



# States Leading for Equity:

Promising Practices Advancing the Equity Commitments



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### **America's Promise Alliance**

America's Promise Alliance leads an alliance of organizations, communities, and individuals dedicated to making the promise of America real for every child. As its signature effort, the GradNation campaign mobilizes Americans to increase the on-time high school graduation rate to 90 percent by 2020 and prepare young people for postsecondary enrollment and the 21st-century workforce. For more information, visit [www.AmericasPromise.org](http://www.AmericasPromise.org).

### **The Aspen Education & Society Program**

The Aspen Education & Society Program improves public education by inspiring, informing, and influencing education leaders across policy and practice, with an emphasis on achieving equity for traditionally underserved students.

[www.aspeninstitute.org/education](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/education)

### **The Council of Chief State School Officers**

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

[www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)

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## A Preface from the Council of Chief State School Officers

Dear Colleagues,

As we undertook the journey toward what would become the [Leading for Equity commitments](#), we knew we had to challenge ourselves in order to achieve educational equity. As we came together nearly two years ago with state chiefs, advocates, philanthropic leaders, political staff, teachers and district officials in Aspen – all individuals with different backgrounds, different experiences and vastly different perspectives – a common goal quickly emerged: to ensure that each and every child received the right educational resources at the right moment in their education. But to get to that point, we knew we needed to gather the data, analyze root causes, and proactively initiate conversations about race and ethnicity, about gender and language, about disability and sexual orientation, and about family background and income. And we knew these conversations had to take place at the local level, but also be supported from the very top. I was proud to see state chiefs take the lead in signing on and committing to Leading for Equity a year ago. Now, I am honored to lead this organization of state leaders that has not let these commitments sit on a shelf. Instead, we can see the promise of that work already beginning to be put into practice. I hear it from our state chiefs when we gather at forums and meetings, I hear it from advocates and stakeholders as we continue to work together, I hear it from teachers and students in classrooms across the country: equity must remain at the front and center of our conversations about education.



The *Leading for Equity* report ends with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that continues to resonate for me at this moment: “Every step towards the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle,” he wrote. “This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.” Every time I talk with state chiefs, I see vigorous and positive action to advance equity for all kids, especially those who for too long have been marginalized or underserved. It is clear that states are taking the lead to advance equity from proactively engaging and initiating conversations about equity and race and income among their own staffs or stakeholder groups to examining talent pipelines and developing innovative strategies to promoting whole-child approaches through accountability and school improvement plans.

This work around equity is the foundation of all we do here at [CCSSO](#), and these promising practices—while certainly not all encompassing of all the progress states are making—represent the first steps along a journey toward a more just and equitable future for each and every child. We know this journey will be long, and the inequities we face in education cannot be solved in a matter of one year. But these promising practices and the level of commitment from our state chiefs, our partners, our stakeholders, advocates, teachers, and state policymakers shows we are on the right path. We acknowledge this work is just beginning and invite you to continue to be a part of all that we do to achieve educational equity for all children across the country.

Sincerely,

Carissa

**Carissa Moffat Miller**

Interim Executive Director, Council of Chief State School Officers

## A Preface from The Aspen Institute

Dear Colleagues,

Equity is at the heart of public education's purpose, and equity is public education's defining challenge. At this pivotal moment in the history of public education, as federal rules recede and make way for a renewal of state leadership, it is both important and inspiring that state education chiefs are defining the challenge and leading on equity. The Aspen Institute is proud to partner with the Council of Chief State School Officers in support of *Leading for Equity*.



In July 2016, [The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program](#) brought together state chiefs, civil rights advocates, classroom teachers, foundation leaders, and policy experts for a week of dialogue and deliberation on the state role in advancing educational equity. While much of the responsibility for education practice is shaped by local leaders and local context, states play an essential role by joining their vision of excellence with policies, leadership, and oversight that make excellence attainable for each and every child, no matter their background or where they were born. States needed to define educational equity, and define the state role in achieving it.

At the same time this group was assembled to outline priority policies and practices that would embody state leadership regarding equity, the country was roiled by incidents of police violence being visited upon people of color; our group's agenda each morning was superseded by what we saw on the news from Baton Rouge, and then St. Paul, and then Dallas. This context heightened the sense of urgency and underscored a simple but elusive truth: the blessings of liberty and the pursuit of domestic tranquility are dependent on achieving educational equity.

We are a long way from meeting the equity imperative; making progress will only come through consistent, committed leadership. The [2017 \*Leading for Equity\* report](#) outlines important steps state leaders can take to achieve equity *and* excellence. It is especially encouraging and important that state chiefs have embraced the responsibility to lead from within; that is, to identify and address inequity that emanates from state action, and sometimes from inaction. State leaders tackling bias and confronting the vestiges of discrimination in their own departments creates conditions for restoring trust with the communities they serve. This willingness to walk the walk of equity is profoundly important in substance and in the signal it sends to the field. To paraphrase W.E.B DuBois' famous quote, local educators and leaders learn more from what state leaders *do* than what they say.

Leading for equity is not easy. Progress is dependent on state leaders defining and pursuing equity. I deeply respect the leadership challenge CCSSO and individual state chiefs have embraced so publicly and proactively, and look forward to the progress *Leading for Equity* can contribute to our communities and our country.

Sincerely,

Ross

**Ross Wiener**

Executive Director, The Education & Society Program, The Aspen Institute

## A Preface from America's Promise Alliance

Dear Colleagues,

In a nation built on the promise of equality, our goal must be that every child in America has the full opportunity to thrive. We've seen and are heartened by real progress toward this goal. Yet we know that far too many young people still face too many hurdles with too little support to achieve success in school and life. Recognizing this reality, the state education chiefs have made a critical and courageous commitment to work to an equity agenda, to work toward the day when every student has access to the right educational resources and supports at the right moment in their education.



Ten years ago, [America's Promise](#) and its partners launched the GradNation campaign to mobilize Americans to increase the national on-time high school graduation rate to 90 percent. At the time, the 90 percent goal seemed like a reach, maybe even unrealistic – graduation rates had been stagnant for decades. But in recent years the nation has seen remarkable gains in high school graduation. Graduation rates have climbed more than a dozen percentage points – reaching an all-time high of 84.1 percent in 2016. The increase in graduation rates means that an additional three million young people graduated with their classes. And the most notable gains in the last decade have been for young people of color.

While these graduation gains demonstrate that real progress is indeed possible, we also see persistent inequity among the young people who are still not graduating on time. The state chiefs' bold focus on equity will mean that we close the gaps in the graduation rates of Black/African-American students, Hispanic/Latino students, English-language learners, low-income students and students with disabilities.

Achieving equity requires sustained commitment, and I applaud the Council of Chief State School Officers and the chiefs for taking on this crucial challenge. Every young person deserves a life that rewards their dreams – a life of opportunity, unburdened by injustice. [Leading for Equity](#) can help us move closer to our ideals where equal opportunity is the defining promise of our country. That's why America's Promise Alliance is proud to partner with the Council of Chief State School Officers in support of *Leading for Equity*.

Sincerely,

John

**John Gomperts**

President and Chief Executive Officer, America's Promise Alliance

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## INTRODUCTION

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A year ago, state chiefs came together with educators, advocates and civil rights leaders to outline actions states could take to move the needle on equity. Since then, states have each taken action and made notable progress to advance equity at the state level.

In July 2016, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Aspen Institute Education & Society Program convened state chiefs, district and classroom practitioners, political leaders, advocates, and membership organizations on educational equity. From that meeting and subsequent conversations with stakeholders from across the country, CCSSO, under the leadership of then-Board President and Wisconsin Superintendent Tony Evers, joined the Aspen Institute Education and Society Program to develop and release [Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs](#). *Leading for Equity* stated ten commitments that state education leaders could take to ensure each student across every race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and income had access to the right educational resources at the right moment in their education.

Now, a year later, it is clear states have made notable progress against the ten equity commitments. The following *States Leading for Equity* report highlights some examples of the promising practices in states to advance equity for each and every child in their states.

This document provides a brief overview of practices and policies states are currently engaging in to provide a stronger education for students. The purpose of this document is not to advocate for one approach over another or to suggest that the work toward educational equity is complete. Rather, this document shows positive examples of state action toward each of the ten equity commitments as a milestone on this journey to share the progress states have made and recognize the difficult work remaining. Our state chiefs know that the journey towards equity is just beginning and this document marks a celebration of positive starts along that path.

### Educational Equity

Educational equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/ or family income.

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## PROMISING PRACTICES

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### 1. PRIORITIZE EQUITY: SET AND COMMUNICATE AN EQUITY VISION AND MEASURABLE TARGETS

As the highest-ranking education official in the state, chief state school officers have committed to prioritize the equity mission of public education. As part of setting the strategic vision and plan for the state’s education system—and in collaboration with state boards of education, state legislatures, and governors—chiefs and their teams must analyze data to determine the greatest gaps and equity challenges and determine how they will focus efforts and allocate limited resources to address those gaps and their root causes. The chief is uniquely positioned to create urgency, galvanize state action, and instill optimism in educators and other stakeholders that significant progress can be accomplished through their collective efforts. This requires trade-offs, clear communication, and a call to stakeholders at all levels of the system to prioritize this work.

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#### Promising Practice: District of Columbia

Washington, DC’s [Office of the State Superintendent of Education \(OSSE\)](#) publishes [annual Equity Reports](#) that report on the demographic information of students, breaks down suspension rates and student achievement scores into subgroups, and reports on attendance rates, student movement, and graduation rates. The agency issues both a cumulative report and school-level reports for all public schools—including both traditional district schools and public charter schools. These reports are available on OSSE’s website along with copies of school report cards and profiles of each school, published by the state office. These equity reports increase transparency around how schools are serving traditionally underserved populations, which can create momentum toward policy and practice shifts within schools, the district, and the state education agency.

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#### Promising Practice: Maryland

The [Maryland State Department of Education](#) has taken the ten *Leading for Equity* Commitments and integrated them into their work across the state education agency. Directors at the state department speak about the commitments at their regular staff meetings to make connections between their work and the equity commitments. This has led to a change in the tenor of the conversations within the state agency—and a furthered focus on ensuring that every single student is given access to a high-quality education. In aligning their work with the equity commitments, Maryland has shifted mindsets within the agency and heightened the focus on low-income students and students of color. This focus also creates accountability for leaders and managers across the state education agency who report on their progress towards educational equity.



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## Promising Practice: Washington

[Washington's Education Research and Data Center](#) compiles data about students as they move through school and into the workforce. It houses longitudinal data about students and allows for analysis of the effectiveness of pathways. In July of 2017, it published an [Early Learning Feedback Report](#) based on the statewide [WaKIDS assessment](#), a “whole-child” approach to assessing GOLD® development and learning in six domains: cognitive, physical, mathematics, social and emotional, literacy, and language. This data is available to the public and has data disaggregated for dual language learners, special education, and race/ethnicity. This focus on the accessibility and type of data—and using it to inform stakeholders and decision-makers across the state—allows for data-driven conversations about educational equity and opportunity gaps to take place and informs discussion about policy and practice.

## 2. START FROM WITHIN: FOCUS ON THE STATE EDUCATION AGENCY

State education agencies (SEAs) can strategically reallocate funding and staff resources to further their mission of advancing equity. Historically, SEAs have been resourced to administer and monitor how the state spends federal and state education funds, and many SEAs are still structured with divisions that reflect these different funding streams. While a complete reorganization is not necessary, state leaders should consider how current SEA structures contribute to existing inequities and/or create barriers to more effectively tackling educational equity. The authority of state chiefs and the agencies they oversee varies by state. Even with limited authority, state chiefs can better equip SEA staff to be leaders for educational equity.

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## Promising Practice: Oregon

The [Oregon Department of Education](#) created an [Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(EDI\)](#) to support students, teachers, and educators across the state. The Office defines education equity as: “the policy, practices, and legislation that translates into resource allocation and opportunities for all students but especially for those historically and current underserved youth and families including protected classes.” Thus EDI has two central roles: to ensure state and federal civil rights compliance for each and every child and to promote educational equity. To accomplish the latter, Oregon has established, with stakeholder involvement, an [African-American/Black Student Success Plan](#) aligned with Oregon’s strategic plan that sets out clear metrics for improving educational outcomes for Oregon’s African-American students, and funding, largely to school districts to improve academic outcomes for English Learner (EL) students. Additionally, the Department works directly in supporting Native American students across the state through direct liaisons. EDI helps to center the entire state education agency in supporting all students in Oregon and its mission pushes beyond compliance toward ensuring that traditionally underserved students across the state receive an excellent education.



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### Promising Practice: Vermont

The [Vermont Agency of Education](#) focuses on starting from within the state education agency to build more equitable outcomes for students. Training on implicit bias is offered to every person within the state education agency, and staff have engaged in conversations about equity in Vermont. Furthermore, Vermont aims to include equity in all its externally facing documents to the field. In doing so, the state education agency has rooted its mission in the difficult yet critical conversations necessary to move educational equity forward throughout the state.

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### Promising Practice: Wisconsin

The [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#) has organized [training on implicit bias](#) for its staff within the state education agency, focused resources on developing strong equity training into its onboarding process for all new employees, organized monthly sessions to give staff the opportunity to focus on a traditionally underserved population, and led proactive conversations about race and outcomes across their work. Wisconsin has further concentrated on the impacts of race after analyzing data that showed the greatest opportunity gap in the country for African-American students is in Wisconsin. State education agency staff regularly engage in conversations, analyze data, and meet with stakeholders about root causes for this gap. Wisconsin starts from within to ensure that equity is at the center of all they do so that each and every student can access pathways to well-paying careers.

## 3. MEASURE WHAT MATTERS: CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EQUITY

Designing and administering accountability systems is a core state responsibility with profound implications for equity. Accountability has multiple dimensions under state and federal law, including the design of school performance rating systems and oversight of evidence-based interventions in low-performing schools and schools with persistent and significant achievement gaps. In addition, ESSA requires greater transparency and public reporting so the public can hold system leaders accountable for equity. While there are both federally- and state-imposed timelines for the development and implementation of new statewide accountability systems, state leaders should not let an ESSA-compliance mentality drive their accountability design; instead, chiefs should consider their broader vision for the state education system and the state's equity goals.

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### Promising Practice: California

The [California Department of Education](#) published in consultation with stakeholders [The California English Learner Roadmap](#), which sets out a list of 4 principles that will guide English Learner education in California from early childhood through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. These principles are Assets-Oriented and Needs-Responsive Schools, Intellectual Quality of Instruction and Meaningful Access, System Conditions that Support Effectiveness, and Alignment and

Articulation Within and Across Systems. There are actionable elements under each of these four principles to set out specific actions to support English Learners. Furthermore, in the stated mission and vision of the roadmap, California affirms the varied backgrounds of its English Learners and an opportunity to become proficient in multiple languages, shifting the narrative from a deficit-minded focus to an asset-based focus on multilingual students able to participate fully in a diverse world.

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### Promising Practice: Louisiana

The [Louisiana Department of Education](#)'s accountability system, developed in partnership with education and business leaders, provides families and communities with information on school quality, and educators with clear expectations for student outcomes. It includes both measures of academic proficiency as well as student progress for grades 3-12.



At the high school level, Louisiana rewards schools not only for their ability to graduate students, but also for their ability to provide them with access to college and career coursework and credentials. Starting in 2019, Louisiana's accountability system will include a new index that will measure school's ability to provide all students with a well-rounded education by providing them with access to extra-curricular activities, advanced coursework, physical education, and other enrichment opportunities. Louisiana has also

worked with stakeholders to develop the first comprehensive birth through 12<sup>th</sup> grade online report card. The state agency released the [Louisiana School Finder](#) and parent-friendly videos in November 2017, with the goal of providing families meaningful and concise information on school performance scores.

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### Promising Practice: Tennessee

The [Tennessee Department of Education](#) revised its school accountability system and now emphasizes schools serving Tennessee's most traditionally underserved students. It does so by basing 40 percent of each school's rating on the results of its low-income, special education, and African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students. This places an impetus on districts and schools to ensure that they are providing an education that reaches each and every student in Tennessee. All schools in Tennessee will receive an overall A-F rating that is based on a dashboard of other metrics, including individual ratings for how a school serves each of its student groups. Furthermore, schools that require targeted support and improvement for their traditionally underserved students will be marked with a minus sign. This shift in school accountability holds the state—and schools—accountable for serving each and every student.

## 4. GO LOCAL: ENGAGE LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES (LEAS) AND PROVIDE TAILORED AND DIFFERENTIATED SUPPORT

Education is largely a local enterprise, with local education agencies (LEAs)—districts, charters, or charter management organizations—leading education strategy, administration, and resource allocation. While governance structures and authority vary by state, state education leaders can provide guidance, support, funding, public pressure, and incentives to help LEAs close achievement and opportunity gaps based on local context. Accountability, monitoring, compliance, and oversight will always be necessary state (and federal) functions, but state leaders should take the lead to find common ground with local superintendents, local school board members, and other leaders to make sure all actors recognize their power and responsibility to advance equity. Closing opportunity and achievement gaps can only happen if state and local leaders understand and embrace their respective roles.

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### Promising Practice: Connecticut

The [Connecticut State Department of Education](#), the [Capitol Region Education Council](#), [State Education Resource Center](#), and [Parent Information Resource Center](#) founded [Friday CAFÉ](#), a peer-



to-peer network focused on providing a shared context and space around family engagement professionals. The core of Friday CAFÉ is to host morning discussion and networking conversations on a monthly basis. Gatherings are held in

community venues that spark creativity such as museums and galleries. There is an advisory group that sets topics for once monthly meetings and allows professionals from all over the state to share struggles and best practices in engaging fully with families. Data demonstrates that parent engagement is a significant factor in students' academic outcomes, and Friday CAFÉ provides opportunities to engage with best practices, to share problems, and to build innovative solutions towards making sure each parent or guardian has access to information about resources available to their student and themselves.

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### Promising Practice: Illinois

The [Illinois State Board of Education](#) sought to revamp how they approached school improvement, and so the state education agency sought feedback from schools and community partners in addition to state stakeholders. The result of that feedback and collaboration was [IL-EMPOWER](#), a plan that revises Illinois' approach to school improvement. It replaces a single provider model and creates an opportunity for school voice in the improvement process. The IL-EMPOWER process starts with a needs assessment process that includes an Equity Analysis. The process focuses on factors that promote positive student outcomes and creates a foundation for using data inquiry in addressing opportunity and access. The Illinois State Board of Education has partnered

with more than 30 quality providers that can support schools with capacity development in priority areas identified as most needed. This approach helps schools create equitable outcomes for students because there are multiple pathways to school improvement that are more responsive to local community needs.

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### **Promising Practice: Massachusetts**

The [Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education](#) convened a group of educators who collaborated to create the [Educator Effectiveness Guidebook for Inclusive Practice](#)—a set of tools highlighting professional development options, frameworks, rubrics, and case studies to promote inclusive practice at the classroom, school, and district level. This Guidebook matters because data demonstrates that students who receive special education services perform better in the least restrictive environment—and moreover, that practices for inclusive schools are not only beneficial to students with individualized education plans, but for all students by providing evidence-based approaches to accessible instruction, positive behavior supports, and social-emotional learning. Massachusetts’ approach in providing their local education agencies with resources to support inclusive practice across the state allows districts and schools to innovate while providing guidance and a starting point so that each and every child has access to an equitable educational opportunity.

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### **Promising Practice: Minnesota**

The [Minnesota Department of Education](#) repurposed resources to create an equity specialist who works in the field with classroom teachers to develop their capacity around equity. The equity specialists engage with community members and find the best way to support teachers in being responsive to meeting their local community needs. Additionally, the state is using the 3 percent set-aside from Title II under the Every Student Succeeds Act to invest in additional positions at the state education agency focused on working with school principals and school leadership around equity. This use of resources helps increase the capacity of decision-makers in schools in their ability to use an equity lens, directly impacting school climate and culture.

## **5. FOLLOW THE MONEY: ALLOCATE RESOURCES TO ACHIEVE FISCAL EQUITY**

Funding for public education is a foundational state responsibility. Over the last several decades, many states have increased their share of public education funding, minimizing reliance on local funds that are distributed unevenly and exacerbate inequality. In some states, funding has become more equitable in recent years, but states and districts still often invest less in educating low-income students and students of color than they do in educating affluent and white students. These funding gaps occur across districts, at different schools within the same district, and even within the same school.

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### Promising Practice: California

The [California Department of Education's Local Control Funding Formula \(LCFF\)](#) is one of the most ambitious efforts in the nation to serve low-income students. It provides \$10 billion in extra funds annually to school districts so they can better serve students from low-income families, foster youth, and English Learners. LCFF also provides local school boards with more discretion over spending, while requiring those boards to engage in more interaction with their local communities. Finally, the LCFF created the [California School Dashboard](#), which provides the public with a wealth of information about how schools, districts, and student groups are doing on a variety of topics, including test scores, high school graduation rates, and college and career readiness.

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### Promising Practice: Mississippi

The [Mississippi Department of Education](#) has created the [Mississippi Comprehensive Automated Performance-based System \(MCAPS\)](#) to provide more clarity and transparency around the process in which schools may allocate their Title I dollars including creating an online Title I application for local education agencies to use, guidance around linking funding to student achievement, and a planning tool that assists districts and school leaders in creating their schoolwide and targeted assistance plans. This system will also support the [Office of School Improvement](#) as it assists low-performing schools allocate their dollars to create the greatest impact on student achievement. This system provides support to districts and schools to increase the efficacy of each federal dollar spent—and to ensure those resources reach students in a comprehensive manner—to improve student outcomes.



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### Promising Practice: Nevada

The [Nevada Department of Education](#) has allocated \$75 million per year to two programs—Zoom Schools and Victory Schools—out of the states' general fund in order to promote more equitable student outcomes. The [Zoom Schools initiative](#) prioritizes intensive supports to Nevada's English learners in 60 schools with high concentrations of English learners. The interventions have led to increased academic achievement and English language proficiency for students receiving these targeted intensive supports. The [Victory Schools Program](#) supports 35 schools and more than 21,000 students--providing \$25 million per year to support schools serving low-income students in Nevada. Victory Schools' programming focuses on wraparound services and family engagement to better support low-income students. Both of these initiatives used targeted approaches to increase fiscal resources to schools and districts that need additional funding to facilitate programming that promotes better student outcomes.

## 6. START EARLY: INVEST IN THE YOUNGEST LEARNERS

Many low-income students and students of color are already academically behind their peers when they start kindergarten. A developmentally-appropriate, high-quality early learning experience aligned to standards uses play to help prepare young children to learn. State chiefs can make the case that equity requires expanding and targeting access to high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs, and closing opportunity gaps for children growing up in low-income families; this is a critical strategy for improving the quality of K-12 education with a high return on investment.

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### Promising Practice: Delaware

The [Delaware Department of Education](#)'s ESSA plan links directly with the [Delaware Early Learning Council Strategic Plan](#), which set goals around health, high-quality early learning programs, aligned birth through third grade systems, and continuous improvement. In its [ESSA plan](#), Delaware identifies multiple federal funding streams to support goals, offers technical assistance around early learning for schools, and offers targeted professional development for early educators. In doing so, Delaware is leveraging resources to improve the quality of early childhood education across the state, facilitating a good start for the youngest learners to build competencies and a love of learning that will help them throughout life.

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### Promising Practice: District of Columbia

The [Office of the State Superintendent of Education \(OSSE\)](#) in Washington, DC is implementing the [Classroom Assessment Scoring System \(CLASS\)](#) throughout its continuum of early childhood providers from Pre-K to grades 3-5. This CLASS is a research-based observational tool rooted in three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. These observations are up to three hours in length allowing for a wide variety of experiences to be seen. By using this system, the District of Columbia seeks to use quantitative data to identify and replicate best practices across the District.



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### Promising Practice: Mississippi

The [Mississippi Department of Education](#) offers aligned professional development for early childhood educators in schools, Head Start sites, and community-based programs. Regional trainings and coaching support focus on topics such as developmentally appropriate classroom practices, school readiness, and standards-based instruction in early childhood. Mississippi has made a commitment across government stakeholders and departments towards [early childhood education](#). In focusing on developing its early childhood education workforce, Mississippi

increases the efficacy of early childhood programming across the state. By coordinating across departments to improve the coordination of services, Mississippi makes sure that its youngest learners and their parents have access to the best possible early childhood education.

## 7. ENGAGE MORE DEEPLY: MONITOR EQUITABLE IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS

While most states are not directly responsible for running schools or hiring educators, they do have an important role to monitor and oversee local actions. However, what happens in classrooms, hallways, and playgrounds has the greatest impact on students; chiefs must ensure all students receive an equitable education without micromanaging or overextending themselves.

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### Promising Practice: Louisiana

The [Louisiana Department of Education](#) believes that in order for students to be able to master grade-level content, they must have access to high-quality instruction on a regular basis. Therefore, Louisiana is committed to ensuring that teachers have clear and straightforward access to the highest quality curriculum, assessments, and professional development to ensure that all students are on track to reaching this goal. Over the past few years, the state education agency has made a commitment to selecting and promoting high-quality curricula, also known as “Tier 1”, through its [instructional materials review process](#).



Louisiana has enlisted the help of teachers to review, develop, and promote these [Tier 1 curricula](#) to build trust in their quality and ensure seamless adoption by every teacher in the state. Open access to top-tier curriculum ensures that all students, regardless of their demographic makeup, social background, or zip code, have access to high-quality instructional materials. The state promotes the use of high-quality curricula through comprehensive and coordinated communication structures that include newsletters, an online teacher toolbox, and in-person professional

development directly from content experts. This integrated academic strategy ensures students and teachers have the tools and resources they need to reach their full potential.

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### Promising Practice: Kentucky

Kentucky passed legislation that formalizes a statewide review of labor market information (LMI). Using validated LMI data, in partnership with the business community, Kentucky is encouraging the creation of new, relevant pathways aligned to regional employment needs and has begun phasing out career pathways that are not high-wage and high-demand. The [Kentucky Department of Education](#) will pay for industry-recognized credentials in validated pathways and provide professional development for teachers to transition to teach new or additional career pathways. This policy shift increases equity by increasing the availability of high-quality career pathways and

upholding a promise to students who participate in this programming that their skill building is relevant and necessary in industries across the state.

## 8. VALUE PEOPLE: FOCUS ON TEACHERS AND LEADERS

In response to federal law, state chiefs have provided written assurance that low-income students and students of color will no longer be taught disproportionately by ineffective, inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers. Each state has already developed a plan to meet this assurance, but these plans can be strengthened. Implementation must be supported and aggressively monitored to ensure equitable access to effective teaching, and teachers must be prepared to teach our increasingly diverse student population. State leaders should focus on hiring more diverse teachers, principals, and system leaders to reflect changing student demographics; while most students in our schools now are children of color, this is true for very few of our teachers and principals.

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### Promising Practice: Ohio

To ensure that all students had access to the very best teachers and to comply with federal law, the [Ohio Department of Education](#) developed an educator equity plan in 2015. In the subsequent years, the state has been intentional in creating resources and providing support to local districts to ensure that traditionally underserved students have access to great teachers and leaders. This support has come in the form of equity labs held across the state and [state data resources](#) including the Educator Strength Workforce Index and the [Ohio Local Equitable Access Planning Guide](#) that ask districts to examine root-causes of gaps in educator access and to allow districts to make data-driven decisions to increase equitable access. Every student deserves access to a great teacher and leaders, and through their educator equity plan, Ohio is helping districts make educated decisions on how best to allocate teachers and principals effectively to increase outcomes for all students.



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### Promising Practice: Pennsylvania

In all of Pennsylvania's planning for the Every Student Succeeds Act, school leadership emerged as a vital factor—for supporting and retaining highly effective educators, for implementing evidence-based school improvement strategies, and for developing meaningful connections between schools and communities. To support school leaders, the [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#) (PDE) is beginning the second year of its Superintendents' Academy—a year-long, equity-focused professional development opportunity that has reached approximately 140 school leaders who collectively educate more than 300,000 of the state's public school students. The [Superintendents' Academy](#) is designed to engage superintendents in the work of improving achievement where

significant numbers of students face the challenges of poverty. Each participating school leader conducts an intensive action learning project devoted to equity and access and works to translate this learning into meaningful change.

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### **Promising Practice: South Dakota**

To intentionally develop cultural competency across its education workforce, the [South Dakota Department of Education](#) in partnership with its tribal communities created the [WoLakota Project](#). The project is a professional development and mentorship program that matches new teachers with mentor teachers and seeks to center around the [Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings](#). Teachers participate in [Courage to Teach circles](#) that support each other in the work. This work focuses on embracing the cultural identity among American Indian students and understanding that identity in addressing educational inequities to promote greater cultural understanding across non-native students and teachers. By focusing on increasing cultural competency, the state education agency helps increase the efficacy of its workforce in understanding community contexts and delivering a high-quality education to every student.

## **9. IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING: FOCUS ON SCHOOL CULTURE, CLIMATE, AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Achieving equity means meeting the needs of every child, which includes providing a safe and supportive school environment, access to a well-rounded curriculum and appropriate technology, and regular examination of additional unmet needs. In addition to general culture and climate, there is a particular need to prioritize this work because students who are growing up in poverty are disproportionately exposed to trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACE) that affect their readiness to learn. Schools and staff responsible for educating these students need training and resources to create a level playing field in which students can achieve their potential. School Improvement Grant plans and allocations are one way for states to start addressing these needs. Chiefs should communicate proactively about the lessons learned when addressing students with multiple ACE factors. Schools cannot and should not try to displace families or faith communities as sources of value and character development. However, schools must ensure students can learn in environments that are conducive to developing the skills, habits, and dispositions that support success in school and beyond. Without stifling local control or innovation, SEAs can elevate these issues and the crucial equity implications.

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### **Promising Practice: Connecticut**

The [Connecticut State Department of Education](#) has designated chronic absenteeism as one of its accountability measures. In doing so, Connecticut emphasizes the connection between attendance and academic achievement. To better support local districts and schools in improving attendance, Connecticut published [Reducing Chronic Absence in Connecticut Schools: A Prevention and Intervention Guide for Schools and Districts](#)—which specifically identifies bright spots and provides guidance around how local districts and schools can use their capacity to improve attendance.

This resource outlines a system of tier-supports anchored by school-level review teams that include specific actions schools can take to support students by helping to understand and address root causes of absences.

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### Promising Practice: Iowa

The [Iowa Department of Education](#) has administered its Conditions for Learning survey as part of a larger [Iowa Youth Survey](#). It is using the survey as part of its school accountability system, revising the survey to meet best practices, and expanding the survey to serve students grades 3-12 to make sure student voice is considered when evaluating school climate and culture. Lifting student voice is critically important in ensuring that every student across every background feels supported while at school. Student outcomes improve when students feel they are cared for in an educational setting. In using this survey as part of its accountability system, the state education agency reiterates its commitment to students by helping ground itself in qualitative data from students about their experience in school.

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### Promising Practice: Minnesota

The [Minnesota Department of Education](#) developed a [toolkit](#) to help school districts and charter schools create environments where transgender and gender nonconforming students are safe, supported and fully included, and have equal access to the educational opportunities provided to all students as required by federal or state law. Since the passage of the state's 2014 anti-bullying law, the Safe and Supportive Minnesota Schools Act, an increasing number of school administrators, staff members, students and families have contacted the Minnesota Department of Education's [School Safety Technical Assistance Center](#) seeking help on how to ensure safe, supportive and inclusive environments for all students, including transgender and gender nonconforming students. In addition to providing definitions around gender identity, gender expression, and related terminology, the toolkit offers examples of successful policies and resources for working with communities in the creation of local policies and practices.



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### Promising Practice: Oklahoma

The [Oklahoma State Department of Education](#), in its ESSA plan, has taken the unique approach of using food as an academic intervention to ensure greater access to the federal school, summer, and afterschool nutrition programs. Its [ESSA plan](#) notes the linkage between food security and student achievement and thus has set out specific, measurable goals to ensure that all Oklahoma students—particularly those who need it most—receive food services across the year. It has a goal to increase participation in the Community Eligibility Provision from 34 percent to 75 percent by 2025, increase participation in the School Breakfast Program by 20 percent by 2025, and the Summer Food Service by 30 percent by 2025. (In summer 2017 alone,

the agency saw an increase of 14 percent in summer meals served.) Increasing access to food service programs not only helps alleviate child hunger, a problem affecting 1 in 5 children across the country, but also academic achievement because a student whose basic human needs are met are more likely to succeed.

## 10. EMPOWER STUDENT OPTIONS: ENSURE FAMILIES HAVE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS THAT ALIGN TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

Student and parent agency is an important part of achieving educational equity. All students, regardless of their background, should have options regarding how and where they go to school, taking into account the needs of local communities. Regardless of where they live, students should have access to advanced coursework and a variety of educational choices that meet their learning needs.

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### Promising Practice: Florida

The [Florida Department of Education](#) created a [District-Charter Collaboration Compact](#) supporting schools in creating mechanisms that allow all public schools—both district and charter—to share best practices in instructional practice, curriculum development, and family engagement. In doing so, Florida promotes cooperation between schools and allows for better community partnership in serving students. The compact is rooted in the idea that both sectors can learn from one another in how best to serve students and parents. This approach builds momentum towards equity by reframing a competitive environment and seeking to create a cooperative, collaborative student-centered approach.



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### Promising Practice: North Dakota

The [North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#) promotes open enrollment for students through a law which creates a system that allows parents to enroll in schools outside of their zoned districts. In doing so, North Dakota has created a more personalized approach in ensuring that students can get access to the right educational resources at the right moment in their education. Additionally, North Dakota and South Dakota have a cross-border school enrollment plan that allows for students to attend a school in the other state. This increases options for rural student populations along the border and allowing parents to consider a variety of factors. With these two policies, North Dakota promotes equity by facilitating a process by which students can access schools that best meet their needs.

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## Promising Practice: Utah

The [Utah Education Network](#) has long existed and is constantly improving to meet the needs of students, teachers, and parents across the state of Utah. The Utah Education Network in partnership with the [Utah State Board of Education](#) compiles resources for the use of all its citizens including research databases, lesson plans, and houses Utah’s online library including *Preschool Pioneer*, which helps prepares students to read. This site also houses the platforms for distance learning in Utah—ensuring that students get access to best practice no matter where they happen to live in the state—or what the weather is. Utah also includes open educational resources (OERs) on the Network website, ensuring students can access high-quality curricula regardless of resources. This network expands the availability of strong education options and facilitates learning in every corner of the state.

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## CONCLUSION

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While our work toward achieving educational equity is far from finished, states are leading with policies, practices, and engagement that is bold and rooted in a firm belief that each and every child has a right to an excellent education. Educational equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income. We recognize the journey toward educational equity is a long and arduous one, but it is an important and necessary journey that will define the course of our nation. State chiefs lead for equity because they believe firmly in the potential of each and every child. We all recognize we can do more, and these promising practices show we are on the right path to ensure a brighter future for our nation’s students.

*Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.*  
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



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