



# Join Us!

## A Message from the Authors



### About the Toolkit

The [Dignity in Schools Campaign \(DSC\)](#), [Partners for Each and Every Child](#), a project of the Opportunity Institute, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. developed this Toolkit to serve as a call to action and to empower parents, families, care-givers, students, and other community members with the information and tools they need to be actively involved in making decisions that impact their schools.

### The Road So Far

This Toolkit was created by and for families, students, organizers, school board members, teachers, and other school community members from across the United States, with input and resources from national and state-based advocates.

Starting in the summer of 2017, this Toolkit was imagined, written, edited, and published with support from over 200 community members who came from towns and cities across the United States to more than 20 calls, meetings, and events; wrote in feedback online; and called in with ideas and edits.

**We are so grateful to each student, parent, organizer, and community leader who gave us their time, wisdom, and power to make this resource a useful and empowering set of tools, reflective of the communities we hope that it will continue to serve in the years to come.**

### Who is the Toolkit For?

This set of tools is intended to support organizers — including families and students — as they work with their school communities to understand and engage around the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#).

### Why Now?

Our students need more from their schools:

- **Our public school children need more:** 51% of public school children in the U.S. are living in poverty, yet funding to support them is low.<sup>1</sup> In fact, high-poverty districts spend over 15% less per student than low-poverty districts do.<sup>2</sup>
- **Segregation in schools by race and class is increasing:** Latinx students — the largest minority group in the U.S. — are now the most segregated.<sup>3</sup>
- **Schools don't treat students equitably:** Black students are suspended and expelled more than three times more often than white students.<sup>4</sup>
- **Achievement gaps still exist:** In both math and reading, over 85% of white 12th graders receive higher test scores than the average black 12th grader.<sup>5</sup>
- **ESSA's requirements and funding can help us move forward:** Title I funding alone supports over 21 million students in more than 56,000 schools in the U.S.<sup>6</sup>

1. [Majority of U.S. public school students are in poverty](#) (Washington Post, 2015)  
2. [Good School, Rich School; Bad School, Poor School](#) (The Atlantic, 2016)  
3. [Report: School Segregation Is Back, 60 Years After "Brown"](#) (PBS, 2014)

4. [Achievement gap is our fault, not the kids'](#) (The Baltimore Sun, 2017)  
5. [Racial/Ethnic Enrollment in Public Schools](#) (NCES, 2017)  
6. [NCES Fast Facts: Title I](#)

## Why ESSA?

In 2015, Congress passed the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) — an update to the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) — that provides state governments with a vision of success for every student, especially those who need the most support. This new law provides several opportunities for states, districts, and schools to ensure that all students have access to the crucial resources they need to be successful. It also requires that families, students, and community members be a part of the process for improving and expanding opportunities for all students.

It is critical that we all play a key role in the decision-making process. Our communities are directly impacted by these decisions and are in the best position to determine what will work for our schools and students. ESSA offers us the opportunity to look at how we are serving students and what we can do to move toward greater equity and justice for our children — together.

## Who are the Authors?

**The Dignity in Schools Campaign** (DSC) is a coalition of over 100 grassroots and education advocacy organizations in 29 states. Since its inception in 2006, DSC members have worked to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by challenging the systemic problem of unfair school discipline policies that push students out of our nation's schools and by advocating for high-quality educational environments that keep students in school and learning.



Founded in 1940 by Thurgood Marshall, the **NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.** (LDF) is the nation's oldest civil rights law organization. For almost 80 years, LDF has relied on the Constitution and federal and state civil rights laws to pursue equality and justice for African-Americans and other people of color.



A project of the Opportunity Institute, **Partners for Each and Every Child** (Partners for) is a collaborative, nonpartisan network of education researchers, advocacy organizations, and policy experts who are committed to educational excellence for each and every child. Partners for works to advance sound educational policies that are responsive to the needs of at-risk, underserved, and politically underrepresented students.



**Together, we urge you to use the information  
in this resource to take a seat at the table and  
make your voice heard!**



Find more at [PartnersforEachandEveryChild.org/EngageforEdEquity](https://PartnersforEachandEveryChild.org/EngageforEdEquity)