

Education for All -Shared Story Talking Points Spring 2021- a resource provided by the [California Partnership for the Future of Learning](#)

What is our key narrative for this moment? We can't go back to the pre-pandemic status quo which was failing our communities. We must reimagine and rebuild an education system that is racially just.

Core Narrative: Schools are irreplaceable--not just as places of learning, but as resource hubs that provide connections and opportunities for youth and families beyond classroom instruction. When schools across California closed their doors and went online in response to the spread of COVID-19, many students and their families lost access to this critical resource. This past year has been difficult for all - students who feel isolated, educators who have risen to the occasion of teaching from a distance, and parents who have struggled with the broad range of challenges - from education to employment- worsened by the pandemic.

Now, districts in California are beginning the long process of getting students and educators back to in-person school. Without careful attention to equity and a focus on relationships, mental health, and healing, the return to school risks further failing to deliver on the promise of an equal education for all, {especially for students of color, English-learners, LGBTQ students, rural students, and students in low-income communities.}

This isn't a time to return to a pre-pandemic status quo where your zip code determines the quality of your education and schools perpetuate cycles of racism and inequity. With the record amount of state and federal funding flowing to school districts and local government, we have a critical window of opportunity to help communities restart and recover from the pandemic. We must transform schools by taking a restorative, whole-child approach that centers students, families, and educators as equal partners in shaping a new pathway forward.

Now, more than ever, we must build a network of public schools that are beacons of light and provide hope, opportunity, and pathways to health and success. Investing in racially-just and relationship-centered community schools where every student, educator, and family thrives will allow everyone to heal from the pandemic and transform the future of California.

Shifts in Narrative We Aim to Make

From learning loss to a restorative, whole-student approach

- What our students need after this year is time to reconnect and to heal. Centering relationships and wellness in the return to school will create the conditions where learning is possible.
- All of us have been through a very difficult, traumatic year; the harmful impacts of the pandemic on our students' mental health has been well documented. That's why making space for connection, healing, and wellness is so critical as we return to school as the first step in building the foundation that makes learning and academics possible.
- Students across the state have seen their traditional forms of learning disrupted by the pandemic. Yet, many have adapted- taking on new, bigger roles in their homes and communities, mastering new technology, and expanding how and where they learn. We should build off these new skills and make sure every student is re-engaged through meaningful learning and relationship building that recognizes their struggles and growth over the past year.
- These demonstrate new ways to engage our children and youth in meaningful learning that create more equitable and engaging schools.
- Focusing on the idea of learning loss in the return to school ignores the fact that far too many students were being left behind long before the pandemic. Our focus should be on creating the conditions and fostering the relationships that make learning possible in every school and community so we can end cycles of disinvestment and inequity once and for all.
- Taking a one-size-fits-all approach to learning won't work; we saw this even before the pandemic. Instead we must set our sights on a restorative, whole-child approach to education.
- The pandemic and break from school-as-usual gives us a critical chance to reimagine our schools as hubs of opportunity and hope that can resolve injustices and spark healing.
- If this crisis has shown us anything, it's that the systems put in place to govern our lives can be quickly changed for our collective good. {Share an example of how your local school or district rose to meet the needs of students}. This means we can no longer accept the status quo when it comes to our schools. It is possible to transform education and create a system that works for all students.

From individualism to collective leadership

- The way we get through this is together. No one person has the answers to these unprecedented challenges.
- This is the moment for us to go all in. First to meet the immediate needs of our community to recover from the pandemic, and then to reimagine what an education system that works for all could truly be.
- Strong, authentic relationships and partnership - between students, families, educators and advocates- open new possibilities for what we can create and achieve together.

- We have to build trust in the expertise of students, families, educators and school communities working together as a team to reimagine and make real public schools where all students thrive

From scarcity to abundance

- There is enough for everyone to have what they need to stay healthy, safe, and connected especially given the resources available because of state and federal COVID relief efforts. It is about the choices we make on how to distribute the abundant resources we have.
- We can't let elected leaders or those with power use the demands of the most privileged families as an excuse for leaving many students and communities behind.
- If we invest the short-term funds coming to our districts through COVID relief in smart, strategic ways that focus on culture and systems change, we can transform education to be more equitable and effective for the long term.

Mix and Match Talking Points

About the role of schools as hubs of health, learning, and opportunity

- California's success and prosperity depends on our public schools' capacity to serve as beacons of light and hope that spark opportunity. We can see clearly in this crisis that schools aren't just about preparing kids for college and careers but about the health and prosperity of entire communities.
- Not only do our schools provide young people a place to explore, learn, and grow but they provide parents and families assurance that their children have a safe place to be so they are able to work. That means the success of our public schools is critical for the prosperity of California.
- Schools are meant to be sites of learning and possibility- not narrowly focused on policing and testing our youth.
 - The current national conversation about defunding the police hits close to home for thousands of California students who attend a school with police officers but no counselor or nurse. We need to shift our priorities and our investments to create schools that are safe and healthy for all.
 - Taking a one-size-fits-all approach to learning and focusing narrowly on standardized tests and grades won't work; we saw this even before the pandemic. Instead we must set our sights on a restorative, whole-child approach to education.
- This virus revealed to us the interconnectedness of our world in a very personal way. It is showing, conclusively, that the health and well being of one is intimately bound to the health and well being of all. The same can be said about education. The quality and well-being of our schools is intimately connected to the success and prosperity of California. Moving forward, we need a new level of commitment to fulfill the promises of real equity, opportunity, and justice in our public schools.

- Across California we have dozens of examples of communities with healthy, vibrant and equitable schools where students are empowered and engaged. {Share briefly about one example} We should look to these models - and the leadership of students, families, and educators - to learn from and build upon as we reimagine California as a place where every student goes to an amazing school.
- Despite the very real challenges of last year, the pandemic also brought out the best in people. People pulled together to share resources, technology, information, and food so that families could continue to meet their needs. For example {share a story about a way that your local community is responding to student and parent need}

How the COVID-19 Crisis and Uprising shone a light on longstanding inequities

- Long before the pandemic {uprising} began, the zip code you live in dictated the quality of education you receive. It should have never been that way. Yet, amid COVID we continued to see students who live in rural areas, low-income communities, and students of color face the biggest disparities in being able to transition to online learning environments much less meet their basic needs. While all of us experienced the pandemic, communities of color bore the brunt of harm from COVID and the economic downturn. Now, these same students and families are being asked to reenter schools that will further perpetuate cycles of inequity unless bold action is taken.
- Schools don't work for too many of us, because our voices haven't been centered in conversations about what our schools and communities need. We have an unprecedented opportunity to facilitate students, educators, and families leading the way to design new approaches and solutions as we go back to school.
- For most of us, public schools are foundational to getting a good start in life. However, the unprecedented trauma from the pandemic, disruption in traditional learning, and the racial reckoning spurred by Black, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and Latinx communities demanding justice, exposed generational inequities that have and will continue to harm students of color if we stick with the status quo.
- Inadequate public education funding has been a perpetual and devastating problem in communities of color and areas of concentrated poverty for decades. Without a smart and strategic investment of the dollars available because of COVID relief, we'll continue to see the same issues come to the surface again and again. Real improvements start with building equity and centering relationships in everything we do in schools, from assessment to decision-making about re-opening to instruction.

Making connections between education and the Movement for Black Lives

- Creating a California where Black Lives Matter begins in our schools. Every child - no matter their race, background or zip code- should have a thriving, well-funded school in their neighborhood where they can tap into their full potential. Our first step in achieving this vision is to center the voices of Black students, families, and educators in conversations about the return to school so that no one is left behind.

- In neighborhoods where the wealthy and well-connected live, there are excellent public schools as well as easy access to living wages, healthcare and freedom from police terror. Now is the time to reimagine our education system so that every community has a thriving, equitable school that fosters connection and opportunity for everyone who lives there.

About opportunities for change and solutions

- The pandemic and break from school-as-usual gives us a critical chance to reimagine our schools as hubs of opportunity and hope that can resolve injustices and spark healing.
- If this crisis has shown us anything, it's that the systems put in place to govern our lives can be quickly changed for our collective good. {Share an example of how your local school or district rose to meet the needs of students}. This means we can no longer accept the status quo when it comes to our schools. It is possible to transform education and create a system that works for all students.
- New relief investments from state and federal governments must center on the people who need it the most. There is enough for everyone to have what they need to stay healthy, safe, and connected as we return to school. It is about the choices we make on how to distribute the abundant resources we have. Our children deserve us to choose their futures by investing equitably in public schools that foster the health of every community.
- With students at home, parents around the state recognized the vital and difficult job that teachers undertake every day. We should channel this recognition to win policies and practices to recruit and retain fully prepared teachers that reflect the racial, ethnic, and language diversity of California's students, and provide jobs with living wages, good benefits, and resources for ongoing learning and development.
- Schools aren't just about academics--they are also places where young people learn how to be active and engaged members of a community that fosters positive social interactions, emotional resilience, and healthy relationships.

Messages and Frames to Avoid or Reframe

- **AVOID.** Our schools are failing. We shouldn't spend more money on something that isn't working.
 - **REFRAME.** It is easy to point to the many challenges facing public schools around California. But many communities also have healthy, vibrant public schools that are doing an excellent job tapping into their students' full potential. The challenges of our schools can be remedied with increased and equitable investment, and by following the lead of students, educators and parents.
 - Reinvesting in and rebuilding public education takes all of us leading together to create a public education system that reflects our communities and fully realizes the role of public education in advancing equity and addressing societies longstanding inequities.

- When students return to the classroom after COVID-19, they will need even greater support to navigate their health, their wellness, and their learning goals. Now is a time to double down and move our State's resources so that every student can attend a fully-funded and thriving school.
- AVOID. Frames that position teachers, school staff, or unions as bad or greedy.
 - REFRAME: Our teachers, and the unions that represent them, want the same things we do- a return to school that is safe and healthy for everyone.
 - REFRAME: In the past year, more than ever, Californians are realizing that teaching is a challenging job that takes real skill. Teachers, like students and families, deserve the resources they need to be successful and stay safe.
 - REFRAME: We support teacher and educators unions right to organize in this moment and look to them as partners as we reimagine the future of education.
- AVOID repeating the oppositional frames even if your message aims to debunk a myth or opposition message
 - REFRAME. Focus on what we want, not what we don't want.

[The California Partnership for the Future of Learning](#) is a statewide alliance of community organizing and advocacy groups advancing a shared vision of a transformational, racially just education system built for us all.

It is led by Advancement Project California, Californians for Justice, PICO California, and Public Advocates, with the support of Community Coalition, InnerCity Struggle, and over a dozen grassroots, research and philanthropic partners.