



Communicating a
Shared Vision for
Students and Education

MESSAGE MANUAL

Prepared for the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation

ABOUT THIS MANUAL

What is the purpose of this manual?

This manual is designed to help education reform advocates, field leaders, parent engagement organizations, civil rights groups, and others who are focused on improving teaching and learning for students communicate consistently about our shared vision to advance student success and equity in education.

Our hope is to provide organizations with guidance on what works when communicating with various target audiences about teaching and learning, and about their unique approaches to addressing complex educational challenges.

How should I use the messages?

The language in this manual can be used as a reference or template for preparing materials and presentations. Drawing upon the language and best practices in this manual will help you deliver a consistent and motivating message that will enhance understanding of your work and amplify our collective impact.

Science tells us that people are most likely to support a cause or change their opinions about an issue when presented with a coherent narrative that frames the topic with an intuitive set of themes, utilizes familiar language, and appeals to commonly held aspirations and values. Accordingly, this manual presents an aspirational narrative about student agency and equity in education, built through an iterative process of crafting and testing messages about key themes.

The narrative and supporting content use clear, memorable language to establish a set of common ideas about student success and equity in education. Common ideas and language provide alignment, clarity and consistency to ensure potential partners and stakeholders can see themselves in the work—and build momentum behind a movement for student success and equity in education.

For maximum effectiveness, the language and ideas in this manual should be tailored for different audiences, regions, and occasions. The narrative is not intended as a universal, exclusive message about education. Rather, it is a resource from which messengers can draw material and inspiration as they craft their own organizational communications.

Education Ecosystem

There are many factors that contribute to student success beyond a curriculum, classroom or a particular teacher—teaching and learning happens in a larger context. This communications framework puts students at the center and represents the multiple layers and factors that shape learning environments.

As part of any communications about our work, it is critical to acknowledge that 1) students are at the center of our efforts, and 2) the education ecosystem is complex—there are multiple entry points for this work. Addressing this will help build credibility and make your work more accessible for audiences who may approach education from many different angles, including through policy, practice, research, and assessment.



ASPIRATIONAL NARRATIVE

Today's students are tomorrow's leaders, voters, and parents. We rely on them to make our communities vibrant and our society strong. In order to do all this, each student—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make—needs high-quality teaching and learning that empowers and equips them to achieve their goals, whatever those may be.

Our country works best when everyone contributes. As inequality rises, public schools have the potential to help level the playing field by removing obstacles and creating equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. But right now, many schools don't have the resources to live up to this potential. As a result, too many students aren't getting a chance to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional, and civic lives. This inequity weakens our society and our democracy, and makes us less prepared to tackle the most pressing issues facing our nation.

Every child deserves an education that allows them to explore and express their identity, have agency in their education, and define success based on their values and authentic goals. With equitable access to the full spectrum of educational and extracurricular opportunities, along with individualized support, every student can develop the skills and competencies they need.

There is no one way to achieve this ambitious vision, but a growing movement of passionate people from across sectors and around the country are already working to strengthen and support schools in their communities. Together, we can use our diverse perspectives and expertise to find, share, and tailor the most promising ideas so that every student and community benefits from this work.

ASPIRATIONAL NARRATIVE, EXPLAINED



The Aspirational Narrative is based on research conducted with numerous audiences. Below, we've explained the motivating power behind key words and phrases included in the Narrative.

WINNING WORDS	WHY TO USE THEM	LANGUAGE TO AVOID
<p>Each student—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make</p>	<p>Highlighting place, race, income, and other factors that lead to unequal outcomes for children helps to make your organization's commitment to equity explicit. Feel free to include additional detail here.</p>	<p>"All students," "our students," or other language that homogenizes distinct identities and underserved groups while obscuring inequality.</p>
<p>Achieve their goals, whatever those may be</p>	<p>Student agency, and the role schools play in helping children understand and work to achieve their own personal goals, is a motivating idea across audiences.</p>	<p>Narrow, prescribed outcomes, such as a sole focus on "graduation" or "attending college," since these don't leave room for students' own goals.</p>
<p>As inequality rises</p>	<p>Some audiences more readily understand and believe this problem statement than others, but there is broad consensus around the idea that not everyone's children are treated equally or have access to the same opportunities.</p>	<p>A narrow focus on educational challenges without placing them in the context of larger systemic issues. For example: "As test scores continue to fall," or "As graduation rates drop."</p>
<p>Public schools have the potential to help level the playing field by removing obstacles</p>	<p>This language acknowledges that obstacles—intentional and unintentional—stand in the way of some students succeeding, and highlights the proactive role that public school can play in removing them.</p>	<p>"Public schools are the key," and other language that positions the public education system as the sole solution to inequality and systemic oppression.</p>
<p>Many schools don't have the resources</p>	<p>This highlights a central challenge many public schools have without blaming teachers. There are many, many reasons schools aren't able to live up to the goal in this message—use your communications to call attention to those specific issues as needed.</p>	<p>"Schools are failing," "schools fall short," "educators aren't able to," and other language that places blame for inequitable educational outcomes on educators and school leaders without acknowledging systems that create and perpetuate inequality.</p>

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WINNING WORDS	WHY TO USE THEM	LANGUAGE TO AVOID
<p>This inequity weakens our society and our democracy, and makes us less prepared to tackle the most pressing issues facing our nation</p>	<p>Show your audiences how individual issues like student success affects everyone in the country.</p>	<p>Framing consequences solely in terms of individual educational outcomes—such as “if we don’t act now, students will lose out on opportunities”—without connecting these outcomes to their impact on communities and society writ large</p>
<p>Along with individualized support</p>	<p>It is not enough to simply provide the same opportunities to every student. History, context, and individual needs matter.</p>	<p>Focusing on “access” or “providing equal opportunities” without acknowledging that each student has different strengths and needs that impact whether and how well they can take advantage of opportunities once they are provided.</p>
<p>There is no one way to achieve this ambitious vision</p>	<p>Teachers, parents, and educational activists are wary of “silver bullet” solutions, acknowledge that strengthening our educational system will take many combined efforts.</p>	<p>Any claims to single, simple, or “silver bullet” solutions, such as “By increasing educational standards for all students, we can....”</p>
<p>A growing movement of passionate people from across sectors and around the country</p>	<p>Educators, parents, students, and advocates are all wary of silver bullet solutions to intractable challenges, and are more likely to trust others like them to help address these issues. Include details about your organization, your partners, and the communities you serve to build credibility and make this language as vivid as possible.</p>	<p>Over-emphasizing solutions that are not driven by the unique needs of the communities you serve, or focusing on top-down expert interventions.</p>

ASPIRATIONAL NARRATIVE FRAMEWORK

When drafting your own content, this framework can be used as a reference for the most important ideas and language from the Aspirational Narrative.

1. VISION FOR EDUCATION

Every student has an education that empowers and equips them to achieve their goals, whatever those may be.

2. STUDENTS

No matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make, each student deserves high quality teaching and learning.

3. SUCCESS

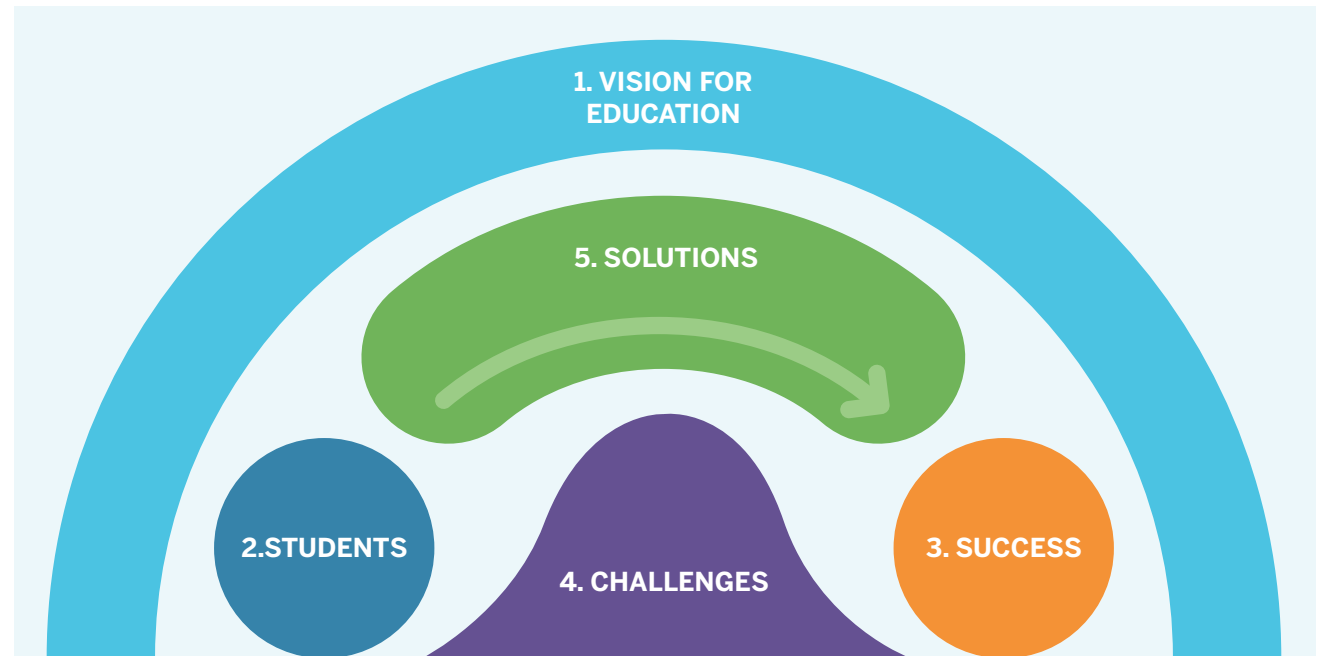
As defined by students, their families, and communities.

4. CHALLENGES

Too many students aren't getting a chance to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional, and civic lives.

5. SOLUTIONS

Learning environments that value and support students to explore and express their identity, have agency in their education and define success based on their values, and authentic goals for their own lives. Equitable access to educational and extracurricular opportunities, along with individualized support.



Answering the questions provided in the Build-Your-Own Prompts, you can create your own narratives and messages for your organization. We've provided a hypothetical example below, bolding language from the Aspirational Narrative alongside organizational-specific language.

BUILD-YOUR-OWN PROMPTS		EXAMPLE	
1. VISION FOR EDUCATION	<p>What is your vision for education?</p> <p>What does that look like for students?</p> <p>How does equity shape this vision?</p>	1. VISION FOR EDUCATION	<p>Parents and community leaders are empowered to demand high quality education for their children that values their identities and prepares them to succeed after graduation.</p>
2. STUDENTS	<p>Describe the students you serve:</p> <p>Who are they? What are they like?</p>	2. STUDENTS	<p>We serve hardworking parents and students living in under-resourced communities who are working to improve educational opportunities so that their communities can continue to thrive in the future.</p>
3. SUCCESS	<p>How do the students and communities you serve define success?</p>	3. SUCCESS	<p>Each and every student is ready for the day after graduation, whether they are going on to college, vocational training, starting a career, or pursuing other goals.</p>
4. CHALLENGES	<p>What are the challenges they face in achieving success?</p>	4. CHALLENGES	<p>Too many communities have schools without the resources to provide a high quality education to each and every student.</p>
5. SOLUTIONS	<p>What solutions do you provide that help students overcome those challenges to be successful?</p>	5. SOLUTIONS	<p>Training and support for teachers to help them find and use high quality, culturally relevant learning materials that affirm each student's identity and provide individualized support as necessary.</p> <p>Empowering parents and community leaders with the information and resources to demand higher quality education for their children.</p>

TAILORED MESSAGES

Purpose

The messages that follow have all been modified from the original message and tailored to serve audiences for different types of organizations. Modified language appears in bold, along with explanations and guidance on the next page. These modified messages should be used in the same way as the original message, and provide some examples and guidance about how to tailor communications to engage and motivate people across sectors and political identity.

Message for Educators and School Leaders

Today's students are tomorrow's leaders, voters, and parents. We rely on them to make our communities vibrant and our society strong. In order to do all this, each student—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make—needs high-quality teaching and learning that empowers and equips them to achieve their **college, career, and life goals**.

Our country works best when everyone contributes. As inequality rises, our public schools have the potential to help level the playing field, remove obstacles, and create equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. **Educators work tirelessly** to meet the needs of their students, but right now their efforts are constrained by **outdated bureaucracy and a lack of resources**. As a result, too many students aren't getting a chance to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional, and civic lives. This inequity weakens our society and our democracy, and makes us less prepared to tackle the most pressing issues facing our nation.

Children in every community deserve an education that values and supports them so they can explore their interests, express their identities, and **participate fully in their learning**, defining success based on their values and authentic goals. With equitable access to the full spectrum of educational and extracurricular opportunities, along with individualized support **grounded in evidence-based practices**, every student can develop the skills and competencies they need.

There is no one way to achieve this ambitious vision, but a growing movement of **teachers, students, parents, and school leaders** are already working to strengthen and support schools in their communities. Together, we can use our diverse perspectives and expertise to find, share, and tailor the most promising ideas so that every student and community benefits from this work.

Tips for Communicating with Educators and School Leaders

Below, we've explained the motivating power behind some of the audience-specific words and phrases used in the modified message for a school network that don't appear in the Aspirational Narrative. We've also included insights and ideas for communicating with teachers and school leaders.

AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC WORDS AND PHRASES	WHY TO USE THEM
College, career, and life goals	Educators and administrators often use this type of concrete language to refer to their goals; reflect it in your communications.
Educators work tirelessly	Many teachers feel overworked and undervalued—acknowledge their important contributions and ongoing work to gain their support.
Outdated bureaucracy and a lack of resources	Emphasize school-specific challenges that educators and administrators will recognize to build credibility.
Participate fully in their learning	Emphasize participation here to show how students are actively engaged in learning, indicating relevant and interesting lessons and materials that parents and community members will support.
Grounded in evidence-based practices	Educators tend to be skeptical of new educational initiatives or “solutions.” To combat that, emphasize the evidence that supports your work and show how it has helped other teachers and students.
Teachers, students, parents, and school leaders	Help educators see themselves in the message by illustrating a school-centered group of actors here.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH TEACHERS

- Center students and improved student outcomes as the main goal of the work
- Talk about solutions as flexible and show how they can be tailored for different types of classrooms
- Lead with stories from real classrooms, but include references and links to research and data when applicable
- Utilize teachers as messengers whenever possible
- Provide concrete tools and resources that teachers can easily and immediately integrate into their existing curricula
- When possible, acknowledge that many teachers are already doing the right things, and lift them up as examples rather than presenting the competencies as a brand new idea

Message for Advocates and Policymakers

Today's students are tomorrow's voters, **activists**, and leaders. We rely on them to make our communities vibrant and our democracy strong. In order to do all this, each student—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make—needs high-quality teaching and learning that empowers and equips them to **participate fully in society**.

Our country works best when everyone contributes. As inequality rises, our public schools have the potential to help level the playing field, remove obstacles, and create equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. But right now, **inequitable policies at the local, state, and federal level** deny many schools the resources they need to live up to this potential, while **schools serving our most privileged communities get more than enough help**. As a result, too many students—especially in low income communities and communities of color—aren't getting a chance to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional, and civic lives. This inequity weakens our society and our democracy, and makes us less prepared to tackle the most pressing issues facing our nation.

Children in every community deserve a high-quality education that values and supports them so they can explore and express their identity, have agency in their education, and define success based on their values and authentic goals. **With policies in place** that provide all students equitable access to the full spectrum of educational and extracurricular opportunities, along with individualized support, every student can develop the skills and competencies they need.

There is no one way to achieve this ambitious vision, but a growing movement of passionate **policymakers, researchers, and advocates** are already working to **change existing policy and introduce new legislation** to strengthen and support schools in their communities. Together, we can use our diverse perspectives and expertise to find, share, and tailor the most promising ideas so that every student and community benefits from this work.

Tips for Communicating with Advocates and Policymakers

Below, we've explained the motivating power behind some of the audience-specific words and phrases used in the modified message for a policy organization that don't appear in the Aspirational Narrative. We've also included insights and ideas for communicating with policymakers.

AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC WORDS AND PHRASES	WHY TO USE THEM
Activists	Use audience-specific student outcomes here to connect with and motivate them.
Participate fully in society	Emphasizing participation aligns with policy advocates' values of civic engagement and the democratic process.
Inequitable policies at the local, state, and federal level	To set up policy action as an intuitive solution, remind audiences that current inequities between schools are due to policy decisions.
Schools serving our most privileged communities get more than enough help	Keep equity in the conversation by reminding audience that already rich schools still get the most resources.
Grounded in evidence-based practices	Telling the audience who exactly is involved and how they all contribute will help them see what success looks like.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH POLICYMAKERS

- Show how solutions can be scaled while remaining flexible and responsive to local needs and contexts
- Share stories of impact at scale—how entire schools, districts and communities benefit when students are empowered and equipped to achieve their goals
- Use representatives from major constituencies as messengers, including parents and teachers but also business and community leaders

Message for Civil Rights and Social Justice Leaders

Today's students are tomorrow's **activists**, voters, and leaders. We rely on them to make our communities vibrant and our democracy strong. In order to do all this, each student—**no matter their race, place, religion, ability, or income**—needs high-quality teaching and learning that empowers and equips them to achieve their goals, whatever those may be.

Our country works best when everyone contributes. As inequality rises, our public schools have the potential to help level the playing field, remove obstacles, and create equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. But right now, **inequitable systems and policies deny many schools—particularly those serving communities of color and low-income families furthest from privilege**—the resources they need to help all of their students thrive. As a result, **too many low-income students and students of color** don't get a chance to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional, and civic lives. **This waste of human potential** weakens our society and our democracy, and **exacerbates the already growing gaps between our most and least privileged communities**.

Children in every community deserve an education that values and supports them so they can explore and express their identity, have agency in their education, and define success based on their values and authentic goals. With equitable access to the full spectrum of educational and extracurricular opportunities, along with individualized support, every student can develop the skills and competencies they need.

There is no one way to achieve this ambitious vision, but a growing movement of passionate people from across sectors and around the country are already working to **advance equity** and strengthen and support **students, families and schools** in their communities. Together, we can use our diverse perspectives and expertise to find, share, and tailor the most promising ideas so that every student and community benefits from this work.

Tips for Communicating with Civil Rights and Social Justice Leaders

Below, we've explained the motivating power behind some of the audience-specific words and phrases used in the modified message for a civil rights or social justice organization that don't appear in the Aspirational Narrative. We've also included insights and ideas for communicating with civil rights and social justice leaders.

AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC WORDS AND PHRASES	WHY TO USE THEM
Race, place, religion, ability, or income	Civil rights advocates want to be as explicit as possible about inequity and privilege, so you should include as much detail here as you need.
Inequitable systems and policies deny	Present the challenge as urgent, but also solvable, by emphasizing the decisions that have led to the current reality.
Particularly those serving communities of color and low-income families furthest from privilege	Be explicit about which types of schools are most likely to be underfunded or otherwise lack the resources to serve their students.
Low-income students and students of color	Be explicit throughout your communications about who is most affected by these inequities.
Waste of human potential	Using strong language makes the consequences more vivid and evokes a visceral reaction.
Advance equity and strengthen and support students, families and schools in their communities	Be explicit about equity and how students and families are vital partners in this work.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH CIVIL RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS

- Explain how your approach seeks out and includes feedback from local communities before implementing solutions
- Emphasize how your work empowers students to define their own vision of success and allows them to be successful in any number of trades, jobs, or careers
- Use messengers with diverse backgrounds, particularly from minority groups that are not usually included in education initiatives such as native populations
- Share stories that demonstrate how classroom practices that support development of the core competencies can be culturally responsive and value local knowledge and history

Message for Parents, Organizers, and Community Leaders

Today's **children** are tomorrow's community leaders, voters, and **parents**. We rely on them to make our communities vibrant and our society strong. In order to **fulfill their innate potential**, each **child**—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make—deserves **quality teachers and relevant, supported learning** that empowers and equips them to achieve their goals, whatever those may be.

Our country works best when everyone contributes. As inequality rises, our public schools have the potential to help level the playing field, remove obstacles, and create equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. But right now, many schools don't have the resources to live up to this potential. As a result, too many **children** aren't getting a chance to develop the knowledge, skills and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional, and civic lives. This inequity weakens our society and our democracy, and makes us less prepared to tackle the most pressing issues facing our nation.

Children in every community deserve an education that values and supports them so they can explore and express their identity, have agency in their education, and define success based on their values and authentic goals. With equitable access to the **same classes, experiences, and activities available to even the most privileged children**—along with individualized support—every **child** can develop the skills and competencies they need.

There is no one way to achieve this ambitious vision, but a growing movement of passionate people from across sectors and around the country are already working to strengthen and support schools in their communities. Together, we can use our diverse perspectives and expertise to find, share, and tailor the most promising ideas so that every student and community benefits from this work.

Tips for Communicating with Parents, Organizers, and Community Leaders

Below, we've explained the motivating power behind some of the audience-specific words and phrases used in the modified message for a community organizing or parent engagement organization that don't appear in the Aspirational Narrative. We've also included insights and ideas for communicating with parents.

AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC WORDS AND PHRASES	WHY TO USE THEM
Children	When speaking to parents and community members, emphasize "child" to reflect how people close to students see them.
Fulfill their innate potential	Parents believe their children are capable of accomplishing great things and want schools to nurture this potential.
Quality teachers and relevant, supported learning	Make more abstract concepts such as "teaching and learning" as concrete as possible for parents by focusing on people (teachers) and characteristics (relevant, supported).
Children in every community	When tailoring this message, include community-specific details relevant to each audience.
Same classes, experiences, and activities available to even the most privileged children	Be as concrete as possible and talk about what "classroom and extracurricular opportunities" actually are, and show parents and community members that you are committed to helping all students take advantage of high quality opportunities.
Growing movement of passionate people	People want to know who's included in this movement, so be sure to include details about the types of people and organizations working in the communities you are communicating with.

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

- Acknowledge that every student is unique and there is no one-size-fits all definition of success
- Define success for students as giving them the ability to define and achieve their own goals, and empowering them to take control of their own lives
- Talk about how your work prepare students to succeed in their careers as well as in school
- When introducing new solutions or ideas, emphasize the proven data or science behind the approach (i.e. how we know this works) to alleviate concerns about 'experimental' interventions on their children
- Use teachers as champions for new classroom approaches or interventions; engage business leaders as champions to talk about how these approaches help build skills students need in the workforce

Message for Researchers

Today's students are tomorrow's leaders, voters, and parents. We rely on them to make our communities vibrant and our society strong. In order to do all this, each student—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make—needs high-quality, **evidence-based** teaching and learning that empowers and equips them to achieve their goals, whatever those may be.

Our country works best when everyone contributes. As inequality rises, our public schools have the potential to help level the playing field, remove obstacles, and create equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. **But this is only possible if we invest in research and evaluation to figure out what helps students in different communities succeed—and what doesn't.** Unfortunately, **gaps in our understanding** mean that too many students aren't getting a chance to develop the knowledge, skills and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional and civic lives. **This is particularly true for minority communities who are underrepresented in research and often ignored if their data fall outside the major trendlines.** This inequity weakens our society and our democracy, and makes us less prepared to tackle the most pressing issues facing our nation.

Children in every community deserve an education that values and supports them so they can explore and express their identity, have agency in their **education** and define success based on their values and authentic goals. Equitable access to the educational and extracurricular opportunities **proven to help them succeed**, along with individualized support, can help every student can develop the skills and competencies they need.

There is no one way to achieve this ambitious vision, but a growing movement of passionate **researchers and advocates** are **already working to understand what works and what doesn't** to strengthen and support schools in their communities. Together, we can use our diverse perspectives and expertise to find, share, and tailor the most promising ideas so that every student and community benefits from this work.

Tips for Communicating with Researchers

Below, we've explained the motivating power behind some of the audience-specific words and phrases used in the modified message for a research organization that don't appear in the Aspirational Narrative.

AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC WORDS AND PHRASES	WHY TO USE THEM
Evidence-based	Emphasize the importance of evidence and research to frame your organization's strengths as a critical part of the solution.
Invest in research and evaluation to figure out what helps students in different communities succeed—and what doesn't	Make the value of research concrete by telling the audience what questions it can help us answer.
Gaps in our understanding	Emphasize the gaps in what we know and don't know about what helps students succeed—and potentially add specific gaps based on audience priorities—to make the challenge both vivid and solvable.
Proven to help them succeed	Continue to emphasize the importance of evidence-based solutions throughout your communications.
Passionate researchers and advocates are already working to understand what works and what doesn't	Put researchers in the picture alongside advocates so audiences can see how research connects to their lives and needs.

Message for Organizations Working Across Political Divides

Today's students are tomorrow's **parents, workers, and leaders**. We rely on them to make our communities vibrant and our **economy** strong. In order to do all this, each student needs high-quality teaching and learning that equips them with **the skills they need to achieve their goals**.

Our country works best when everyone contributes. **As the gap between rich and poor continues to grow**, our public schools have the potential to help level the playing field, remove obstacles, and create equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. But right now, many schools don't have the resources to live up to this potential. As a result, too many students aren't getting a chance to develop the knowledge, skills and mindsets they need to succeed. This **waste of human potential** makes us **less competitive in the global economy**, and less prepared to tackle the most pressing issues facing our nation.

Every child deserves a **rigorous, high-quality education** that helps them explore their interests, **holds them to high standards, and teaches them relevant skills for the workplace**. With equitable access to the full spectrum of educational and extracurricular opportunities, every student can develop the skills and competencies they need.

There is no one way to achieve this ambitious vision, but a growing movement of people from across sectors and around the country are already working to ensure that **every student receives a high-quality, relevant education**. Together, we can use our diverse expertise to find, share and tailor the most promising ideas so that **every student graduates ready for life and work**.

Tips for Communicating Across Political Divides

Below, we've explained the motivating power behind some of the audience-specific words and phrases used in the modified message for an organization working across political divides that don't appear in the Aspirational Narrative.

AUDIENCE-SPECIFIC WORDS AND PHRASES	WHY TO USE THEM
Workers	Conservative audiences in particular value education that prepares students to compete in the workforce.
Each student needs high-quality teaching and learning that equips them with the skills they need to achieve their goals.	Because “equity” language can alienate more conservative audiences, keep the focus on all students getting the skills they need rather than less-privileged students getting more support.
As the gap between rich and poor continues to grow	There is broad consensus across the political spectrum that the growing gap between rich and poor is an urgent problem.
Less competitive in the global economy	Emphasize the danger of falling behind economically to appeal to more conservative values.
Explore their interests	Keep student agency in the message so long as it pairs with outcomes conservatives value, such as workplace preparation and high standards.
Holds them to high standards	Emphasize the quality and rigor of the educational experience for students.
Ensure that every student receives a high-quality, relevant education	Emphasize the quality and relevance of the educational experience, especially to the workplace, throughout your communications to more conservative audiences.

SAMPLE Q&A

What is equity and why is it important to your work?

We recognize that the students farthest from opportunity are often the ones who receive the least resources. This often has to do with where they live, what they look like, how much money their parents make, and other factors outside of their control.

But simply providing these students with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional and civic lives isn't enough. Students need individualized support, tailored to their personal needs, backgrounds, and strengths, to develop the skills and competencies they need.

Equity means recognizing that different students need different kinds of help, and committing the time, energy, and resources necessary to ensure that every student can use their time in school to explore and express their identity, have agency in their education, and define success based on their values and authentic goals for their own lives.

This message sounds like students get to decide everything about their education, is that true?

We know that high-quality educators teaching students rigorous, relevant material is vitally important to student success.

We've spent a lot of our time and effort focusing on the "how" of public education, and we want to make sure we don't lose sight of the "why." Our goal has always been to ensure that all students—no matter where they live, what they look like or how much money their parents make—receive an education that values and supports them so they can explore and express their identity, have agency in their education and define success based on their values and authentic goals for their own lives.

Student agency is a critical part of the learning process, especially for the knowledge, skills and mindsets that are needed in today's world. Students need to be engaged and active participants in their education. But it's not the whole story, and teachers, parents, administrators, and many others are integral to ensuring that all students achieve their goals, whatever those may be.

Why is public education important?

Our country works best when everyone contributes, and the promise of public education offers hope to every child in this country that they can develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional, and civic lives. Every student should receive a high quality education from their local public school, no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make.

Unfortunately, our country has not always allowed public schools to live up to their full potential. Current policies and practices distribute resources unequally between schools, which often means that the students farthest from privilege, who need the most support, receive the least.

As inequality continues to grow, our public schools have the potential to help level the playing field, remove obstacles, and create equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. We must commit to supporting our public education system, and our schools, teachers, and administrators around the country.

Where is the focus on academics and traditional instruction?

We are committed to ensuring that every student receives a high quality education, along with the individualized resources and support they need to use that education to achieve their goals. The instruction students receive from teachers who value and support them is central to this goal, and central to the work that schools do to strengthen our society and our democracy.

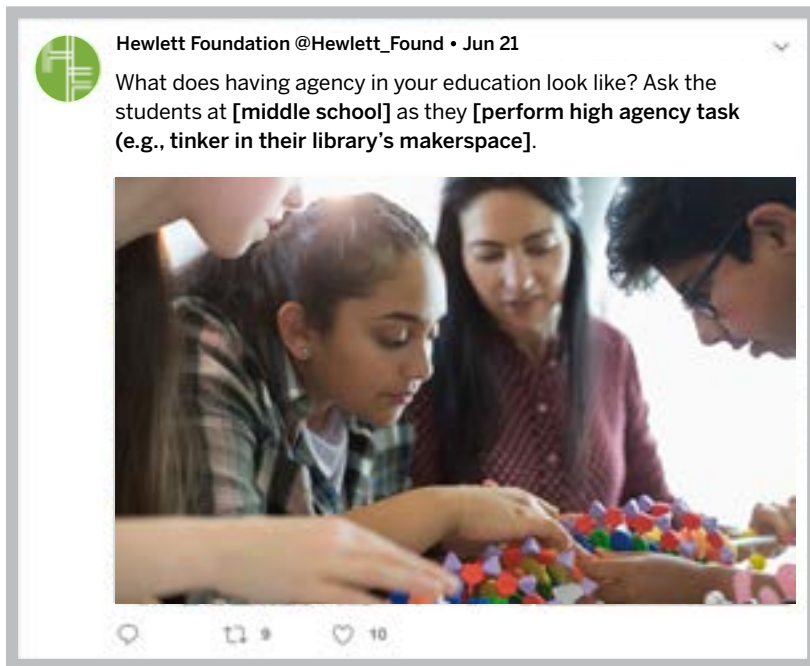
We are focusing on student agency and equity in education as necessary ingredients for academic success, not as alternatives. We know we are asking the education system to do more than it was initially designed to do, and we know that realizing real change will take a lot of hard work for years to come.

EXAMPLES OF THE MESSAGE IN ACTION

The following pieces of sample content across the next few pages each offer an example of using language from the Aspirational Narrative alongside organization-specific language. Underlined text indicates where you should include information specific to your work and audiences. You can use these examples for inspiration when creating your own content.

Sample social media content incorporating motivating language from the message

Sample Tweet



Note: If you need more best practices for social media, or help determining which channels to use, check out [Storytelling for Good](#) for more resources.

Sample Facebook post



Organizational mission materials

The mission of Education Nation is to work with parents and community leaders
[organization] [audience]

to ensure that every child—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make—has the high quality teachers and culturally relevant learning materials they need to explore
[solution]

and express their identity, have agency in their education and define success based on their values and authentic goals for their own lives.

Talking points for a keynote

Today's students are tomorrow's parents, voters, and leaders, and we rely on them to make our communities vibrant, our society just, and our democracy strong. Our collective wellbeing requires that every student—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make—receives the high-quality teaching and learning they need to achieve their goals, whatever those may be.

*While our public schools have the potential to help level the playing field by removing obstacles and creating equal opportunities for children from all walks of life. But right now, many schools don't have the resources to live up to this potential. As a result, too many students aren't getting a chance to develop the knowledge, skills, and mindsets they need to succeed in their academic, social, professional, and civic lives. In particular **[add specific details about a challenge that your organization works to solve]**.*

*At **[Organization]** we believe every child deserves an education that allows them to explore and express their identity, have agency in their education, and define success based on their values and authentic goals. For us, that means **[personalized information about your organizational approach]**.*

*With equitable access to the full spectrum of educational and extracurricular opportunities, along with individualized support, every student can develop the skills and competencies they need. **[Offer evidence that your the opportunities and support your organization offers or provides works]**.*

*We know we're only one part of the solution when it comes to helping students from all walks of life succeed and thrive. We're excited to continue our work with this growing movement of passionate people from across sectors and around the country are already working to strengthen and support schools in their communities. Together, we can **[personalized information about your organization's specific goals, or broader articulation of shared values]**.*

Lead with a shared vision for students and education.

Talk about the challenges currently standing in the way of achieving this vision.

Talk about your organization's work and commitment to advancing equity.

Show how your work helps to overcome the challenges you articulated.

End by reiterating your shared vision for students and education.

Press release

We at Education Nation are pleased to announce that our Learning Nation supplemental class materials are now available in more languages, and tailored to more cultural backgrounds, than ever before.

The mission of Education Nation is to work directly with parents, guardians, and community leaders to ensure that every child—no matter where they live, what they look like, or how much money their parents make—has the culturally relevant learning materials they need to use their time in school to explore and express their identity, have agency in their education, and define success based on their values and authentic goals for their own lives.

For over a decade, Education Nation has been working directly with educators and administrators in the LA Unified School District (LAUSD) to develop supplemental lessons, practice quizzes, and other learning materials in Spanish, Korean, Tagalog, and Hmong Daw, so first and second generation children living in our city can connect what they're learning in class to what they're learning at home. We've also worked directly with community centers to provide hands-on help to parents and students so they can understand and use these materials.

“For years, I struggled to advance my reading level in school,” said one LAUSD student. “It was difficult to keep up when I wasn’t able to speak English in my home, and the only books I felt comfortable and confident reading where in my first language. Learning Nation materials helped me connect the stories and ideas I was learning in school to familiar ones from the books I’d read as a child, making my lessons relevant to me and allowing me to connect what I was learning to my own interests and goals.”

“Our country works best when every child and every family—no matter where they’re from or what they look like—is able to contribute their own unique talents. Public education helps to create equal opportunities for children from all walks of life, but only if students receive the individualized support they need to understand and apply the materials they’re learning in class to their lives and lived experiences. We know there’s no one way to improve educational outcomes for all students, but we hope that by continuing to work with this passionate movement of teachers, administrators, and families, we can use our diverse perspectives and expertise to ensure that all students in Los Angeles can succeed according to their values and authentic goals.”

We hope to continue to expand our Learning Nation materials to support more languages and cultures. If you or someone you know has first-hand knowledge or experience in any language or culture we don't yet support, and you want to join in and support our work, please get in touch!

Lead with the announcement of your new initiative, award, program, or other timely update.

State your organization's mission and commitment to aspirational values of student success and equity in education.

Connect your organization's mission to your new initiative.

Include a direct quote from a beneficiary about the new initiative's impact.

Include a direct quote from an organizational representative talking about the future of the work and next steps.

If possible, offer audiences some way to get involved or support the work.

METHODOLOGY

How were the messages in this manual developed?

The messages in this manual were developed by Hattaway Communications, informed by conversations with the Hewlett education team, feedback from current and former grantees, and research with key stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and civil rights and social justice leaders, as outlined below. You can find much of this research on [Hewlett's website here](#).

- A survey of 41 current Hewlett grantees testing draft messages about deeper learning, fielded from January 8-24, 2018.
- An online discussion forum of teachers across the country, hosted from January 16-17, 2018.
- 10 in-depth interviews with teacher participants from the online discussion forum, held from February 5-8, 2018.
- A roundtable convening civil rights and social justice leaders to discuss equity in education, held on March 1, 2018.
- 26 in-depth interviews with additional civil rights and social justice leaders held from April 4 to May 24, 2018.
- In-person feedback with the Hewlett team on July 2, 2018.
- 8 in-depth interviews with grantees and civil rights and social justice organizations between September 25 and October 19, 2018.
- A survey of 750 parents and 750 teachers from across the country to test the updated message language, fielded between October 29 and December 7, 2018.

The messages are also informed by insights from cognitive and social psychology, best practices in marketing and strategic communications research, and lessons learned from previous research conducted by Hattaway Communications, which can be found here: www.americanaspirations.com



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