



ADVANCING EQUITY IN K-12 EDUCATION: 2021 POLICY PRIORITIES

This school year has been exceptionally challenging, with the ongoing effects of COVID-19 exacerbating pre-existing inequities in our education system and the national reckoning with systemic racism highlighting the critical need to ensure equity is at the core as we recover from the dual pandemics.

Here are four steps state leaders can take to build back a stronger and more equitable K-12 system:

1 **Prioritize equity during pandemic instruction**

To help improve the quality of remote instruction during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the state should establish meaningful and consistent definitions of student attendance, participation, and engagement. In addition, the state should identify and address pandemic-related inequities by collecting disaggregated data on student engagement, instruction, and support services at the school and district level and directing support and resources to the students who need them most. This year's Executive Budget proposal to address broadband access for families who are low-income represents a positive step in improving access to technology for all students, especially for those who have struggled with connectivity while learning remotely or in a blended model. The state should also invest in improving access to devices.

2 **Support efforts to recruit, develop, and retain high-quality teachers of color**

Given the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on educators of color, NYSED should issue guidance on the recruitment, hiring, and retention of diverse educators. The state should also require districts to track and report on retention data and create retention targets. In addition, New York State Senate bill (S.1100) proposes guidelines on "Grow Your Own" initiatives to encourage school districts, BOCES, and institutions of higher education to develop partnerships to attract underrepresented candidates into the teaching profession.

3 **Improve access to advanced coursework that prepares students for college and careers**

New York's education system does not provide students of color and low-income students with equitable access to the middle and high school courses that will prepare them for college, careers, and civic readiness. This year two bills (S. 1111/A.4407) proposed that districts notify parents and students of advanced course offerings and enable automatic enrollment in the next available advanced course, both of which are key provisions that would have a dramatic impact on improving educational equity. The state should also invest in more AP, IB, and Dual Enrollment courses in high-need school districts, including planning time for teachers and supporting equity-driven course enrollment policies.

4 **Enhance supports for students to complete the FAFSA**

High school seniors who complete the FAFSA are more likely to go to college immediately after graduation compared to seniors who do not complete the FAFSA. However, pandemic school closures have made it more difficult for students to access the school and college counselors who often provide critical resources and support in FAFSA completion. The state should provide resources and tools to help districts support families in FAFSA completion, especially students who have been historically underserved.