

MESSAGING GUIDANCE FOR SAFE AND EQUITABLE SCHOOLS

2020



PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

As families, educators, and administrators across the country work hard to assure an education and childhood for our students during the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that we are fighting for an end of business as usual, because business as usual has brought us to this crisis. For too long, certain politicians and the 1% who fund their campaigns have deprived Black and brown communities and low-income neighborhoods of resources, denying children the safe environment, individual attention, and educational opportunities they need to thrive. These same powerful few then turn around and blame Black, Indigenous, and immigrant families for the challenges in our neighborhood public schools, profiting as they divide us and block our efforts for justice in education.

We must come together – Black, white and brown, from suburb to city, from Appalachia and the Northeast to the Sunbelt and the West Coast – to reject this division, rewrite the rules, and make the wealthy pay their fair share so we have the resources to truly educate and inspire every child. Before reopening schools, we must ensure that our classrooms are safe for children, teachers, and the communities they serve.

This guide exists to support educators, administrators, and advocates in making a persuasive case for resourcing public education to provide a safe, equitable and quality education for all students, no matter their race, background, or zip code. Use the messaging principles, sample narratives, and talking points below to guide your advocacy – whether before your school board or city council, in conversation with your neighbor or your state representative, online or on phones.

Messaging Principles

- **Lead with shared values, not problems. Examples:**
 - “Most of us believe that every child, no matter what they look like or where they come from, deserves a safe and welcoming school where they can thrive.”
 - “No matter our race, background, or zip code, most of us want our neighborhood public schools to inspire imagination, cultivate curiosity and critical thinking, and ensure our children can live fulfilling lives.”
 - “Whether Black, white or brown, every child deserves a quality education with well-

prepared teachers who nurture a love of learning, meet mistakes with patience, and help them grow.”

- **Frame the problem as the result of deliberate actions and decisions.**
 - Adhere to the people do things rule. Name an actor or actors whose deliberate choices create the problem. For example, instead of saying, “The gap between white students and Black and brown students persists,” say, “Politicians continue to deprive schools in Black and brown communities, denying them the resources they need to ensure students can thrive.”
 - DO NOT rely upon the language of “inequities” and “disparities,” which simply state that some students do well while others do not – leaving the reason for the difference open to audience interpretation. By repeatedly raising up disparities while obscuring the cause, we suggest that the problem came to exist naturally as opposed to being the result of deliberate actions by a powerful few. Further, in failing to provide an origin story for the problem, we undermine trust that we can provide a solution. Wherever possible, name the specific barriers put in place by specific culprits.
- **Call out efforts to divide us, and show the power of joining together across differences of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, and geography.**
 - Name that certain politicians, corporations, and for-profit education lobbyists deny sufficient resources to neighborhood schools in poorer communities, and then divide us by blaming teachers and Black and brown students for the problems their greed has created.
 - Provide a call to action that explicitly rejects this division and demonstrates strength in unity.
- **Lead with and focus on what we are *for* as opposed to what we are against, using real-world language wherever possible.**
 - Use the language of lived experience to spell out the solutions – from engaging lessons in small classes, to healthy meals, to nurses and counselors who care for our kids – that ensure every child can pursue their dreams.
 - Lead with a positive vision for the future that is grounded in shared values and paints a picture of what we’ll achieve. For example, “justice for all in education” or “ensuring every child, whatever their color or background, can live a fulfilling life,” instead of “reducing racial disparities” or “addressing inequities in education.”

Sample Full Narratives

(A) On School Reopening

Most of us believe that every child, no matter their grade, color or zip code, deserves a safe and welcoming school where they can thrive. But for too long, certain politicians have deprived our public schools the resources they need to reach and teach every child, just as they've denied our families tests and treatment during this pandemic. These same powerful few are trying to divide us by race and by place, insisting we put our children and teachers at risk and leaving parents scrambling for solutions to a crisis they created. They hope to distract us from their failure to prevent and curb COVID and to ensure our schools can fulfill their promise to every one of our kids. We see through their lies. We know that we can't go back to business as usual, because business as usual is what caused this crisis. We know that our teachers and kids must stay physically apart until we have a vaccine or other means to control the spread of COVID and until schools have the resources to ensure everyone in them can stay well. By pulling together, Black, white, and brown, rural and urban, young and old, to demand safe, fully resourced schools, we can prevent unnecessary illness, save countless lives and ensure a better, brighter tomorrow for all of our children, no exceptions.

(B) On Education Equity

No matter what we look like, where we live, or what's in our wallets, most of us want our public schools to inspire imagination, cultivate critical thinking, and ensure our children can live fulfilling lives. But certain politicians try to divide us, ensuring well-resourced schools with mostly white students have enrichment activities, teacher training, and parent engagement, while sending police to monitor and punish Black and brown students in schools that have been denied funding to even cover the basics. Then they turn around and point the finger at families of color for the challenges at our schools, while letting the wealthiest few refuse to pay their fair share. By joining together across race and place, we can rewrite the rules to ensure every school has the engaging materials and up-to-date approaches, healthy meals and emotional supports to set kids up to be all that they dream.

(C) On COVID and Schools

Most of us, whatever our race, gender, or zip code, believe that our families and neighborhoods are stronger, safer, and healthier when we come together to overcome

shared challenges and develop collective solutions. Our public schools help keep our communities connected – serving as sites to distribute supplies, provide meals and keep families informed – even as they help stop the spread of COVID by educating students at home. But today, when a powerful few fuel divisions among us, they block our efforts to provide quality schools and robust remote learning options for every child in every zip code. Joining together, we can rewrite the rules so the richest one percent and big corporations pay their fair share, so our communities are strong and our schools have the resources they need to play their full role in the lives of our kids and our communities.

(D) Positioning Education Within a Broader Frame of Progressive Priorities

Most of us work hard for our families, no matter what we look like or where we come from. But today, when a powerful few fuel divisions among us, they block our efforts to ensure a fair return on our work, paid time to care for our families, and safe and welcoming schools for our children. It's time to join together to rewrite the rules so the richest one percent and big corporations pay their fair share. That's how we ensure every one of us – whether we're native or newcomer; young or old; white, Black or brown – can care for our families, have our voices heard and our rights respected, and make sure every child has a high-quality education that lets them pursue their dreams, no exceptions.

Stand-Alone Talking Points

- Every child, regardless of race, ability, or zip code, needs a neighborhood school with well-prepared teachers, class sizes that enable one-on-one attention, nurses, counselors, and healthy meals that ensure they can thrive.
- No matter what we look like, where we live, or what's in our wallets, most of us want our neighborhood public schools to inspire imagination, cultivate critical thinking, and ensure our children can live fulfilling lives.
- Most of us believe that every child, no matter what they look like or where they come from, deserves a safe and welcoming school where they can thrive.
- Certain politicians try to divide us, ensuring well-resourced schools with mostly white students have everything they need while sending police to monitor and punish Black and brown students in schools that have been denied funding to even cover the basics.

- Our public schools are more than a place where kids take tests. They are part of what ties our communities together and shapes our children's lives.
- When we join together across race and place, we can demand that the wealthiest few pay their fair share so every child can pursue their dreams.
- If we're serious about making sure every child can pursue their dreams, let's get serious about doing what works.
- By joining together across race and zip code, we can rewrite the rules to ensure every school has the engaging materials and up-to-date approaches, healthy meals and emotional supports to set kids up to be all that they dream.