



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 equitable student supports and interventions.

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 student supports and interventions. 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.

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


- Access to effective, culturally relevant supports and interventions in schools is vital for students' overall experiences both in and out of school.
- High quality, personalized supports address individual student needs so that students are empowered and engaged in their educational experiences. These supports should be leveraged uniquely for each student depending on their needs. This includes robust mental health supports, culturally sustaining guidance counseling, individualized social and emotional supports, and more.


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.

-  **37%**
of HS students reported experiencing poor mental health during the pandemic.⁵
-  **44%**
of HS students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness,⁷ and 57% of LGBTQ youth aged 13-17 reported symptoms of depression.⁸
-  **20%**
of HS students seriously considered suicide, and 9% actually attempted to take their own life.⁹
-  **46%**
of LGBTQ young people aged 13-17 seriously considered attempting suicide in 2023, and these rates are higher for LGBTQ young people of color.¹⁰ According to one study, LGBTQ youth are also 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers.¹¹

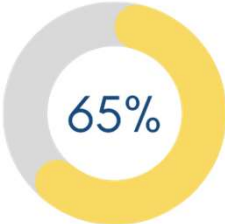
61%
of Black and Hispanic students said they would not feel comfortable reaching out to a counselor if they needed mental health support.¹²


more than
1 in 2
LGBTQ youth reported being verbally harassed at school because others thought they were LGBTQ.¹³


more than
1 in 3
students reported perceiving racism.¹⁴

- Schools have an urgent responsibility to address students’ holistic needs. Actively supporting the social, emotional, and academic development of students is more important than ever, given the experiences of the past several years as students have dealt with increased hardship, anxiety, and stress of the pandemic.

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

- However, despite the clear need to provide meaningful mental health supports, many students – and especially students of color – are not receiving the high-quality supports they need.
- This negatively impacts hundreds of thousands of students, reinforcing broader inequities within school systems between students from historically marginalized backgrounds and their peers.

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.

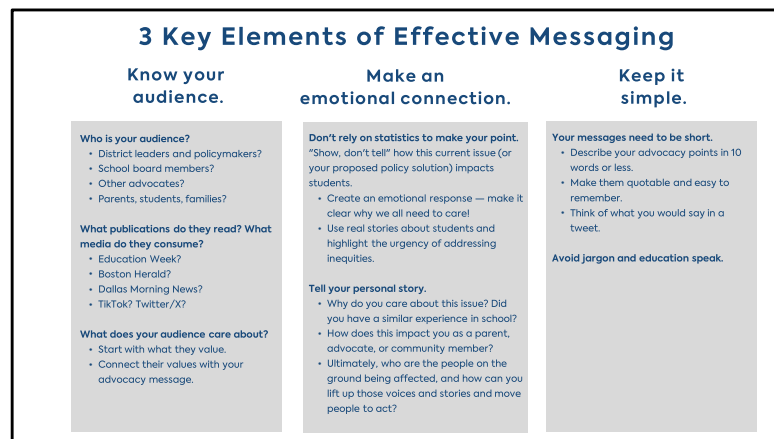


Know your audience.



Make an emotional connection.

The following slides will help you build an effective message to increase student supports and interventions. 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

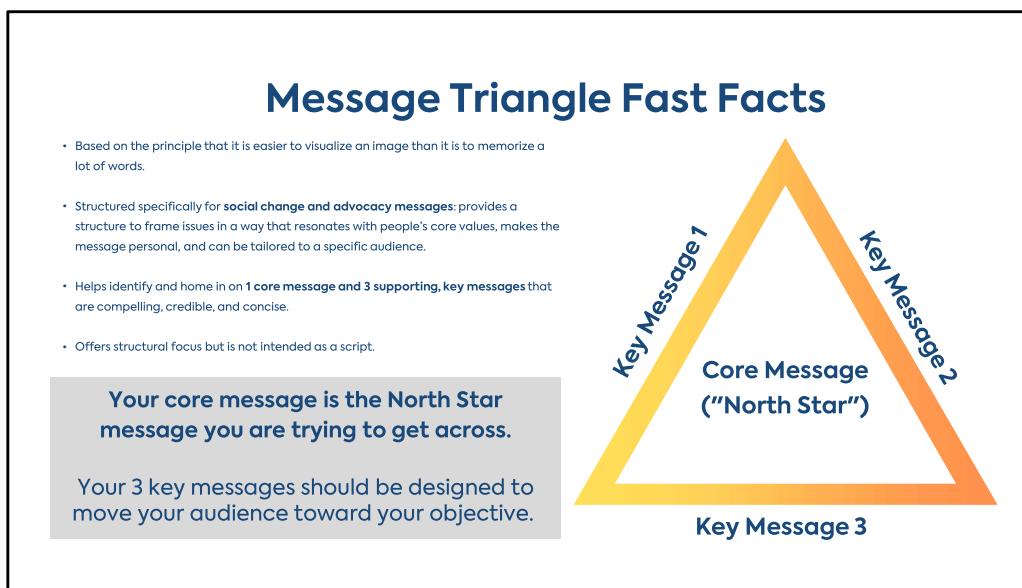
- While it may be tempting to label “everyone” as your audience, the more personalized you can make your message, the more likely it will be to have an impact. Once you’ve identified your specific audience, consider their values or what they care deeply about, keeping in mind that this will likely differ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

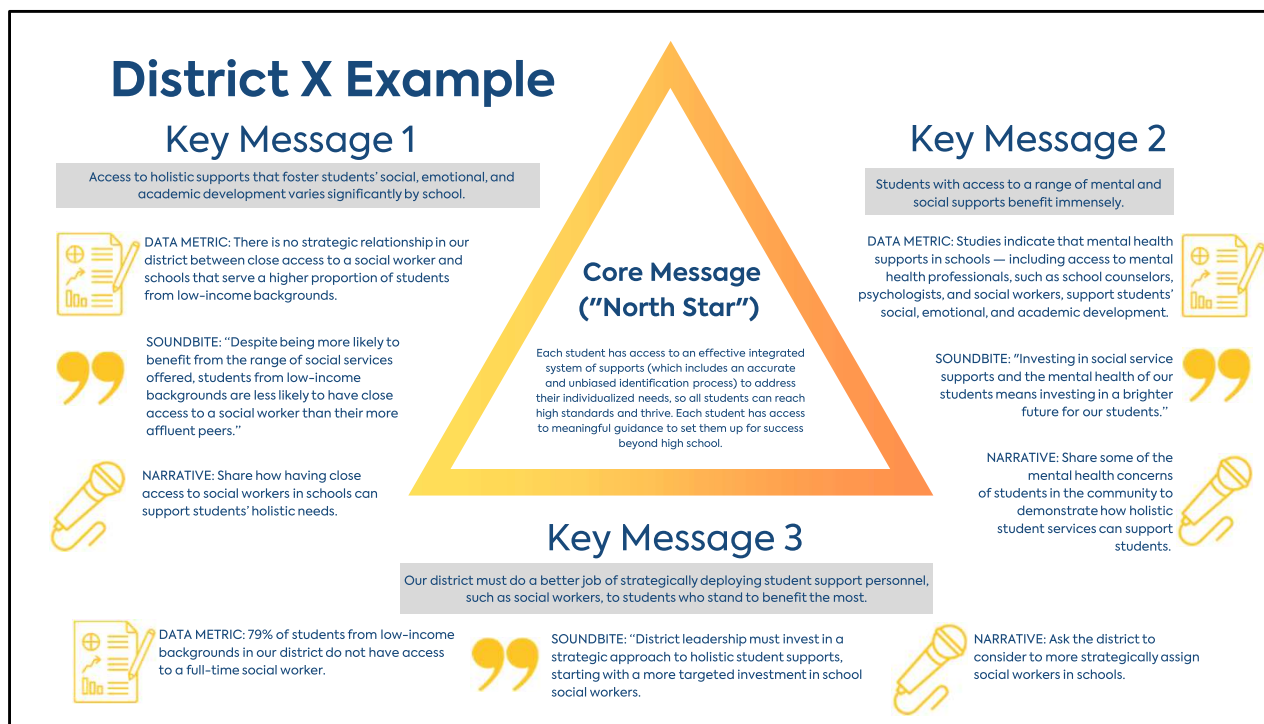
- Now that you know what a Message Triangle is, how do you create one? Start by reviewing the Alliance for Resource Equity's Key Questions on student supports & interventions to ensure you have considered all facets of this topic. You can also turn to the Student Supports & Interventions Section of the Education Combination (pgs. 28-31) 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 that available through the Urban Institute's Education Data Explorer, in order to develop a thorough understanding of student supports & interventions 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 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.

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 7.1) reveals a significant finding: schools that serve a higher proportion of students from low-income backgrounds do not have greater access to a social worker than other schools in the district. 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: "**Access to holistic supports that foster students' social, emotional, and academic development varies significantly by school.**"
 - 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: "**Students with access to a range of mental and social supports benefit immensely.**"
 - 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 do a better job of strategically deploying student support personnel, such as social workers, to students who stand to benefit the most.**"
- 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 student supports & interventions. 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 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.

- 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 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.

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 issueIntroduces dangerous line of oppositionExpresses different mission/goal		
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.

- 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 schools are too focused on mental health, and not on academics, 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 the importance of mental health for students, and second, clarify that a focus on mental health and a focus on academic preparedness are not mutually exclusive. This bridge allows advocates to then further dismantle the opposing claim by reinforcing key messages about the importance of schools providing the targeted supports and interventions students need to thrive (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: “School psychologists and social workers are expensive. Our budget isn’t big enough to accommodate a focus on anything other than the core academic subjects.”
 - While this does not explicitly mention a belief that schools should only be teaching academic subjects, it expresses a similar core claim: Both opposing narratives **cite the importance of prioritizing academics to justify de-prioritizing the importance of a providing additional supports and interventions for students**. Therefore, you could use the same general arguments as listed under the second example in this slide, even though the original opposing message is not identical. Many of the arguments listed under the first example could also be used in this instance.

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).
 - Practical 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.

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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Appendix A: Data Resources Chart

Key Question	Data Metric	Data Source
Key Question 7.1 Does each student who needs targeted social-emotional support receive it?	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).	Urban Institute/NCES
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?		

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.

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: _____

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

Key Message 2

DATA METRIC: _____



SOUNDBITE: _____



NARRATIVE: _____



Key Message 3



DATA METRIC: _____



SOUNDBITE: _____



NARRATIVE: _____

Use this slide to form your own message triangle!