MAKE THE CASE

LEARNING–READY FACILITIES

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 equitable learning-ready facilities.

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 learning ready facilities, 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.

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

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

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

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

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

- Learning-ready facilities are imperative for students' learning, growth, and development. Facilities and buildings create the environment that is conducive to strong educational experiences.

- Research consistently demonstrates that students are best able to learn when they are in spaces that are safe, well-maintained, and are equipped with the necessary supplies and equipment.

- Safe and well-designed facilities can also help contribute to a positive school climate, enhancing students' engagement, motivation, and sense of belonging, all of which are vital factors in fostering successful learning experiences.

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

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

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

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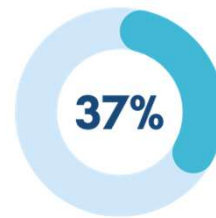
High-poverty districts had 37% less invested in their school facilities improvements than low-poverty districts: an average of $3.8 million per school for school construction from FY09-18, compared to $5.2 million.[7]

50%

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

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

- Learning-ready school facilities ensure students and educators go to school in a building conducive to high quality learning.

- However, capital improvements are expensive, and the schools in most need of significant repair often do not have the funding to dedicate towards important facility upgrades.

- This disproportionately impacts students of color and students from low income backgrounds, who are more likely to attend the schools most in need of capital improvements.

Making the case for improving access to **Learning-Ready Facilities** hinges on effectively communicating their importance, urgency, and connection to your community.

3 Key Elements of Effective Messaging

1 Keep it simple.

2 Know your audience.

3 Make an emotional connection.

The following slides will help you build an effective message to increase learning-ready facilities 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.

3 Key Elements of Effective Messaging

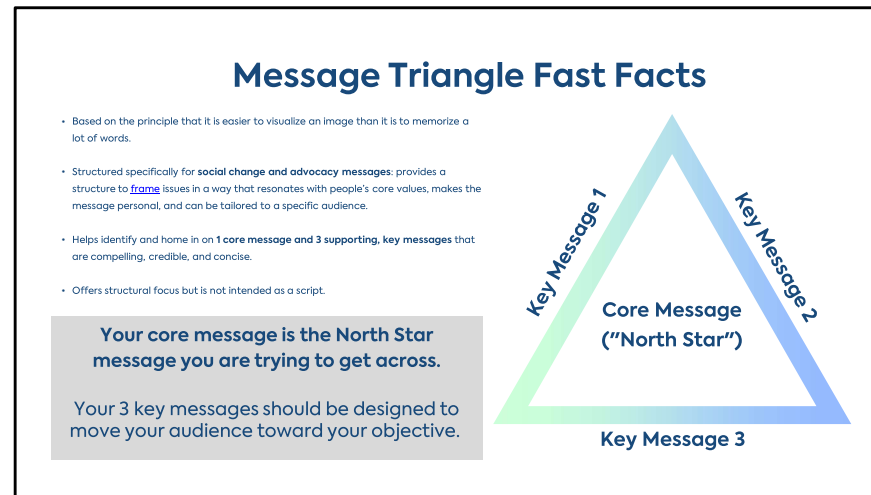| Know your audience.	Make an emotional connection.	Keep it simple.
Who is your audience? • District leaders and policymakers? • School board members? • Other advocates? • Parents, students, families? **What publications do they read? What media do they consume?** • Education Week? • Boston Herald? • Dallas Morning News? • TikTok? Twitter/X? **What does your audience care about?** • Start with what they value. • Connect their values with your advocacy message.	**Don't rely on statistics to make your point.** "Show, don't tell" how this issue (or your proposed policy solution) impacts students. • Create an emotional response — make it clear why we all need to care! • Use real stories about students and highlight the urgency of addressing inequities. **Tell your personal story.** • Why do you care about this issue? Did you have a similar experience in school? • How does this impact you as a parent, advocate, or community member? • Ultimately, who are the people on the ground being affected, and how can you lift up those voices and stories and move people to act?	**Your messages need to be short.** • Describe each of your advocacy points in 10 words or less. • Make them easy to remember and quotable. • Think of what you would say in a tweet. **Avoid jargon and education speak.**

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.

Message Triangle Fast Facts

- Based on the principle that it is easier to visualize an image than it is to memorize a lot of words.

- Structured specifically for **social change and advocacy messages**: provides a structure to frame issues in a way that resonates with people's core values, makes the message personal, and can be tailored to a specific audience.

- Helps identify and home in on **1 core message and 3 supporting, key messages** that are compelling, credible, and concise.

- Offers structural focus but is not intended as a script.

Your core message is the North Star message you are trying to get across.

Your 3 key messages should be designed to move your audience toward your objective.

Key Message 1

Key Message 2

Core Message ("North Star")

Key Message 3

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 Learning–Ready Facilities:

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

Identify your "North Star" or Core Message

Determine what you want to communicate. What is the underlying vision?

- Consider reiterating the Alliance for Resource Equity vision:

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

Support Your Messages With Data

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

- See Appendix A for list of data metrics.
- Prepare a powerful data metric, soundbite, and narrative for your key messages.

Create a Call to Action

The last key message should prompt people to act.

- What action are you requesting from your district?
- What is the most immediate next step?
- What do you want your audience to do?

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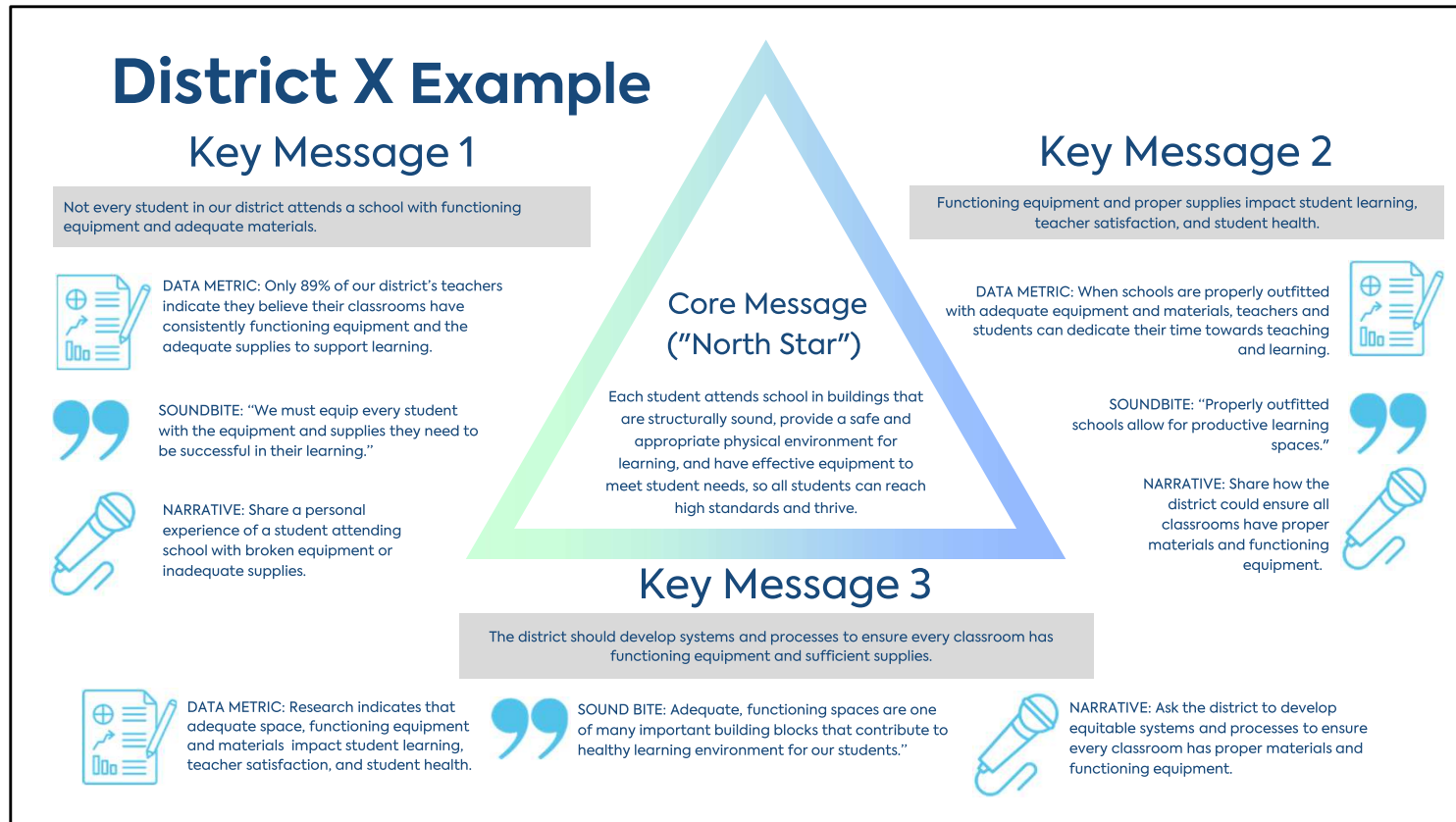
This slide provides an example for the 3rd step from the previous slide: Forming Key Messages. As a reminder, these 3 Key Messages will form each side of your Message Triangle in the end!

- 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 fourth metric listed in Appendix A (Key Question 9.2) reveals a significant finding: 11% of teachers don't believe their classroom consistently has adequate supplies or functioning equipment. 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: **"Not every student in our district attends a school with functioning equipment and adequate materials**."

  - 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: "**Functioning equipment and proper supplies impact student learning, teacher satisfaction, and student health**."

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

- 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.

District X Example

Key Message 1

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

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

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

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

Core Message ("North Star")

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

Key Message 2

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

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

SOUNDBITE: "Properly outfitted schools allow for productive learning spaces."

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

Key Message 3

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

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

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

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

- This is an example of a completed Message Triangle on learning-ready facilities. 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 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 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 misinformation before moving to your positive response.
- **Speculation:** Instead of trying to predict the future, reiterate the information you know and your key message.
- **Irrelevant Question:** Use a bridging statement to connect back to your key message.

Question/concern that ...
- Distracts from key issue
- Introduces dangerous line of opposition
- Expresses different mission/goal

BRIDGING STATEMENT

Your response hits on your key messages in service of core "North Star" message

"I find the more important issue to be..."   "Let me emphasize again..."   "What matters most in this situation is this: ..."

"What I've said comes down to this..."   "And that reminds me..."   "Here's the real problem..."

I think it would be more accurate (or correct) to say..."   "It all boils down to this..."

"While ____ is important, it's also important to remember that..."   "Before we leave this subject, I need to add..."

- 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.

- 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 spending money on buildings and facilities is a luxury, not a necessity for districts, 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 some forms of school facility spending are a luxury, and second, clarify how not all spending on school facilities is frivolous. This bridge allows advocates to then further dismantle the opposing claim and reinforce key messages about the impact of the state of school buildings on students, and the need for all students to attend school in learning-ready facilities (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: "It isn't fair if we provide luxury materials like laptops to certain students, and not others. Since we can't afford laptops for every student, it is best to spend our money elsewhere."

  - While this does not explicitly mention a belief that laptops and internet are not important investments, it expresses a similar core claim: Both opposing narratives **fail to acknowledge differences in students' financial situations** to justify **de-prioritizing the importance of providing equitable access to school materials.** In this case, the opposition is in fact trying to use equity as a cover for dismissing your advocacy. Therefore, you could use the same general arguments as listed under the first example in this slide to note that existing inequities between students are perpetuating resource inequality, and that providing resources to students who otherwise wouldn't have access to them, instead of denying resources to everyone, is in fact a more equitable way to provide learning-ready facilities for all students.

FAQ's

Why does this example message triangle work?
- All key messages connect to one another.
- Each key message includes a data metric, soundbite, and narrative element.
- Each element is concise and asset-framed.
- Each key message speaks to the core message in the center of the triangle.

What if we don't have access to the information we need for the data metrics?
- Ask your district if they will provide the data to you.
- Push for better data transparency using this message triangle.
- In the meantime, rely on national data trends instead.

What makes for an effective narrative element?
- The best story to share is your own!
- But don't get bogged down by the details. Ask yourself what you are trying to communicate, what emotions you want to evoke, and why this specific issue matters to you.

What makes for a compelling soundbite?
- Define your objectives — what do you want others to remember?
- Be concise (aim for 10 seconds or less), clear (avoid jargon, acronyms, technical terms), and catchy (consider using a quick story, anecdote, metaphor, etc., to help illustrate your point.)
- Practice! The best soundbites are authentic but not off the cuff.

What do you mean by asset framing? How do I do that?
- Data doesn't frame itself…and is susceptible to misinterpretation.
- This misinterpretation is especially harmful to historically marginalized communities.
- Key messages should highlight the systems and structures within your district that act as barriers to equitable opportunities and outcomes. This "structure-not-student" approach is known as **asset-framing**.
- Asset-framing places the responsibility on leaders and systems, emphasizing system-level action and does not blame or fault students.

How do I use this message triangle?
- Make it the backbone of your messaging efforts.
- Use it to practice, practice, practice articulating the issue.
- Use it to stay focused on key points, especially when the opposition tries throw you off course.
- Use it alongside the Alliance for Resource Equity diagnostic tool to more thoroughly assess the state of learning-ready facilities in your district, as well as in combination with the guidebooks to dig deeper into root causes and potential actions.

What is the Alliance for Resource Equity? How do I learn more?
- The Alliance for Resource Equity is a partnership between EdTrust and Education Resource Strategies.
- We focus on 10 key dimensions of resource equity — providing tools and resources to help advocates and districts work together to consider how resources (people, time, and money) are spent and distributed.
- Learn more at www.educationresourceequity.org.

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. Earthman, G., Lemasters, L. (1996). *"Review of Research on the Relationship Between School Buildings, Student Achievement, and Student Behavior."* Council of Educational Facility Planners, International. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED416666

2. United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. 2014. "Dear Colleague Letter: Resource Comparability." Washington, DC. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-resourcecomp-201410.pdf

3. Lafortune, J., Schonholzer, D. (2018). "Do School Facilities Matter? Measuring the Effects of Capital Expenditures on Student and Neighborhood Outcomes." *American Economic Association*. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Do-School-Facilities-Matter-Measuring-the-Effects-Lafortune-Sch%C3%B6nholzer/a39a2bb90b2381a6dbd4772edfb0c08276058776

4. National Cooperative Education Statistics System, National Forum on Education Statistics, and the Association of School Business Officials International. (2003). "The Planning Guide for Maintaining School Facilities." Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Education Statistics, 2003. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/maintenance/index.asp

5. U.S. Government Accountability Office (2020). "K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement." https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-494.

6. Ibid.

7. "2021 State of Our Schools." (2021). National Council on School Facilities. https://www.wellcertified.com/state-of-our-schools.

8. Ibid.

Appendix A: Data Resources Chart

Key Question	Data Metric	Data Source
Key Question 9.1 Does each student have access to adequate facilities that are safe and well-maintained to facilitate student learning and meet student needs?	Percentage of school buildings that need significant repairs and demographics of students who use these buildings, disaggregated by school type and proportion of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.	No federal data sources here.
	Scatterplot of Facility Utilization Index (FUI) scores (y-axis) and percentage of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds (x-axis). Calculate the FUI by dividing the number of enrolled students by total enrollment capacity.	Use DOE school report card for enrollment totals.
Key Question 9.2 Does each student have access to adequate equipment to facilitate student learning and meet student needs?	• % of students who report having access to high-quality equipment, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and economic status of respondents. • % of teachers who report being able to access high-quality equipment	No federal data sources here. Your district or state may have publicly available student or teacher survey data that can help answer this question. Check DOE school report card.

For the key questions in this dimension, there are no strong federally-maintained data sources. Districts are also unlikely to track data on student access to high-quality equipment. Rely more heavily on your own personal experiences, general knowledge, and popular news sources to help fill out the gaps in data. For instance, there may an ESSER-related spending report on access to devices that provide insight into Key Question 9.2. Advocates can also lean more heavily on narrative and anecdotes from their community to illuminate this issue.

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
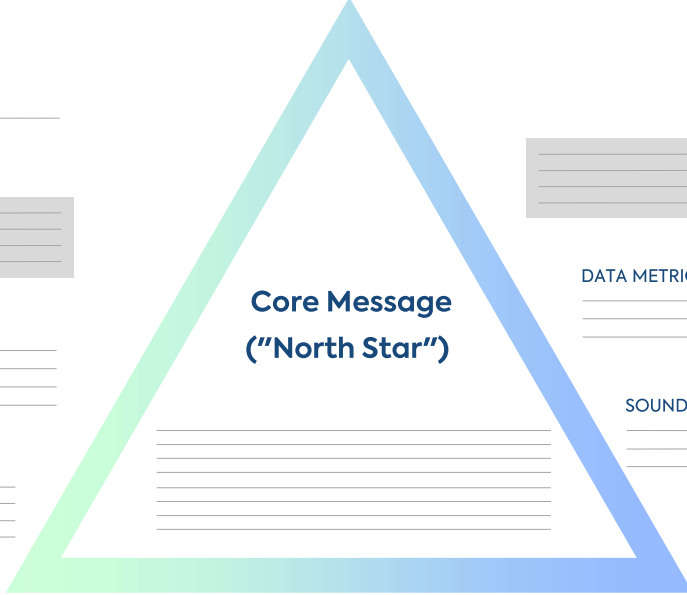
Key Message 2

Core Message
("North Star")

DATA METRIC: _____

SOUNDBITE: _____

NARRATIVE: _____

DATA METRIC: _____

SOUNDBITE: _____

NARRATIVE: _____

Key Message 3

DATA METRIC: _____

SOUNDBITE: _____

NARRATIVE: _____

Use this slide to form your own message triangle!