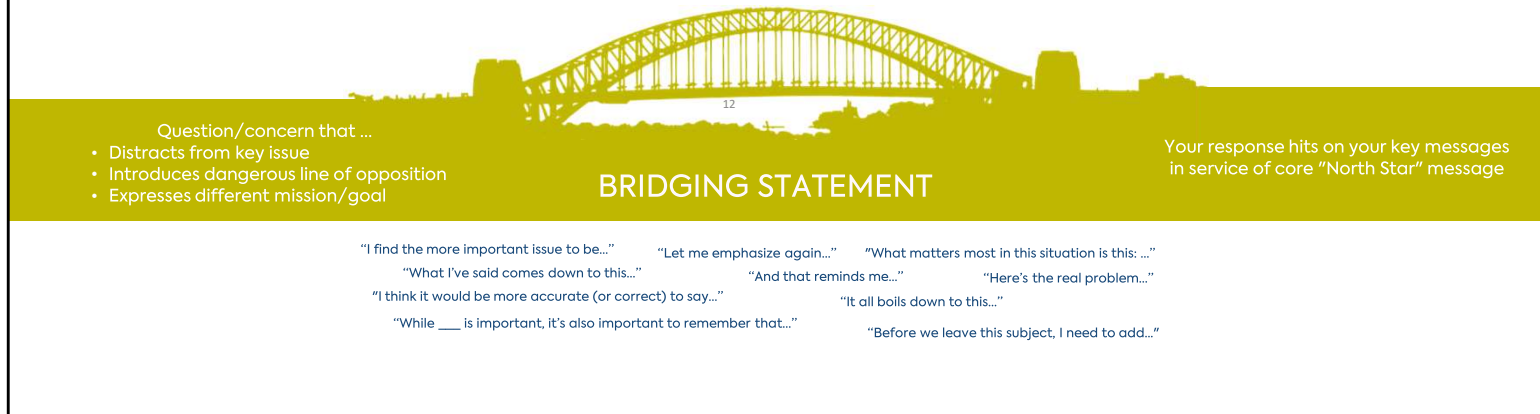
Include a call to action?

- A positive vision helps your audience realize what's possible and recognize the role they play in sparking the change.

- 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 14 (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 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.

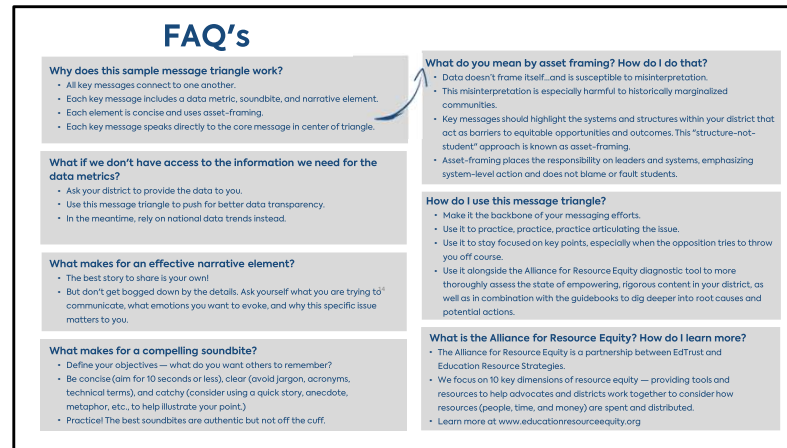


- It is inevitable that you will face criticism when presenting your message. The following slides will help you respond to criticism and focus attention back on your message. There are three main types of criticism: Bad Information, Speculation, and Irrelevant Questions. This slide offers best practices 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.

Question/concern that...	BRIDGING STATEMENT	Your response hits on your key messages in service of core "North Star" message
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distracts from key issue • Introduces dangerous line of opposition • Expresses different mission/goal 	<p>Not all students are ready for advanced coursework. We can't just throw a bunch of students who aren't ready in an advanced class -- that is a disservice to them.</p>	<p>I want to clarify that that is seldom actually the case because...</p> <p>Many more students are ready for advanced coursework than most schools think! Research suggests that up to three times as many students are ready for advanced coursework as are actually enrolled in advanced classes. When enrollment opportunities are equitable, students and families have information about the benefits of advanced coursework, and students feel like they belong in advanced classes and they can thrive.</p>
<p>Even if exam fees and textbooks act as a barrier to get more students taking things like the AP test, or expanding access to more students, we don't want to allocate new strains of money.</p>	<p>When determining how to allocate limited resources, we need to remember that...</p>	<p>Currently, students are not equitably prepared for their postsecondary futures and, in many states, most are not meeting grade-level expectations. To prepare more students for more postsecondary pathways and jobs of the future, states and districts must ensure that more students are connected to rigorous and advanced coursework opportunities.</p>
<p>Curricular materials shouldn't be an avenue to introduce controversial topics in society. If we continue down this road any further, it becomes (or already is) propaganda.</p>	<p>If we take a broader perspective, it becomes clear that...</p>	<p>Teaching truthful, nuanced history is paramount to ensure that our students have a complete picture of our country's complicated history, including the things, past and present, that we have not gotten right. Additionally, students need to be taught to recognize racism, interact with people who are different from them, and learn empathy. By not teaching students the imperfect history of our country, we are failing to prepare them to be problem-solvers and effective citizens in a multicultural society.</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 some students just aren't ready for advanced courses, 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 identify this claim as false. Note that this bridging statement is different than others which might acknowledge the comment by the opposition because in this case the opposing statement includes false information, and therefore the advocate should not call any more attention to it. Instead, the bridge allows advocates to further dismantle the opposing claim by reinforcing key messages about the number of students who are ready for advanced coursework, and the importance of equitable access to these courses (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 teachers are the ones who decide which students are enrolled in advanced courses. They know best which students are ready for this level of coursework, and the district shouldn't interfere in their decision-making."
 - While this does not explicitly mention the belief that not all students are ready for advanced coursework, it expresses a similar core claim: Both opposing narratives **cite a belief** that not all students are ready for advanced courses that justifies **de-prioritizing equitable access to empowering, rigorous content**. 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.



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

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15. Ibid.

Appendix A: Data Resources Chart

Key Question	Data Metric	Data Notes	Data Source
<p>Key Question 4.1 Does each student have access to a high-quality and culturally relevant curriculum and instructional materials?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-level scatterplot that compares % of curricula that meets EdReports' standards (x-axis) by % students from low-income backgrounds (y-axis) School-level scatterplot that compares % of curricula that meets EdReports' standards (x-axis) by % of students of color (y-axis) Stacked barchart of % of curricula that meets EdReports' standards by school type. 	Use district website and general knowledge to determine school curricula. Then look up review by EdReports, an external review site that evaluates the most used ELA, math and science curricula. Use Urban Institute/NCES to get student demographic data.	EdReports
<p>Key Question 4.2 Is each student enrolled in courses that will set them up for success in college and a meaningful career, and do they have equal access to advanced courses?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of students enrolled/passing Algebra I in 8th grade, disaggregated by school poverty status. % of students enrolled/passing Algebra I in 8th grade, disaggregated by student racial/ethnic demographics. % of students enrolled in 1 or more AP classes or passed 1 or more AP exams by school poverty level, by % students of color (or by individual racial/ethnic subgroups) % of students in dual enrollment or IB classes by school poverty level, by % students of color (or by individual racial/ethnic subgroup) Number of AP courses and advanced math courses offered by school (HS-level only) 	Urban Institute/NCES provides advanced coursework enrollment by race/ethnicity only. Check state DOE report cards to see if your state reports these metrics by Title I status or % of students from low-income backgrounds.	Urban Institute/NCES and State DOE District Report Card
<p>Key Question 4.3 Does each student have access to arts and enrichment opportunities beyond core content?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % of students enrolled in art courses by school poverty level and by % students of color (or by individual racial/ethnic subgroup) 	For most states, this source provides district- and school-level data on art courses offered and students enrolled. Click on your state to access the data.	Arts Education Data Project

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

Key Message 2

Core Message ("North Star")

Key Message 3

DATA METRIC: _____

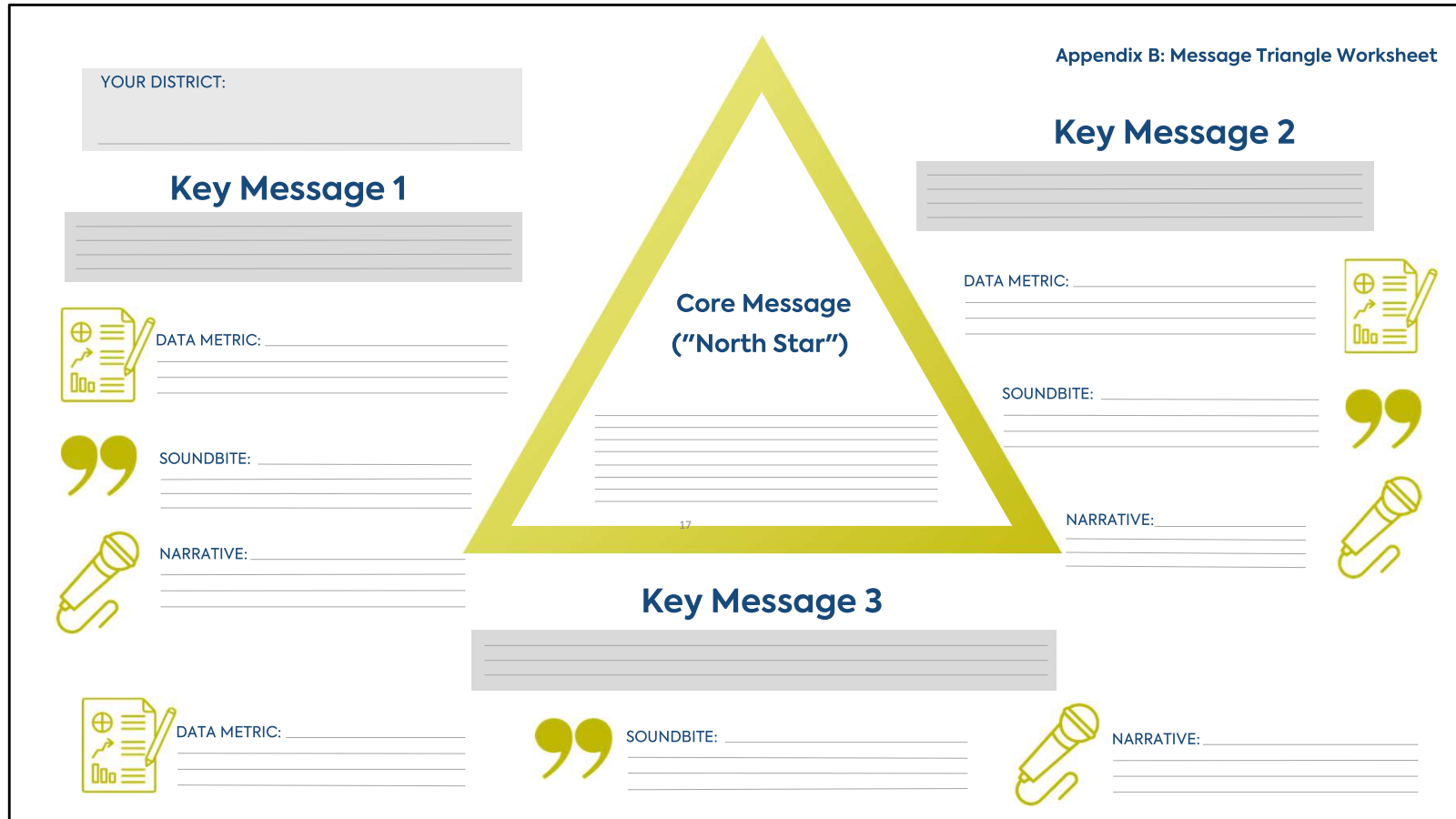
SOUNDBITE: _____

NARRATIVE: _____

DATA METRIC: _____

SOUNDBITE: _____

NARRATIVE: _____

The diagram is a large yellow triangle with a thick border. Inside the triangle, the text "Core Message ('North Star')" is centered. The triangle is divided into three sections by lines extending from its vertices to the center. The top-left section is labeled "Key Message 1", the top-right section is "Key Message 2", and the bottom section is "Key Message 3". Each section contains a grey rectangular box for a title and several horizontal lines for text. Surrounding the triangle are various icons: a document with a plus sign and a pencil, a microphone, and quotation marks. Each icon is associated with a label: "DATA METRIC:", "SOUNDBITE:", and "NARRATIVE:", each followed by horizontal lines for input.

Use this slide to form your own message triangle!