

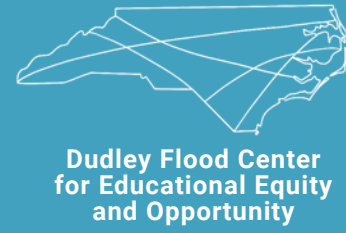
**Dudley Flood Center for
Educational Equity and
Opportunity**

THE PUBLIC SCHOOL FORUM OF NORTH CAROLINA

Creating Opportunities and Access for Every Student in North Carolina

March 2025

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MARCH 2025

CURRENT CONTEXT

On November 5, 2024, millions gathered in front of their TV screens, monitored their phones, and refreshed web pages, eagerly awaiting the announcement of the next president of the United States. Many were anxious about what this decision would mean for their reproductive and civil rights, the education of their children, and the safety of their families and loved ones. They [pondered](#) what the nation would look like if equity, access, and opportunity were realities for everyone or if we would return to a time when the American dream was out of reach for so many hardworking citizens.

As they waited, some recalled the events of 2020 when the murder of George Floyd ignited a movement to address the pervasive issues of discrimination and racism. Institutions across the country began implementing policies and practices aimed at advancing equity. They wondered whether the country would continue on this path or if the commitments made under Project 2025 would undo the hard-won progress achieved by leaders like [Ruth Bader Ginsburg](#), [Thurgood Marshall](#), [Martin Luther King Jr.](#), [Shirley Chisholm](#), [Dr. Dudley E. Flood](#), and countless others who dedicated their lives to fighting discrimination.

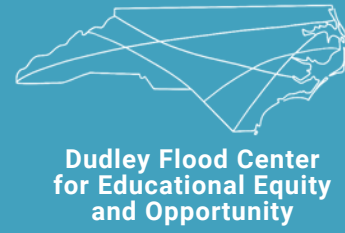
Since the days following the inauguration, many have realized that the work to carry on the legacy of the many civil rights activists is more urgent than some had believed.

EDUCATION: HISTORICAL CONNECTION AND FOUNDATION

Education is often referred to as the "great equalizer," providing a pathway for individuals to achieve successful outcomes in life, especially for those with access to quality education. It is not surprising that student's access to a quality education has been at the center of numerous landmark court cases. One notable case, [Brown v. Board of Education in 1954](#), determined that segregated education was inherently unequal and prevented Black Americans from obtaining equitable access to resources and opportunities. This landmark ruling, along with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, established a foundation for progress in tackling inequities and discrimination in education. Despite the progress we have made, data continues to reveal that students of different backgrounds and identities encounter significant obstacles in accessing qualified educators, engaging with rigorous and culturally responsive coursework, and achieving post-secondary success. Research indicates that these students also experience greater challenges, including disparities in disciplinary actions and over-representation in special education programs.



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MARCH 2025

As we continue to grapple with why, more than 70 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, certain student populations remain systematically marginalized, recent executive orders intend to reverse the significant progress we have made toward educational equity. As we face an uncertain future in education, we must create a path forward that aims to equip and empower every student to succeed.

LOOMING CHALLENGES AND PROACTIVE STEPS

Across the nation, we are now witnessing a wave of rhetoric that has created an atmosphere of uncertainty. Based on the threat of losing federal funding, many institutions are questioning how they can continue to serve their students, families, and communities through equitable practices. However, this is not the first time the country has seen tactics used to stall the forward movement of civil rights in our country. The strategy of conflating “race-neutral ideas” as “states’ rights or local control,” named the “Southern Strategy,” has been used to create a national partisan majority. Fortunately, North Carolina has several resources that provide a foundation for a better path forward, including but not limited to:

- [The West Ed Report](#)
- [The DRIVE Coalition](#)
- [The State Board of Education Equity Resolution](#)
- [The North Carolina Teaching Standards](#)

Each resource gives us a blueprint outlining what we need to support and protect every student in North Carolina.



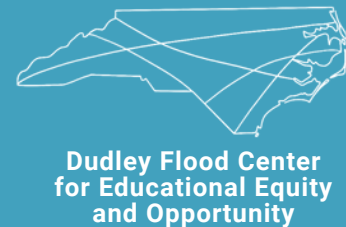
Creating Opportunities and Access for Every Student in North Carolina

MARCH 2025

Current Landscape	Impact	Counter Narrative and Strategy
<p>On January 20, 2025, an executive order prompted the Office of Management and Budget to issue a Memo creating a “Temporary Pause of Agency Grant, Loan, and Other Financial Assistance Programs.” This pause impacts several federal assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the National School Lunch Program.</p>	<p>Restricts access to food assistance.</p> <p>According to research from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 86% of all Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits go to households that include a child, elderly person, or person with disabilities – and ~92% of all SNAP benefits go to families with income at or below the federal poverty line. More children and families will experience hunger without access to these programs, resulting in adverse academic and health outcomes for students.</p>	<p>Advocate to the Department of Education together with organizations such as School Meals for All. This will help ensure that every student has access and opportunity to participate in the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs, which provides access to breakfast and lunch at school.</p> <p>One in five children goes hungry in NC daily, and one in three in rural counties. Schools are often the only source of food for children experiencing hunger. Studies show that offering students healthy meals at school makes them more attentive and engaged in the classroom, leading to better grades, higher attendance rates, and higher graduation rates. Schools offering no-cost breakfast and lunch are likelier to have high-performance grades and meet growth targets.</p>



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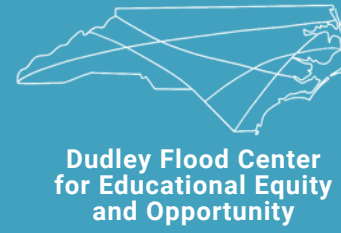


MARCH 2025

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<p>In addition to restricting access to food assistance programs, the freezing of federal funds all but eliminates Head Start, a federal early education program that serves some of the most vulnerable children, including those who are homeless, in foster care, or from low-income households.</p> <p>Furthering the devastating impact of the possible loss of the Head Start program, the Executive Order “Expanding Educational Freedom and Opportunity for Families” promotes more “choice” for families and makes funding available for private and faith-based options. As seen with public schools, when funding is taken away from public options, those most vulnerable suffer the consequences.</p>	<p>Eliminates the Head Start program</p> <p>Head Start is a critical program that helps over one million children nationwide become ready for school by providing them with mental, emotional, and social support programming. This program offers targeted assistance to low-income children as an essential method of bridging inequities and ensuring that all children receive a solid foundation as they embark on their educational journey.</p> <p>Eliminating this program will leave more children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds unprepared for school, ultimately widening the economic wealth gap.</p>	<p>Advocating to the North Carolina General Assembly or with non-profit organizations like NC Child or National Black Child Institute (NBCI) for more access to quality ECE programs, especially for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds:</p> <p>North Carolina must first prioritize children from high-poverty families and communities. Children living in poverty have the least access to high quality early childhood education, preventing them from being as well prepared for K–12 schooling as their peers. As research indicates, without high-quality early learning, children from high-poverty families and communities will begin school at a deficit that is very difficult to overcome.</p>



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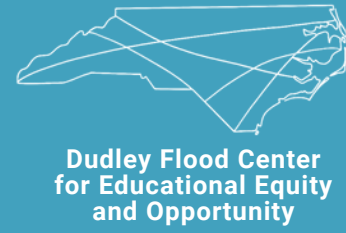


MARCH 2025

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<p>Most recently, the “Dear Colleague Letter” was released, urging schools and universities to end “pervasive and repugnant race-based preferences and other forms of racial discrimination have emanated throughout every facet of academia.” This comes on the heels of the Supreme Court decision reversing the affirmative action decision and furthers the narrative that systemic and structural racism is a false premise despite years of education research and data.</p> <p>This mandate would also restrict access to inclusive, accurate, and quality instruction under the premise of teaching content on our country’s imperfect history, such as the slave trade, which “stigmatizes students who belong to particular racial groups based on crude racial stereotypes.”</p> <p>As we have seen through school data, equitable access to education resources and opportunities is essential to ensuring that social constructions do not hinder positive student life outcomes.</p>	<p><u>Emboldens racial discrimination in everything, including education</u></p> <p>The Civil Rights Division of the DOJ determines disparate impact as, "does the adverse effect of the policy or practice fall disproportionately on a race, color, or national origin group?"</p> <p><u>Eliminating the disparate impact theory of liability will hamstring the federal government's ability to fulfill its legal obligations to protect students from all forms of discrimination, including in-school discipline.</u></p> <p>In response to this letter and years of “culture wars” around the use of Critical Race Theory in schools, Many states have passed laws that ban or restrict what students can learn about history. This inherently intends to silence dissent and punish those who speak the truth to counter whitewashed falsehoods.</p>	<p>Advocating to the North Carolina State Superintendent and State Board of Education to extend the priorities set in the NC State Board of Education's "A Resolution To Support Equity And Excellence In North Carolina Public Education."</p> <p>The resolution aims to support equity and excellence in North Carolina's public education system with the goals "to eliminate opportunity gaps by 2025, improve school and district performance by 2025, and increase educator preparedness to meet the needs of every student by 2025. Each school will need to leverage data to understand where these gaps are and how to address them.</p> <p>In North Carolina, teachers are required to follow the <u>NC Teaching Standards. Specifically, Standard 2</u> focuses on establishing a respectful environment for a diverse population of students. This standard emphasizes that educators must foster positive, nurturing relationships between each child and caring adults. Teachers are encouraged to create an inviting, respectful, supportive, inclusive, and flexible environment. This approach is essential for ensuring that every student receives quality coursework that honors diversity, equity, and inclusion.</p>



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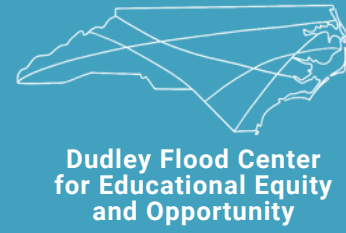


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<p>In addition to the “Dear Colleague letter”, we are also witnessing action to eliminate the Department of Education and an Executive Order that calls for eliminating gender self-identification. This is based on the premise that “efforts to eradicate the biological reality of [gender] fundamentally attack women by depriving them of their dignity, safety, and well-being.”</p>	<p>Makes it easier for LGBTQ+ students to experience discrimination in schools</p> <p>As we have seen throughout history, those who identify our side of the normative genders are vulnerable to mental health disorders, such as depression and physical safety concerns. According to the Youth Behavior Risk Survey, in 2023, 19% of high school students were bullied on school property during the past Year, with student who identify as LGBTQ+ more likely than cisgender and heterosexual students to be bullied at school, experience mental health issue, and contemplate suicide. Not having the proper protections and mandates for those who identify as LGBTQ+ will result in a lack of safety for students.</p>	<p>Advocating the North Carolina General Assembly and Federal Department of Education for the protection and safety of LGBTQ+ students in every school.</p> <p>Collecting data that accurately reflects diverse gender identities and sexual orientations is essential for protecting the civil rights of LGBTQ+ students. Under the Biden administration, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) had mandated that all charter schools improve the accuracy of their student demographic data collection</p>



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<p>Schools and families are also facing the damaging effects of Executive Order: PROTECTING THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AGAINST INVASION. This EO depicts immigrant families as “significant threats to national security and public safety, committing vile and heinous acts against innocent Americans.” This order essentially rolls back all protections from previous administrations, including birthright citizenship.</p>	<p>Results in the unlawful removal of Immigrant families and students from sanctuary cities and schools</p> <p>Because of this narrative, ICE raids have begun to take place across the nation in schools and safe havens. These are legitimate concerns for immigrant families who could face increased abuse and trauma as a result. Due to increased fear, many families will keep their students from school to avoid possible detainment. This will restrict their access academic attainment, appropriate health care, etc.</p>	<p>Follow organization such as LatinxEducation and advocate to the Local School Board Members for current North Carolina legal guidance for schools.</p> <p>Currently, in North, legal guidance to school districts says that ICE officers must be denied access to students or student records unless they have a court order or warrant. Schools should also prepare themselves to support students and families to know their rights and have a plan in place if a parent or guardian is detained.</p>

