

# Carnegie

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## RESULTS



## THE EDUCATION TRUST

### Changing the Education Conversation in America

The Education Trust is a nonprofit organization that promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels—pre-kindergarten through college. Its goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people—especially those from low-income families or who are black, Latino or Native American—to lives on the margins of the American mainstream. For more than 15 years, its researchers, analysts and advocates have worked to transform the country's schools and colleges into institutions that truly educate all students.

Like Carnegie Corporation, the Education Trust believes an excellent education improves the lives of young people, is vital to sustaining our democracy and strengthens America. The organization has identified long-standing gaps in achievement—between the United States and other nations, between students of color and white students, between students of different income levels and between similar students schooled in different systems—as a critical moral and economic challenge to our country. Although stubborn, long-standing gaps in opportunity, achievement and attainment have roots inside and outside of schools, these inequities are not inevitable. The Education Trust believes that schools and colleges, appropriately organized and staffed, can help virtually all students master the knowledge they need to succeed.

To accomplish its mission of closing gaps in opportunity and achievement, the Education Trust combines data analysis and research with hands-on work in schools and colleges to find workable, common-sense strategies for complex problems. Believing education policy to be dominated largely by the interests of adults, this organization is an assertive voice for the interests of students, especially those whose needs and potential are often overlooked.

“We single-mindedly focused on low income and kids of color, from pre-K to higher education,” says Kati Haycock, the organization’s founder and president. “We started out with a strategy, which was set during a meeting in the living room of my house: to make closing gaps a high national priority and become the go-to organization for that work. We laughed because no one else was focused on this at all.” What began as pie-in-the-sky, within seven years had become the explicit policy of the federal government, and every state was pressed to work on it, she says. “We are still unique among national organizations to have that focus, on that set of kids and to work with pre-K through college, and we are not about to detour.”

Carnegie Corporation has supported the Education Trust from the beginning. “Today, they are among the strongest, most trusted education advocates in the country,” says Michele Cahill, Carnegie Corporation vice president, National Program, and program director, Urban Education. “They’re looked to even by people who disagree with their policy recommendations. No one disputes their data.” The Corporation’s role has always been to support capacity building throughout the organization, Cahill notes. The Education Trust was one of the first organizations in the field to back up its advocacy with data analysis. Serious and accurate data is essential for the education debate, in both the macro sense—how states are faring on their yearly assessments, graduation rates and in comparison to each other—and in the micro sense—which schools are breaking

the mold by successfully educating low-income and minority students to higher standards.

Asked what motivated the organization to focus on closing education gaps, Haycock, a Californian who came east in 1989 to be the number-two person at the Children’s Defense Fund, says, “We thought about it: When states and communities set out to improve schools, one set of kids will always get left out. They’ll be last in line and least well served. Unless someone were to stand up and say these kids need to be a top priority, not an afterthought, it would continue.” Social mobility is not what we say it is, she claims. But the people who work at the Education Trust want the country to live up to promises made to the American people during the Civil Rights era.

Through the years the organization has identified and focused on a set of priority areas: high standards and high-quality assessments; improved accountability systems; turnaround strategies for the lowest performing schools; equitable access to education and to high-quality teachers and leaders; and high-quality instructional tools. The Corporation has helped the Education Trust establish a critical voice in the national debate on education reform by supporting the organization’s most significant activities:

- Working alongside educators, parents, students, policy-makers and civic and business leaders in communities across the country, providing practical assistance in their efforts to transform schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well.
- Analyzing local, state and national data and using this learning to help build broader understanding of achievement and opportunity gaps and the actions necessary to close them.
- Participating in national and state policy debates, bringing lessons learned from on-the-ground work and from data analyses to build the case for policies that will help all students and schools reach high levels of achievement.

## Putting Data to Work

Data is at the heart of Education Trust’s work. “For us, data is a way to cut through people’s perceptions and get to the truth faster,” Haycock says. “People have ideas in their heads, but until they actually see the data it’s not real. Data gets people to focus on the problem. It’s our strategy.” The organization does lots of analyses of big data sets, she says, because these aren’t minor gaps with minor consequences. They’re big. “We also know in order to act on these problems people need to hope, and to feel like if they act things will get better. So we follow up with examples of states, schools and colleges getting better results than others. Having the data behind you

gives everyone confidence that we're not just repeating myths about schools. It forces us to be painfully honest about where we are." As Haycock likes to quote, "Without data I'm just another guy with an opinion."

"We are known as the data people," says Education Trust's vice president of communications, Amy Wilkins. "But I've worked in Washington most of my adult life and can tell you, we don't do as much data as some folks. The difference is, we use our data to tell stories that stick in people's head. Rather than dump data we fit it into a narrative." Wilkins says what makes the organization effective is that "we manage to be honest brokers. Our recommendations really do grow from what the data say," she stresses. "Consequently we're neither reliably Democrat nor Republican and no one can predict where we'll come out on any given issue. In the past we made Ted Kennedy as crazy as we made George Bush. We're about closing the gaps, period, and when we say something is good, people believe us. Our endorsement on policy is really coveted, even though the Education Trust is not very self-promoting. We think the work should speak for itself. When I first came here it was just scrappy little Ed Trust. Although we've grown, we try to maintain that identity."

Being pioneers in the field does bring risks. For Education Trust, some early analysis based on first-year data was not sufficiently rigorous, according to a few experts. But early support from Carnegie Corporation helped the organization bring more first-rate analysts on board, which led to building the reputation for excellence it enjoys today. "The Education Trust is nationally known for putting out reports that are really usable for policymakers," says Cahill. "Their people are smart and passionate and they comment on policy and funding decisions with a compelling vision of where the country should be headed."

By not requiring specific "deliverables," the Corporation's flexible support for the Education Trust has freed the organization to take advantage of new opportunities as they arose and to act on its own ideas as well. For example, when Race to the Top took shape as part of the 2008 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), Education Trust's equity-focused analyses quickly responded to this unprecedented federal program. At the same time, the organization conducted a series of in-depth analyses on the state and local level in preparation for the eventual reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. In this case, its aim has been to advocate for a new law that takes into account what was learned from the current law (No Child Left Behind, or NCLB) and that adheres to the mission of raising achievement, closing gaps and making sure all students graduate college- and career-ready.

A key outcome of the No Child Left Behind Act of

2001 was the assessment and data gathering the Act mandated and the resulting analysis it made possible. The Education Trust saw this new information as a potentially powerful tool for creating and sustaining more effective schools and, with support from Carnegie Corporation, it undertook a series of ambitious projects to provide educators and civic leaders nationwide with access to national, state and local data and data analysis as well as assistance with interpreting and using data for planning. The organization's goal was to enable education reform leaders to examine the achievement gap, see how it can be overcome in certain circumstances and consider critical policies and practices that could lead to change. It launched a web site to build understanding of data on teacher quality, middle school and high school reform, student achievement and U.S. and international comparisons. The site also featured a community data guide to allow local users to see how the performance of their schools and districts stacked up against national and state trends.

## Putting the Gap on the Map

With the availability of assessment and data gathering and analysis mandated under NCLB, tools became available for creating and sustaining more effective schools and closing persistent gaps. But to reduce those achievement gaps and go from isolated examples of excellence to effective schools for all students, the public needed to accept that all children, regardless of socioeconomic status, can learn at high levels. Many educators and community leaders still believed that external factors, especially poverty, were root causes of poor achievement. But the Education Trust contended that it was a case of problems being caused by poverty and compounded by low-level curricula, poorly prepared teachers and large, anonymous schools.

"When I first came here in 1995 the goal was simply to put the gap on the map," Amy Wilkins recalls. "Today it's hard to realize that back in the middle 90s you didn't talk about the gap because it was perceived as immutable—just the way things were." Wilkins believes it's important that the Education Trust searched out and highlighted where the gap is actually closing, proving there's been more progress than anyone expected. "This is what's changing the way people think about the potential that poor people and people of color have," she says. "Digging into the data and bringing these schools up to the surface changed those old assumptions."

The Education Trust did not underestimate the effort needed for progress. It stressed that accelerating the pace of reform required state, district, school, union and community leaders to focus relentlessly on the factors that matter most for student achievement: high expectations, teacher quality,

effective pedagogy, rich and rigorous curriculum, and ongoing assessment. Knowing that easily usable data is a powerful tool in shaping public opinion, the organization posted performance and accountability data on its Web site, set up an interactive database of school districts that had achieved success with low-income and minority students and expanded its work on teacher quality and funding inequities. The organization worked for bolder, smarter, more effective reforms, providing strong evidence that across the country, young people living in poverty could succeed academically. It successfully demonstrated that data could be used to shift public opinion about reform to beliefs based on fresh evidence rather than outdated word of mouth.

## Low-Performing High Schools

By 2006, the push for standards, accountability and continuous improvement that had taken root in elementary and middle schools had reached American high schools. At that time, among the 29 countries participating in the most recent international assessment of 15-year-olds, U.S. high school students ranked 20th in reading, 19th in science and 24th in math. Even the top 5 percent of U.S. students were ranked below the international average for top students and, more distressingly, Latino and African American students, who comprise more than one-third of youth in the United States, demonstrated math skills approximating those of the average white eighth-grader.

Efforts to address this crisis grew steadily, with Ed Trust and other Carnegie Corporation grantees taking leading roles. Yet despite the obvious need for reform, the work suffered from an absence of public agreement on several key factors: what the core progress indicators should be and how they should be measured; how to interpret analyses of data on the distribution of high school opportunities and student achievement; how to use readily available data tools to help educators and community members understand the performance of their own schools.

The Corporation again provided support for the Education Trust because program staff considered the organization uniquely positioned to move the high school reform agenda forward at that critical time, with education among the chief concerns in the upcoming presidential campaign and the issue about to be hotly debated as officials decided on the substance of NCLB. The outcome of those debates was expected to determine whether the country would take the steps necessary to improve public schools, including raising standards, making data central to decision-making and incorporating strict accountability measures for all schools and all grades.

More than a decade of advocacy had secured the Education Trust's reputation as a dependable bipartisan source of information and student data among educators, policymakers, media and the public. At the same time, the organization was seen as a relentless critic of the barriers that keep American schools from equitably serving all students. While working with schools and districts to close achievement gaps, it also acted in close cooperation with other national nonprofits concerned with high school policy, such as the Alliance for Excellent Education, which focuses on raising standards and improving policies to increase high school graduation and college readiness especially by low-income students.

Other partners included Achieve, Inc. and the Fordham Foundation. They were funded not only by Carnegie Corporation, but by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Walters Johnson Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and the Lumina Foundation for Education, among others.

The Education Trust was well positioned to launch an initiative that aimed at providing the current and emerging high school reform movement with a solid core of data analyses and tools to assist in preparing all American students for college, work and citizenship. The organization had acquired access to a treasure trove of information on high school students—from demographic data to standardized test results to AP and SAT scores—which, when analyzed, could contribute significantly to a better understanding of patterns and trends regarding both opportunities to learn and student performance.

This information could help shape the work of practitioners and policymakers, especially with ample media focus on the reform agenda—which the Education Trust secured through a range of strategies including trend reports and presentations emphasizing the importance of the work, sharing of inspiring stories about schools and districts that were beating the odds, plus lessons for policy and practice that can be derived from these examples. Staff members talked with journalists, who called on their data and perspectives on a near-daily basis; regularly testified before Congress and were invited to work with elected officials to help strategize about accountability and education reform.

The Education Trust provided additional publicly accessible, web-based tools that allowed anyone with Internet access to search for schools by demographic and performance criteria. The organization developed a comprehensive plan to disseminate its work through the mainstream media, professional and trade publications, and directly to the policymakers, activists and education insiders. This ambitious and multifaceted, multiyear project went a long way toward demonstrating what works and what doesn't when it comes to raising achievement and closing gaps.

## Help for Higher Ed

The Education Trust's gap-closing work doesn't stop with high school. The key to economic mobility in the United States of America is higher education. Over the course of their working lives, college graduates are likely to earn \$1 million more than high school graduates, with the earnings gap growing even wider for those with advanced degrees. And America's ability to compete in the global economy depends on increasing the country's percentage of college graduates. Yet even though higher education institutions have opened their doors to more students, too few college freshmen graduate from a four-year university within six years. The numbers are worse for students traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

"We have the same mission of promoting academic achievement from pre-K *through* college," says José L. Cruz, vice president for Higher Education Policy and Practice at the Education Trust. "What we are striving to do within that overarching mission is to focus not only on access, but also ensuring the transition from year 12 to 13 is what it needs to be for the kids we care about, and that the institutions are organized to provide the supports." Cruz came to Ed Trust a year and a half ago when the organization decided higher education was a big enough issue to merit its own division. The former VP for student affairs of the University of Puerto Rico System, Cruz now oversees higher education policy and practice, which includes the Access to Success (A2S) Initiative—a consortium of 22 public higher education systems through 20 states, covering 312 campuses with a total of 3.5 million students. As he explains, the CEOs of all 22 systems have committed not only to the number of degree completions for their states, but also to cut their gaps in half for low-income and minority students by 2015. "These 22 systems are committed to being held accountable to those goals by collecting data and making it public, and by providing support," Cruz explains, "and they need to learn from one another in order to be able to reach those goals."

The Education Trust has worked with campuses and systems on delivery, helping them establish goals and put the strategies and monitoring in place to ensure they're on a trajectory to meet those goals. Typically, an institution's goals for 2015 may not even be addressed until 2013 or 2014, leaving insufficient time to make necessary changes Cruz says. But Ed Trust makes sure they provide timely support for progress, and when schools know that there are public reports they will try harder.

"Another strand is helping them look at data a little differently," he says. "We're not just looking at retention and graduation; by then it's too late. Instead we look at leading

indicators." Leading indicators are data on a set of proven factors that provide early signals of how well a student is progressing toward degree completion.

The use of leading indicator data provides a viable alternative. "For example, if a student has not completed two credit bearing math courses, the likelihood of graduation is next to none," he says. "So, why aren't we tracking how many students aren't reaching that milestone? Some haven't registered, others need academic advising, or more courses. Tracking indicators in real time allows us to identify specific students who have specific needs at specific times. Providing what they need can move the needle." A front-line faculty and campus staff can use leading indicator analysis to focus limited resources on interventions that work. According to Cruz, there's been a lot of good work on some campuses, but it's time to double down. "If we are really going to cut gaps in half, we need to provide more direct support to campuses."

Tuition is also a major concern Ed Trust is working on. The cost of attending college has more than doubled in the last three decades. Over the same time period, for the poorest families, income only rose by 3 percent. Today, the cost of attending a public four-year college represents more than half of the annual median income for the nation's poorest families, even after accounting for financial aid. For America's wealthiest families, the proportion of family income necessary to send a child to college is less than 10 percent. Such staggering increases in college prices threaten the ability of students—particularly those from low-income families—to gain access to higher education.

Public colleges and universities are dealing with big roadblocks, both political and fiscal. Many face significant budget pressures around state allocations with implications for expanding access. Institutions have had to cut back on support and increase tuition. While increases in the maximum award amount of federal Pell Grants can help low-income students, unfortunately, the maximum Pell Grant today covers only about one-third of the cost of attending a public four-year college; 30 years ago it covered three-quarters of the cost.

At the same time there's an alarming shift toward merit aid that keeps scarce financial aid dollars from getting to low-income students. "It's partly about rankings," says Cruz. "Colleges want to attract more academically elite students, and one way to do that is to provide grants to students even if they don't need it. This brings in a student who will help boost the ranking, and who will contribute more to the cost of attendance than a lower income student can." This is a misalignment Ed Trust tries to surface and, hopefully, to influence so policymakers will take a different direction.

Cruz explains that because public institutions have faced significant budget cuts, they now have fewer seats—a

fact that creates a market niche for-profit schools have entered aggressively. Many of these institutions spend huge amounts of money on predatory recruiting of lower-income students who supplement their Pell grants with risky private loans to foot the tuition bill. “It’s a sad state of affairs that’s definitely getting worse,” according to Cruz. “It will take a lot of political will to get better. There is a glimmer of hope, and we see some state attorneys general looking closely at fraud and abuse in the for-profit sector.”

The Education Trust believes colleges and universities can do better, and has helped them get the message—more students, lower cost, maintain quality, preserve equity—without lowering standards. “What we’ve found is that the way to close the gap is by being more careful about student learning,” Cruz says. “It’s really equity and quantity through quality.” Why is it that some schools are getting results and others are not? “In top performers it’s not about the programs, it’s the practitioners,” he says. “It’s not about bold reform; the way you transform is by harnessing the power of small incremental reforms, just 1 percent, and through the magic of compound interest it can benefit every student in your cohort.”

To help students and families compare graduation rates at institutions across the country and see which schools best help students complete their degrees, the Education Trust created the free interactive web tool College Results Online ([www.collegeresults.org](http://www.collegeresults.org)). The site draws on the nation’s most comprehensive database of college graduation rates, so users can select from thousands of traditional public and private four-year colleges and universities as well as hundreds of private, for-profit ones, compare a school’s graduation rate with that of similar institutions serving similar groups of students and check out graduation rates by students’ race, ethnicity and gender.

## The New Normal

National education policy has been changing rapidly since the 2009 Race to the Top grant competition catalyzed widespread state-level system reforms. Now, with universal state adoption of the Common Core Standards on the horizon, the daunting challenges of implementation have pushed policymakers to consider bolder innovation in human capital and technology-enabled school designs. Key reform policies will be reshaped in the near future, but the effects of varying policy options on low-income students and students of color are hard to predict. Meanwhile, states and districts are facing dramatic budget pressures and grappling with “the new normal” of demand for higher levels of performance for all students, with fewer resources. In a time of such great

opportunity and great risk, it’s important that strong, independent institutions advance the fact base on which policy decisions are made and practice priorities developed.

“There are a couple of major ways that the Education Trust aligns with Carnegie Corporation goals,” says Leah Hamilton, program director, Urban Education. “They help with the will-building struggle that gets in the way of reform when decision-makers don’t have insight into how education practices map to the policy world. We can’t all be experts in the nuances of policy and how it might affect students; we need repositories of expertise to inform what we should be doing. They’re a voice for equity, and they help people focus on what the priorities for change should be. A lot of policy voices are out there,” Hamilton says, “and the Education Trust really is a trusted source.”

“There’s more to our work than policy,” Haycock adds. “It’s also about changing education practice.” Our folks have worked since the very beginning in communities such as El Paso, Texas and Pueblo, Colorado. We worked with teachers there to design a protocol still in use today with the move to Common Core Standards. We’ve done a fair amount with teacher quality issues and distribution of teachers. The tendency is to give the best teachers to the most affluent kids, but we’re working to change that.”

“We like to talk about the next thing rather than what we’ve done,” says Kati Haycock. Still, she points to a combination of accomplishments, such as policy victories dating back to 1994 with reform of Title 1, an effort to stop the defunding of high poverty schools when they succeed and to give schools permission to stop using dollars in ineffective ways. “We also got provisions in the Higher Education Act in 1998 holding institutions responsible for producing teachers that could pass licensing exams, which are state administered. And in 2002 our folks were very deeply engaged in crafting of NCLB—not wholly responsible for it, certainly, but a very strong, small group of people plus Bush, Kennedy and Miller got it passed.”

The Education Trust is behind many changes in the way data is viewed in the field. “Analytical techniques we pioneered are now used by many states and the federal government,” says Haycock. “Before, no one looked at gaps and patterns. Now they do everything we used to do and we can do new analyses. Ours was the only web-based tool available for folks to compare results among schools that serve similar students. Now there’s also benchmarking for colleges to improve student results.” Haycock points out one other thing, possibly the most important of all: The Education Trust got people to recognize disparities and bust the myth that schools can’t produce astonishingly good results for very poor kids. “When we started, no one else did it,” she says. “They didn’t celebrate great results. Outstanding

schools never got patted on the back. Now many states have picked up the idea—Minnesota just did it. LA started a couple of years ago. And it makes us feel good to see somebody saying thank you and holding great work up.”

The Education Trust’s record also reflects a steady focus on the country’s most urgent education challenges, where its research and reporting have contributed to advancing the agenda. It has shown a capacity to help fashion real solutions to next-generation problems, while continuing to influence public opinion through relationships with educators, journalists and activists around the country. Some highlights include:

**American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA):**

The Education Trust built an equity-focused coalition to craft detailed comments to the proposed regulations for the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, the Race to the Top competition and the School Improvement Grants program.

**Race to the Top (RTTT) application support:**

It published *Gauging the Gaps: A Deeper Look at School Achievement*, to generate understanding of how to interpret state achievement gap data.

**School improvement grant policy:**

It produced *Stuck Schools: A Framework for Identifying Schools Where Students Need Change*, which revealed, through data, how a certain percentage of schools remain in the bottom performance quartile despite efforts at transformation. The “stuck schools framework” became one way states understood the performance of the schools in the state portfolio.

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

**reauthorization:** It developed a set of policy priority areas essential for advancing equity and high achievement for all students, and continues to develop detailed policy briefs and data models on each priority to inform the field.

**Common Core Standards:**

It produced, for the National Association of System Heads annual meeting, *Opportunities (and Perils) for Systems Moving Toward Common Core Standards*, a white paper on higher education’s involvement in the Common Core Standards.

## A Marathon Not a Sprint

The stakes couldn’t be any higher for delivering on the agenda in the coming years. Much is at play—from standards and assessments, to accountability, turnaround and teacher quality and equity. Lack of attention to equity could halt the progress Carnegie Corporation and its grantees have worked toward for so long, leaving low-income students and students of color ill-prepared for the workplace and a society of ever-increasing complexity. Kati Haycock stresses that things are much better now, but there’s still a long way to

go and it’s not helpful to believe the myth that gaps always have, and always will, exist.

“There’s no doubt that the biggest single obstacle we face is our failure to believe that poor and minority kids can achieve at high levels,” she says. “The inability to imagine these kids as high performers creates the worst roadblocks, and it’s true among educators as well as parents. Nobody’s willing to say, yes there are these problems and challenges brought to school. But instead of minimizing them we give these kids less of everything. It’s not a uniquely American problem, but it seems more intense here. The U.S. is the only developed country in the world that consistently underfunds high-poverty schools.”

Looking ahead, equity focused data and policy analyses will continue to be needed to inform key policy decisions. The work ahead will include accountability systems—how will policymakers set achievable goals to increase achievement and narrow persistent gaps? If schools don’t meet their goals, what then? And how must systems change when states move to new standards and assessments that align with college and workplace demands? Turnaround strategies are essential for the lowest performing schools. Data analysis can show what kinds of supports and interventions are required to achieve these goals and help determine what happens if, even after receiving support, poor schools don’t get better. Finally, the issues of teacher evaluation and equity pose substantial technical challenges. Not only do the systems themselves need to be improved, it’s just as vital to make better use of the information these systems generate to improve the quality of the teaching force and ensure equitable access to effective teachers for all.

As long as these strategies are needed, Ed Trust will be doing the work and working the data. “We’re unique in that there’s been no mission creep,” Amy Wilkins says. “Closing gaps is our goal and we see all new or potential work through that filter. We’re known for singleness of purpose and it’s why we’re effective. We know we’re running a marathon, not a sprint.”

Wilkins sees the greatest danger as something “bigger than education. It is a serious flaw in our social fabric that we treat so many things like commodities, including education. If you’re an education consumer, you get yours and you don’t really care if anyone else gets theirs. Universal public education once meant we all took responsibility for educating each other’s kids. But it’s turned into every family for itself; if my kid is ok that’s enough. The gap is a product of that attitude. In truth, our fate is deeply tied to the fate of other people—although they may not be our color, speak our language or have our kind of money. People are having a hard time feeling bonds of community across those lines,

CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK  
437 Madison Avenue  
New York, New York 10022

Phone: (212) 371-3200  
Fax: (212) 754-4073  
Web site: [www.carnegie.org](http://www.carnegie.org)

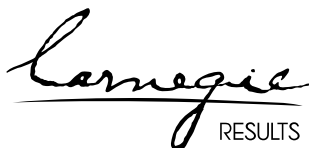
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but it's more important than ever that we learn how to do it."

Kati Haycock is hopeful. "Many educators believe as we do and are working as hard as we are and producing great results. There are no more gaps or even negative gaps in a lot of places. When people put their minds to it this is something they can do. All it takes is quality—maybe something more to catch up, but good honest instruction and decent supports. It's not mysterious. We could get it done in a decade!"

*To find out more about the Education Trust visit [www.EdTrust.org](http://www.EdTrust.org)*

*Written by: Karen Theroux. Theroux is an editor/writer in the Corporation's Public Affairs department with many years' experience in educational publishing and communications.*



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