Back to School Toolkit
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What a year we have had.

So much loss. So much change. In the midst of it all, though, so much meaningful resistance and resilience. With all that, it’s almost hard to believe that a new school year is up on the horizon.

As we prepare to return to school, the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS) is inviting parents, students, educators and education professionals, and school staff, far and wide to join us in a collective and coordinated effort to raise demands and take action that can help us achieve the goal for our schools our communities deserve.

The history of change in this country teaches us that we make and sustain change only when everyday people organize and take action to register their desires and discontent. That is exactly what those of us in the movement for education and racial justice must do.

While times have changed, what we must do has not. We must build power through building coalitions, crafting demands that give us the schools we deserve, taking action and repeating those steps. We invite you to join this season of action!

Yours In Struggle,

Keron Blair
Executive Director

THE ALLIANCE TO RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS
For far too long, our public education in America has had to bear the weight of under-resourced communities, disinvestment, and racism.

It created a system that values the have and undercuts the have-nots. As many students return to in-person learning, now is the time for us to renew our call for change.

With calls for racial justice growing louder and the voices of parents, children, and educators growing stronger, the time is now to push forward our agenda for high-quality, well-resourced, and safe neighborhood public schools.

Since the start of the global pandemic, AROS and its alliance partners have been working around the clock to develop principles and policies that we believe will improve our nation’s public schools. Beyond that, our plan will transform our classrooms, value Black lives, and ensure that our children, families, and educators are treated with respect, dignity and equity.

America’s public schools should be places where ZIP code, race, sexual orientation and citizenship status don’t matter. Sadly, that isn’t the case. If we acknowledge the truth about the systemic racism and bigotry in our country, we also recognize how our children and their schools have been harmed. For AROS, #BlackLivesMatter is more than just a hashtag or social media post. It is a policy doctrine that should govern how we think about safety, the economy, and public education.

The American Rescue Plan invested over $170 billion in public education, making this the federal government’s largest ever single investment in our schools. This money is supposed to be a one-time investment in equity, and it will be our job to ensure that this happens.

The Post-Pandemic Schools Our Children Deserve: Principles and Policies Promoting Equity After Disruption
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ap5SVq3sHNTEJPlOqKhtB-Gt_Qqe9iG52Il5eMVirQo/edit?usp=sharing
The Post-Pandemic Schools Our Kids Deserve is a living document and guide to where some of the disparately needed federal dollars should go. We will continue to grow, change and adjust this document as this pandemic and the inequities it has laid bare changes.

Together, we -- parents, children, community, educators, and our local unions — will win the fight to ensure our students attend high-quality neighborhood public schools, and this document will help.

As the climate changes during this Back-To-School period, please reach out to us, if you need updates on policy, practices and solutions.
Campaigns on the forefront of demanding the schools we deserve:

**Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools:**

**Full funding for Title I:** Since becoming law, Title I and IDEA have never been fully funded. That lack of funding has left too many of our students and communities vulnerable and lacking. Congress has the power to fix that. AROS is leading a campaign that calls for the full funding of Title I.

**Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools:**

**Tell the truth. The Whole truth.** Our students must be taught about the full history of this country. The business of public schools and public educators is dealing with, confronting and developing ways to build a more racially just society. Those who say and want to do differently are wrong. The “Tell the Truth” campaign is about honesty in curriculum and making sure that educators are equipped and have space to teach all of America’s history.

**The Schott Foundation For Public Education:**

**Get these billions.** The scale of the broad federal funding in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) presents an opportunity for transformative change – but only if funds are invested in addressing systemic racism and advancing equity. **This requires sustained organizing to ensure accountability and community participation to direct investments – and ongoing, transparent structures to incorporate community input.**

**AFT Back-to-School-for-All Campaign:**

The 1.7 million-member AFT has invested heavily in a nationwide push for family engagement and safe in-person learning this fall, affecting more than 1,800 locals. This means everything from door-to-door canvassing, support for vaccine clinics, town halls, book fairs and other grassroots efforts.
NEA Campaign for Safe, Just, and Equitable Schools
The three million-member NEA is embarking on a campaign for safe, just and equitable schools. By harnessing the energy of its members and the community they serve, NEA is working collectively to increase funding for proven programs such as services for low-income students under Title I and students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). Their campaign also includes prioritizing efforts to recruit, retain and support a more racially diverse educator core.

Journey for Justice Alliance:
Equity or Else. The Journey for Justice Alliance is leading a large-scale effort to demand equity and lift up the need for a quality-of-life agenda that situates education justice alongside the other needs of our communities.

Alliance for Educational Justice:
School Safety and Police. Young people around the country have long been raising the point that school safety and an affirming school climate must be untethered from police presence in our schools. Many of us have watched with horror as police, SROs and other law enforcement officers abuse young people in schools.

Youth Mandate For Education and Liberation (Center For Popular Democracy):
As millions of young people across the country prepare for an unprecedented “back to school” season amid a global pandemic, and following the national uprising against police violence in Black communities, we must center young people’s demands now more than ever. As the Youth Mandate for Education and Liberation states: “Our vision and mandate begins with police-free schools.”
Fully Fund Title I.

Fifty-five years ago, the U.S. Congress signed Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into law. This promised that students and families living in poverty would receive additional investments to mitigate its impact on educational achievement.

Since then, Title I has never been fully funded. That lack of critical investment has been disastrous for poor students, their families and the communities they call home. In many cases, these students are predominantly Black and brown. Instead of receiving the necessary funds, these young people and their parents have been subjected to devastating school closures, excessive policing and the loss of qualified Black and brown educators.

Despite the spotty track record of disinvestment, we have a couple reasons to organize for the full funding of Title I:

During his campaign, President Joe Biden repeatedly promised that if elected, he would work to triple Title I funding! This was a sign to educators, parents, students and the community that we would have a friend in the White House on matters of school funding and the fight for educational equity.

Additionally, Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Representative Susie Lee (D-NV) introduced the Keep Our Promise to America’s Children and Teachers Act. This piece of legislation, also known as the Keep Our PACT Act, would place Congress on a well-needed and responsible path to meeting its obligation to fully fund Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The third and most critical step to ensuring students, communities and educators have the necessary tools to meet the challenges of our new world involves unprecedented organizing on the local, state and federal level.
In truth, fully funding Title I, is, as they say, a no brainer. Over the last year, we have watched the COVID-19 pandemic wreak unimaginable havoc across the globe, the brunt of which landed on the poor, the vulnerable, and Black and brown people.

Collectively, we represent millions of students, parents, educators, school-related personnel and community members. We know, better than most, what it means for the classrooms in our community to thrive with the necessary resources.

With this in mind, we invite groups from all across the movement for social justice to get involved and join our campaign to get Title I and IDEA fully funded this year! Our goal is to move millions of parents, students, educators and community members to take action. That means calling lawmakers, planning virtual rallies, meeting with members of Congress, writing letters, using social media and holding legislators accountable for their commitments to racial equity.
During this Back-To-School season, here is how you can engage in the fight for the full-funding of Title I and IDEA:

Schedule an In-District Meeting with Your Member of Congress:
Both the Keep Our Pact Act and the pending federal budget have allotted additional monies for Title I and IDEA, but these budgets and bills don’t get passed without pressure from members of the education community, like yourselves.

If you care about getting more investments for high-quality neighborhood public schools we urge you to call your congressional representative’s district office and schedule an in-district meeting either in person or virtually. During this meeting, let your member of Congress know where in the district you live and why you care so deeply about greater investment in public education. In addition, be sure to ask them to properly fund Title I and IDEA and become a co-sponsor of the Keep Our PACT Act (SR 72/HR 764).

Call Your Member of Congress En Masse:
If you can’t schedule an in-district meeting, you can also organize a call-in day to your member of Congress. As we all know, there is power in numbers. If we all call together, we can make a difference and get our voices heard on the need for more funding for our students and their classrooms. When you call, be sure to tell them your zip-code and ask for their support of the Keep Our PACT Act, SR 72/HR 764.

The number for the capital switchboard, (which will allow you to put in your state and reach your Senators) is 202-224-3121.
Educate Your Community About Title I and IDEA:

1. Title I Explained: Here's a brief video that explains what Title I is and does in schools
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-baTFnhJRU

2. IDEA Explained:
   https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/

3. Read AROS’ Report: Confronting Education Debt
   http://educationdebt.reclaimourschools.org/

Join Our Title I/IDEA Mailing List!
Tell the truth.

Critical Race Theory (commonly referred to as CRT) is the latest boogeyman dreamed up to scare people from having courageous conversations about race and racism within and beyond our schools. Unless we act to preserve the space to have these difficult conversations, we may never fully understand how race and racism impact us. Thus, we will resign ourselves to its most destructive impacts that are disproportionately felt by racially vulnerable people.

The NYU Metro Center’s Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC) is excited to announce a new resource for communities resisting those attacks and continuing to organize for anti-racist, culturally responsive schools: Winning Racial Justice in Our Schools: Resisting the Right Wing Attacks on Critical Race Theory. This toolkit is a one-stop shop to understand the context and motivation of the anti-CRT attacks, use effective talking points, get your message into the media, take action through local organizing, advocate for anti-racist education policies, and run for school board. Check it out on the CRE Hub today: https://crehub.org/crt-toolkit.

This toolkit is a collective effort! If you have additions or suggestions, or want support with your organizing effort, please contact us at nyu-ejroc@nyu.edu.
How you can get involved:

Visit the NYU Metro Center for a culturally responsive-sustaining education for our Students.

Check out the informational events hosted by the Metro Center to educate yourself, your community and your family about what a culturally responsive education could be.
Get these billions.

IN THE NEWS:
President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 into law on March 11, 2021. The law doles out $1.9T in COVID-19 relief, including allocations of roughly $125B for the K-12 education system, and nearly $40B for the higher education system. This move by Congress and President Biden represents the largest one-time investment in K-12 public education in American History.

The scale of broad federal funding in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) presents an opportunity for transformative change – but only if funds are invested to address systemic racism and advance equity. This requires sustained organizing to ensure accountability and community participation to direct investments – and ongoing, transparent structures to incorporate community input.

This page provides resources to support that kind of organizing. Some have been developed by Schott, and many more gathered from partners. This information covers components of ARP and provides insights into how communities across the country are mobilizing.

On the Schott’s American Rescue Plan: Organizing for Equity Page members of the community can find a wealth of resources, from how much money will go to your state and district to tools that can help in the process to organize and influence how the money will be spent.

http://schottfoundation.org/arp-organizing-toolkit
AFT’s Back-to-School Campaign.

AFT President Randi Weingarten will travel the length and breadth of the country this month to encourage students and staff to return to full-time, in-person school by helping educators and families create safe and welcoming learning environments where kids can recover and thrive.

Working shoulder-to-shoulder with parents, administrators and communities, the $5 million “Back to School for All” tour is championing a return to five-days-a-week, brick-and-mortar instruction. This comes after 18 months of unprecedented turmoil and a changing virus, demonstrated by the troubling surge in the Delta variant.

The 1.7 million-member AFT has invested heavily in the nationwide push, affecting over 1,800 locals, with everything from door-to-door canvassing, support for vaccine clinics, town halls, book fairs and other grass-roots efforts. The initiatives, working in tandem with resources and support from President Biden’s American Rescue Plan, are intended to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of all students, regardless of geography or demography. AFT locals, from coast to coast and points in between, are participating in the push. Higher education locals who are preparing for thousands of students to return to campus amid complex health and safety protocols have also joined in the fight.

The national union will operate “office hours” and clinics with designated times when affiliates and others can call in to discuss ideas and get technical support. Share My Lesson(link is external), the AFT’s lesson planning resource, will be a clearinghouse for best practices. The most meaningful part of this campaign is how members, staff and volunteers are connecting with families to rebuild relationships and trust eroded by a once-in-a-century pandemic.
How to get involved:

From door-to-door canvassing, support for vaccine clinics, town halls, book fairs and other grass-roots efforts. Learn more about a Back to School for All initiative stop near you and e-mail jrodrigues@aft.org to plug in to events near you!
NEA Campaign for Safe, Just and Equitable Schools.

We believe in and want safe, just, and equitable schools for all students—no matter who they are, where they live, or what they look like. As president of the National Education Association, representing more than 3 million educators, Becky Pringle works hard every day to make sure all students can pursue their dreams and live fulfilling lives and to help ensure an education system, economy, and democracy that works for all of us. No exceptions.

As the global pandemic persists, educators are illustrating what it means to reach, teach, and inspire every student. Educators have gone to extraordinary lengths to serve students and their communities while also tending to their own families. As students and educators return to schools this fall, we are focused on keeping students safe, learning and engaged.

NEA’s campaign for safe, just and equitable schools stems from and is built on top of its current racial and social justice work. President Becky Pringle is committed to taking this message and campaign as she travels the country this year, engaging key stakeholders along the way to realize this vision of safe, just, and equitable schools.

The association’s 3 million members are up to the challenge. Together, in coordination with national partners, NEA state and local affiliates, racial justice advocates, and community activists are connecting to build powerful education communities and continue our work to confront and end institutional racism in our public schools.

NEA will harness the energy of our members to support campaigns at the state and local level, aiming to leverage federal support for just funding formulas that remedy resource disparities around race, income, and geographic wealth patterns, and for no-cost higher education.
The campaigns we support will realize dramatic funding increases for proven programs such as services for low-income students under Title I and students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). Through this work we will make sure students have school-based, non-privatized, non-outsourced services to meet their social-emotional and mental health needs.

We will realize robust staffing levels, including appropriate class sizes, access to electives, art, librarians, ESPs, and appropriate higher education staffing levels. We will organize to create pathways for more racially diverse educators; greater numbers of Native educators and educators of color, especially in high-quality, full-time, professional or tenure-track positions. As educators we know how important it is for students to have education faculty and staff who look and sound like their communities.

Finally, as educators, we know the importance of supporting the whole child and our work does not stop when the bell rings or school doors close. This work will support campaigns that seek remedy to economic justice issues including, but not limited to, affordable housing, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and access to healthcare and childcare.

The pandemic shined a bright light on what educators have long known—that too many students don’t get enough to eat, don’t have access to technology to learn at home, have unstable housing conditions or move frequently. Our work to eliminate inequity cannot start nor end with the pandemic and our schools—we must address racial injustices that exist in all the surrounding socio-economic systems and deprive our Black and brown students of opportunity.

Our time for a safe, just and equitable public school system is now.
Equity or Else.

Journey for Justice (J4J) launched the Equity or Else Campaign on May 17, 2021 with a national virtual rally that was viewed by over 3,000 people. We brought together leaders and organizers from different quality-of-life areas (education, housing, health care, environment/climate justice, youth investment, and food production and delivery) to share how inequity affects these areas and the grassroots solutions they have organized.

We have partnered with organizations such as The Center for Popular Democracy, Alliance for Educational Justice (youth), Alliance to Reclaim our Schools, Dignity in Schools Coalition, and National Alliance Against Racist & Political Repression, along with several local organizations.

J4J will be organizing multiple listening projects in no fewer than 50 cities across the United States, getting grassroots voices on the harm racism has caused in quality-of-life areas such as education, housing, safety, climate and youth investment; and what solutions should look like. These listening projects will be in person and virtual. We have organized a national cadre of elected officials, from school board members to U.S. senators, to organize and attend the listening projects in their districts.

This is critical because hundreds of billions of dollars will be flowing into American cities to supposedly address racism and recovery from the COVID pandemic. Without grassroots demand, these resources will not go to our communities.

After the listening projects, we will host regional in-person town halls in April of 2022 to develop regional quality-of-life platforms. In May of 2022, we will bring everyone together at the J4J National Conference in Baltimore where we will build our national quality of life platform. This will culminate with a September 2022 Demand for Equity in Washington DC.

Learn more about our campaign and to join the fight forward for equitable schools and communities. https://www.standing4equity.org/eoe-toolkit
How you can get involved:

Learn more about our campaign and to join the fight forward for equitable schools and communities.
https://www.standing4equity.org/eoe-toolkit

Host a Listening Project in your community
https://www.standing4equity.org/listening-project-tour
School Safety and Police.

IN THE NEWS:
After a months long push by students in the nation’s second largest public school system, leaders in Los Angeles approved a plan in March 2021 to cut the district’s security force by a third, joining a growing number of cities that have reduced the presence of police officers in school hallways. Calls to downsize or significantly alter police forces surged during nationwide protests across the country last summer after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. But those efforts have faced roadblocks in the months since, making schools one of the few places where major changes have been enacted.

A couple of weeks ago, young Black people, and families and students of color took action for #PoliceFreeSchools. From teach-ins, to rallies, caravans, actions, to major school board votes, the groundswell of support for the removal of police (police practice, culture and infrastructure) from our schools is building. As more of our people come into the fold, we want to share what are and why we call for police-free schools. We are clear that police-free schools are not just about the physical removal of cops from school buildings, but ending the carceral system perpetuated by the racist education system. For us, this campaign is grounded in abolition. If we seed abolition in our schools, it makes it possible to seed it in our communities.

Our National Campaign for Police Free Schools is fueled by local organizing. In 2017, we compiled all the strategies groups were deploying to win the removal of police from schools. We call them the “6 Ds” for Police Free Schools. In 2018, we published our report with the Advancement Project National Office, “We Came to Learn: A Call to Action for Police Free Schools”.

Check out the report, the action kit, and the 6 Ds here:
https://advancementproject.org/wecametolearn/

See the actions young people and communities are taking here:
bit.ly/weekofactionpfs
Youth Mandate for Education and Liberation.

As millions of young people across the country prepare themselves for an unprecedented “back to school” moment amid a global pandemic and following the national uprising against police violence in Black communities, we must center young people’s demands now more than ever.

As the Youth Mandate for Education and Liberation states: “Our vision and mandate begins with police-free schools.”

All decision makers must know that young people, parents, community members, and allies refuse to return to the same schools they left. These schools were chronically underfunded and filled with police and surveillance. Young people are instead demanding that their government “Fund Education, Not Incarceration.”

Register to join the fight for education justice by visiting the Youth Mandate for Education and Liberation website:
https://www.youthmandate.com/back-to-school-actions

See the actions young people and communities are taking here:
bit.ly/weekofactionpfs

#YouthMandate Toolkit.

With the back-to-school season upon us, The Center for Popular Democracy has created a #YouthMandate Toolkit to help organizers on the local, state and national level. In this toolkit, users will find sample social media language, walk-thru instructions to plan local actions in your community and sample emails for allies committed to social justice.

Check out the robust toolkit by visiting the Center for Popular Democracy website: https://docs.google.com/document/d/146Dw-DojVF0CBHCcOleKRuHWtrp6pdX77_5JhufELcM/edit
A Note on Taking Action.

The change we want to see really only happens when people like you take action.

Those actions must:
- be clear in their demands
- involve parents, educators, students and school staff
- be directed at targets that can meet our demands -- like local school leadership, school boards, city councils, state legislators, and Congress
- be public and call attention to the needs and demands of our communities

Some Examples

Community listening sessions. See J4J site for what that can look like.

Contact your legislators. This can be through phone calls, emails, or planned in-person or zoom visits.

Rallies. A public way of coming together to show power and solidarity. They should happen in places where the decision makers are more than likely to witness the power of the community.

Walk-ins. A staple of the AROS universe. Through walk-ins, educators, school staff, students and parents demonstrate their unity and collective power.
Sample script when calling a lawmaker:

1. Introduce yourself to whoever answers the phone!

2. “Hello! My name is ________ and I am a resident of CITY/DISTRICT. I am calling to share my concern with NAME OF LEGISLATOR regarding HOUSE/SENATE BILL NUMBER.

3. Your call will either be connected to the legislator or to a member of his/her staff.

4. Introduce yourself (again) and ask for a minute of their time.

5. Read from your script.

An example of what you could say is,

“I am calling because I am concerned about the HOUSE/SENATE BILL NUMBER. This bill is important to me because it seeks to ensure that all our students attend high-quality neighborhood public schools rich with well-resourced classrooms, well-supported educators and all the necessary wraparound services to meet the social and emotional needs of our youngest residents.

Properly Funding Title I and IDEA will provide well-needed equity for our Black, brown, , and vulnerable students and their families. In addition, these investments will also ensure that after this pandemic, our schools will have access to social workers, school nurses, guidance counselors and safe learning conditions.

I want to see greater investments at (insert the name of a local school or school district located in the legislator’s district), and that can only happen if you co-sponsor this bill and increase funding for public education. Please support the SENATE/HOUSE BILL NUMBER when it comes up for vote this legislative session.”

6. That’s it! Thank them for their time!