

brightbeam™

A large, stylized number '20' is centered in the background. It is composed of numerous horizontal lines of varying lengths, with a color gradient from green at the top to blue at the bottom. The background features a dark blue-to-purple gradient and a pink grid pattern that recedes into the distance.

ANNUAL REPORT

A Message From

Principal Stewart

To the education champions class of 2022, congratulations on a great (and challenging) year!

As we all begin to put our 2023 plans into action, let us take a moment to reflect on what we've done.

In this yearbook, we'll share highlights from the brightbeam team and many of our allies working on behalf of children, and you'll get to know our staff better through our yearbook photos. But most importantly, we'll share select insights we've gleaned from our work in the field.

These insights would not have been possible if we hadn't shut down our organization for three weeks last spring to step back and make hard choices about how we align our staff and resources to support our education partners. Some may see that as risky. We saw it as necessary. We are stewards of an investment made in us that comes with an expectation that our work improves life outcomes for children. I said it before and I'll say it again: I believe all of us working in public benefit organizations should hold ourselves accountable for results.

As Jeb Bush often says, "reform is never complete; success is never final." If we're not regularly evolving our work and our strategies, we're at risk of getting complacent. We're not ashamed of the fact that we're constantly going through changes here at brightbeam. In fact, we're proud of it. We devise our plans and test them out in the real world. Then we learn from them, make revisions, and try again.

So let's have a totally awesome 2023, and in the immortal words of Bill and Ted, "be excellent to each other," and "party on, dudes!"



Chris Stewart



TABLE OF CONTENTS

**A Message from
Principal Stewart**

Brightbeam Event Highlights

**2022 Lillian Lowery Data
Champion Award**

**An Ed Reform Who's Who
22 in '22**

Say Hello to the Class of 2022

Brightbeam Event Highlights

Hard Won Insights

Partner Event Highlights

Thank You

HIGHLIGHTS



The Great Pause of 2022!

In late winter and early spring of 2022 we shut down our organization so we could align staff and resources to support our partners. We brought our staff together to analyze our work, test our assumptions and establish a path forward. One outcome we're proud of: a completely redesigned ed post news site. We're still fine-tuning, but we're in a better spot going into 2023 than we were at this time in 2022.

Magic City Acceptance Academy

In May, we dispatched staff to Birmingham, Alabama for the graduation ceremony at Magic City Acceptance Academy — the South's first charter school dedicated to affirming LGBTQ+ students. The school had recently come under attack by a popular gubernatorial candidate who hurled claims of "exploitation" of children in a political ad. The school hired security guards to keep students safe from strangers who showed up at the school filming students and shouting bible verses at them. ICYMI — Here's the [article](#) and [the story carousel](#) on Instagram.



Atlanta All-Staff

Brightbeam staff came together in October for an in-person, all-staff meeting for the first time since the pandemic. We used the time to develop our process and have some fun together!

HIGHLIGHTS

Grasstops, meet Grassroots!

We launched our Seeking Common Ground report in March. We based it on a series of digital town hall meetings in which we brought grassroots leaders and “grasstops” national leaders together to discuss a better path forward to help parents, teachers, leaders and communities know how kids are doing. So grateful to participants like Alicia Dixon (Marcus Foster Education Institute), Christine Sampson-Clark (NEA), Dan Weisberg (formerly TNTP), Paige Kowalski (Data Quality Campaign) and many others who made it possible. ([Check out the report](#)).



Across Colors Podcast

This past fall, we launched an eye-opening podcast, [Across Colors](#), that took listeners on a journey across the country to meet parents who are stepping up — not just for their own children, but for all the children in their communities. Tanzina Vega, a New York City mom who also happens to be one of the nation’s foremost journalists exploring inequality, hosted the show.

Math for All

In April, we kicked off our Math For All campaign. It aims to change the way parents, teachers, students and school leaders think about math education (Hint: [everyone's a math person](#)). In the initial phase of this campaign, our goal was to shine a light on issues around math identity, math curriculum, equity in math instruction, and making math relevant to the lives of students. Along the way, we bumped into this young man who let us snap a pic of his inspirational shirt: “Be Greater Than Average.”



HIGHLIGHTS



Restoring Common Cause in D.C.

During August and September, brightbeam led 10 Restoring Common Cause events across four cities. We brought youth, education leaders, community activists, media influencers and others together from different racial and political backgrounds to break bread with us and discuss potential shared values and opportunities for common cause in public education. This was our D.C. group.

Tennessee's Reading Comeback

Our piece in August highlighting Tennessee's progress coming out of the pandemic, [The Surprising State Where Kids Are Making a Reading Comeback](#), generated a flurry of conversations. Karen Vaitea, a science of reading influencer on Twitter, gave our piece a [shoutout](#) for talking about the importance of quality curriculum, a group called Standards Work [amplified the piece](#) through their networks, and we got this helpful bit of feedback from a mom on Facebook:

"Was just reading about learning to read (as my son enters pre-K and has started to do a lot of pre-reading on his own (asking about letter sounds, identifying initial consonants, etc.) and I have wanted to support good habits that encourage word decoding (rather than accidentally promoting a strategy that will prove challenging once he is in school). I was surprised to find we have such strong data on what works but somehow continue to struggle as a country teaching kids to read. This article helps me better understand why that is. Great work."



2022 Lillian Lowery Data Champion Award

CALIFORNIA WINS!



Governor Newsom, working with a representative coalition of state and grassroots leaders, developed a new Cradle-to-Career Data System for California that embodies Ms. Lowery's spirit of using data to achieve systemic equity for children on the margins. Capturing longitudinal data from preschool through college and into the workforce will help policymakers, researchers, nonprofit leaders and, importantly, educators and families, better understand how children are developing over time and the impact of policies and practices on their lives.

Historically, California's state education data system was rife with incomplete data and difficult to use with little transparency and limited access. But over the last few years, state and grassroots leaders brought the new system to life. Their asset-based approach is one Ms. Lowery herself spoke to in a 2020 interview with Penny Bauder.

"Those closest to students, teachers, school leaders and communities — ALL communities — need to clearly understand how policy shapes all that they do each day and how we support our children."

While California's story is unique, the roadmap is replicable. [The P20W+ website](#), created by WestEd, is an exciting opportunity to accelerate the spread of comprehensive longitudinal data systems across the country. Check out the Data Quality Campaign's [case study](#) for more information.

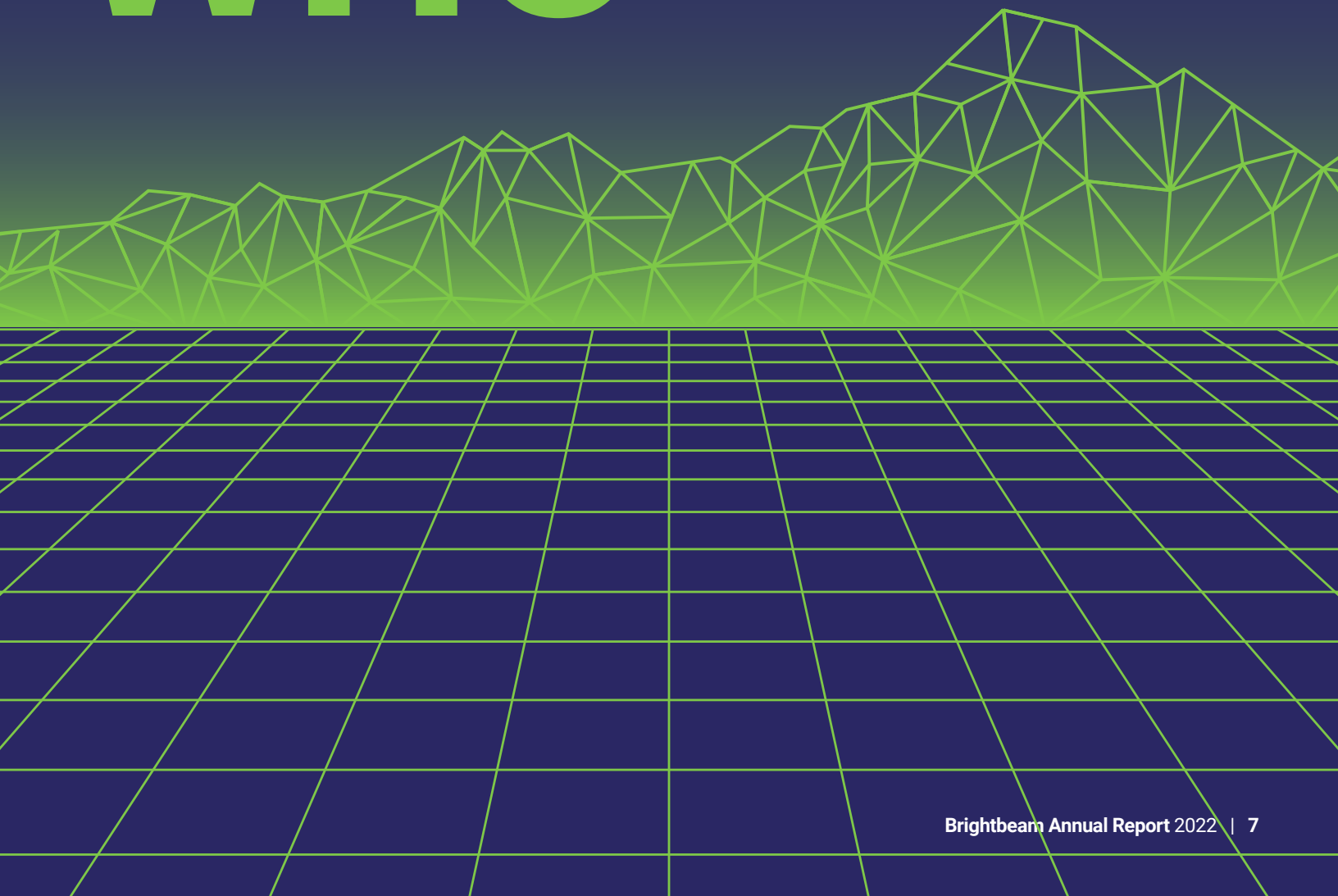
Brightbeam congratulates California on its intrepid journey to use data to fight for kids. We look forward to seeing the seeds planted through this innovative data system bloom and spread to other states and systems across the country.

About the Award

The Lillian Lowery Data Champion Award recognizes individuals or organizations that exemplify her spirit of using data to fight for children to receive a better education. Lillian Lowery is a former brightbeam board member who passed away in April 2022. She was a champion for the use of data to improve outcomes for kids. We're honoring her this year by recognizing other data champions working to improve educational opportunities for children.

An Ed Reform

WHO'S WHO



An Ed Reform Who's Who

22 | N '22

Which two organizations have paired up in 2022 and really shined together?

Randi Weingarten and Jonah Edelman teamed up to write [this piece](#).

In April, two people who might usually be at odds with each other based on their positions as leaders in education reform and the second-largest teacher's union, came together to resist the forces undermining democracy and our public education system. They co-authored a piece in TIME magazine calling for Americans to stand up against the lies and hatred threatening our public schools, and we're here for it.

Most likely to modernize how teachers organize themselves for power

Evan Stone
Educators for Excellence

Most likely to be seen smiling among friends at every education conference

Derrell Bradford
50can

Most likely to suffer the challenges of bringing people together across lines of difference

Patricia Levesque
ExcelinEd

Most likely to make a boring education topic interesting for more people

Kwame Sarfo-Mensah

Most likely to bring hard evidence to any claim about learning

Linda Darling-Hammond
Learning Policy Institute

Biggest data geek capable of seeing the future

The entire Murmuration Team

Seems like every move Murmuration makes is based on data. We were particularly impressed with their [Gen Z report](#).

Most likely to help local leaders buy into a successful youth strategy

Center for the Study of Social Policy

Most likely to bring the heat to candidates running for office... again and again

Sarah Carpenter
Memphis Lift

The parent whisperers

Ed Navigator

Check out this [parent guide](#) they created in August 2022.



An Ed Reform Who's Who

22 | N '22



Most likely to have glowing halos in their closet

Barbara Semedo

Deputy Executive Director
CLASP

CLASP is all about helping children out of poverty and tending to their welfare. They do this work with limited public investment and support from policymakers. They must be angels.

Most likely to be writing his next book right now

Andy Smarick

Most likely to leave education research for late night comedy

Morgan Polikoff

USC Rossier

Most likely to keep equity in education advocacy, and also to judge your mother's fruit salad ambrosia and find it wanting

Denise Forte

CEO of Ed Trust

Biggest practical jokester and biggest email cc'er in ed reform

Mike Petrilli

The Thomas B. Fordham
Institute

Mostly likely to get everyone in the room fired up

Dr. Cokethea Hill

Blaque KC

Most likely to solve the crisis in preparing math teachers

National Council on Teacher Quality

NCTQ examined more than 1,100 teacher prep programs and produced a killer report on elementary math. If anyone understands the state of how teachers are trained to teach math and suggest a better way, it's them.

Most likely to carry parent voices from the streets to the White House

Keri Rodriguez

National Parents Union

Most likely to BE HEARD at a school board meeting (despite trembling knees)

Taylor Lyons

Moms for Social Justice

Most likely to lead an army of parents to the steps of a capitol building

Kim Dukes

Atlanta Thrive

As a mother of ten children, Kim found a way to connect with parents in compelling ways. In 2020 she knocked on more than 10,000 doors for the election that year, and has turned out hundreds of parents for multiple events.

Most Likely to educate a community with or without schools

Lakisha Young

Oakland REACH

Most likely to secure a bright start for every kid

Constance Gully

Parents as Teachers

Say Hello to the

CLASS OF '22



Antonio Parés
Senior Partner, Strategy



Channell Johnson
Social Media Manager



Chris Stewart
Chief Executive Officer



Donnell Green
Partner, Finance & Operations



Ikhlas Saleem
Partner, Digital



Josh Stewart
Digital Media Manager



Khiah Reddick
Operations Associate



Kristi Schreifels
Executive Assistant



Lane Wright
Chief of Staff



Lesley Guggenheim
Chief Operating Officer



Lisa Hollenbach
Senior Digital Manager



Mark Lowery
Managing Editor/Senior Writer



Maureen Kelleher
Partner, Editorial



HIGHLIGHTS

Science of Reading

Brightbeam's piece on Illinois resonated deeply with readers. The post, [Science of Literacy and Dual Language Advocates Can Work Together, But It's Harder Than You Think](#), moved several in our audience to take action: Parents shared it in Facebook groups and with state and local education leaders. Teachers shared it with faculty and professors shared it with their peers.



Jane Crow: Then and Now

In November, we launched our [Jane Crow: Then and Now](#) multimedia project in which we gathered an insightful group of historians, journalists, teachers and moms to share their stories and reflective essays on a sensitive topic: How white women — as mothers and teachers — have historically used their position to perpetuate systems of oppression, and how that history remains alive and active today.

This project also celebrates the white women who bucked the system and worked to provide a just education to Black and Brown young people.

HIGHLIGHTS



Understanding Audiences in Minneapolis

Over the summer we worked with partners in Minneapolis like Great Minnesota Schools to set up individual interviews and group discussions with more than 100 education stakeholders in Minneapolis, including families from a variety of racial and ethnic demographics, education advocates, and practitioners and local leaders. Through our analysis, we uncovered a lot of challenges and gave GMS recommendations on how to start tackling them including a comprehensive campaign framework.

Looking Back on Accountability

Last spring, brightbeam partnered with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation to help them gain some qualitative perspectives on education accountability reforms like No Child Left Behind and Race To The Top. We talked to parents, teachers, advocates and other leaders who experienced those policies in different ways over the last 20 years or so, and found that even some of the fiercest critics admit that it's better to have imperfect data than none at all.



Hard Won

INSIGHTS





STAY RELEVANT

“The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people.”

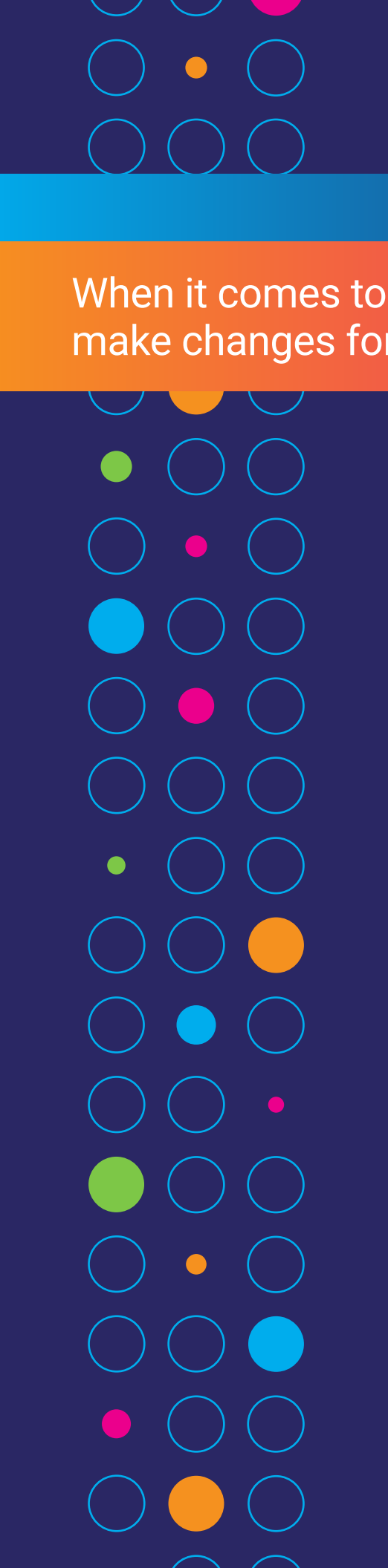
A Nation at Risk, 1983



At brightbeam, part of our work involves helping national and grassroots clients solve their education-related communication challenges. Through that work, we surface insights into how different audiences want to participate in the democracy of public education.

We learned a lot in 2022 — much of it about how to refine our own practice and solve problems for our clients — but we’re also learning lessons that we believe will have an impact on education advocacy for the next 20 to 30 years. In the aftermath of a pandemic that robbed American students of their opportunity to learn and grow, we know the dangers of failing to take action on the policies and practices most likely to produce healthy children.

The big takeaway over the last year is that education advocacy in our field is losing relevance for two reasons: Our message is dated, muddled and depressing, and we’re allowing the sensible middle to be silenced by the extremes.



Messages in Disarray

When it comes to communicating with those in power to make changes for kids, we're mostly getting it wrong.

Education advocates who are genuinely working to improve the academic well-being of children are smart people. So smart, in fact, that they can adroitly detail and debate all of the problems we've caused within our education systems as we've pushed to make things better. There's nothing wrong with a little humility; it's important to acknowledge mistakes. But when we focus so much of our attention on those mistakes, fight with each other about all the messy stuff, and undermine the very partners we need in our armada to change the realities for students, we lose.

Our message is being nuanced into oblivion.

This wasn't a hypothesis we devised and then set out to prove with evidence. It emerged out of the amalgamation of dozens of in-depth conversations with hundreds of people across the country: Education leaders (inside and outside of the traditional system), teachers, young people fresh out of high school, community organizations, activists, non-profit leaders, business leaders, policy wonks and parents, old-school education reformers and educators who pre-date No Child Left Behind, and people of varying races, genders and political persuasions.

We did a lot of listening. And through the noise we found a signal: Our messages need to be simpler, forward-looking, and unifying.

During an event we organized in Dallas, one community leader said, "the ed universe is its own echo chamber; you're talking to yourselves. That doesn't win."

For our project with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Kati Hayock, founder and retired CEO of The Education Trust, highlighted No Child Left Behind's implementation as an example of how education advocates struggle to unify and inspire.

"Before implementation even began," she said, "the unions and administrators associations got out in front to characterize it as this horrible effort. All hammer, all stick, no carrot...there was nothing that was effectively messaged to either educators or parents on the positives of all this. So, stories started popping up of children who were crying because the tests were too hard, educators who were cheating, and educators who were just focusing on kids right under the bubble."



During a dinner in D.C., a group of seasoned communications professionals warmly debated what we should be saying, what we shouldn't, and how effective any given message might be. Within a span of about 10 minutes they contended on a range of issues, including "New Yorkifying" everyone's school system (i.e., treating all schools like they have the same problems as big cities like New York and L.A.), charter schools being for all, eliminating the inequities of school boundaries, concerns about home values, appealing to parents' natural desires to get the best for their kids, and finally to Critical Race Theory. It was a wild ride that all started with a question about what a unifying message might be. The more we talked, the more obvious it became: Right now, there isn't one.

Reformers talk about accountability, curriculum, equity, guns in school, leadership, racism, school choice, teacher quality and on and on. These are all important issues that certainly need attention, but to be effective, any issues we promote must fit into a clear and compelling mental structure that is meaningful to those who need to hear them. Over the past year, we've worked with public engagement experts to learn all we can about framing so that we can create the fresh frames education advocacy can use to increase public understanding of our issues.

The Shrinking Sensible Middle



Our opponents on the extreme ends of our political system — those who want to wind back the clock or at least maintain the status quo — don't have a messaging problem. Their frames are clear and powerful.

Both sides are effectively saying "save our schools." The only difference is "from what?" For unions, it's, "save our schools from any threats to school funding, teacher jobs, working conditions, etc." For the right, it's, "save our schools (or more precisely, save our kids) from harmful leftist ideologies."

Regardless of the realities, their uncomplicated messages resonate with audiences that don't live and breathe education policy the way our advocates do. Without grounding, the public forms incomplete or inaccurate opinions and then looks for anything that validates those opinions regardless of what data tells them.

This "save our schools" frame is effective because it evokes a mental structure of a beloved and vital institution — one that nurtures our children — coming under attack in any number of ways.

The frame is so powerful that it has united factions on the far left and the far right to the same protectionist cause: Leave us alone; stay out of our schools. They may have different reasons, but they both want to see things like testing and accountability take a back seat, if not disappear entirely. A few short years ago, we saw the same kind of bilateral unity with Common Core.



As in our broader political context, the extreme voices on the left and right are now dominating the conversation in education. The sensible middle is going unheard. They've left the room. While it's crucial to consider these indicators of where we are, we also need to be mindful of what's coming.

Mind the (Generation) Gap

The TikTok generation is just beginning to step into their roles as civic influencers.

They're already teachers in schools and Gen-Z is credited with blunting the red wave in the last election. At 70 million strong, they'll be the largest block of voters in America by 2028. They're also the most ethnically and racially diverse generation. They're more fluid in their thinking, more politically independent and the first generation to grow up entirely in the digital age.

A report from Murmuration observed that social media is not a tool for them; it's part of their identity. Murmuration's report predicts "Gen-Z will change everything."

Based on the data, and on conversations we've had with Zoomers in 2022, we can begin to illuminate a roadmap for approaching our work:

- > The fights against diversity, inclusivity and personal freedom "to be" are going to lose. Pluralism and intersectionality are the future.
- > The future is collaborative, communal and democratic. Competition and winners/losers frames are a turn-off.
- > There is no such thing as a union-free future. Plan accordingly.
- > There will never be a one-best-system to serve all students. Gen-Z believes in public education — they also believe in options.

For them, mental health, climate change, systemic racism and income inequality are not "those other issues." As the nation's future voters, teachers and citizens, Gen Z sees these issues as intersectional. Education advocacy that siloes itself away from the most important issues to the largest, most diverse generation in American history will perish.



Revive Reason and Simplify

We need to bring back and support the voices in the sensible middle. We must stop catering to the polarizing debates and start elevating voices of reason. And we must learn how to speak to the rising generation.



One community leader during a breakfast meeting in Dallas said, “I’m very uncertain if education reform is going to survive. We’ve grown (as an industry) fat, and overconfident. We’re starting to fight with each other as if we think we’ve beaten our opposition.”

We need to resist and overpower the extreme voices in education who are steering us toward greater division and worsening outcomes for the children most in need of better opportunities.

The way to do that is with a clear and compelling frame for all of the messages that will drive better outcomes and opportunities for children. It should be simple and tap into an existing mental structure that’s meaningful to the parents, teachers and education leaders at every level.

People unite behind inspiring goals and a sense of purpose — not nuance and self-flagellation. Our frame and the messages within it need to speak to ideals like opportunities for children, freedom and human dignity. We need to convey a vision of children thriving.

The details of how communities will draw closer to these ideals should be hammered out by the communities themselves, respecting those circumstances and people that make communities unique.

We don’t claim to have all the answers (we haven’t gone back to the future). But through our experiences over the past year, we have developed a clearer sense of the guiding principles that will make us more effective: Create simple, unifying messages that fit into a compelling mental framework.

So let’s tighten our paisley headbands and neon scrunchies, brush the dust off our oversized shoulder pads, and go to work like it’s 1984.

Partner Event

HIGHLIGHTS

ExcelinEd National Summit

The ExcelinEd conference is always inspiring and enlightening, and November 2022's event was no different. Visitors from 47 states met in Salt Lake City to learn more about how states are pushing for better reading instruction, demanding better options for parents, and challenging traditional ideas around math standards. Jeb Bush said he loves the summit because it's not about political rhetoric or ideology, "it's about plans to fix things."



Education Writers Association National Summit

The EWA held its national seminar in July celebrating 75 years of training, networking and inspiration for education writers. Maureen Kelleher attended the event and said the highlight was NYT's Erika Green interviewing the West Philadelphia teacher who inspired "Abbott Elementary." Maureen's daughter, Antonia, scored a selfie with Ms. Green.



Power to the Parents

The National Parents Union has been building a coalition with other New York organizations and getting parents and students ready for the NY legislative sessions in January. NPU's New York director, Ashara Baker, has also been hosting conversations about the role of school board members.



HIGHLIGHTS



Smart Spending

FutureEd helped education policymakers navigate key challenges in the wake of the pandemic in 2022. Their analyses of Covid-relief spending plans in 5,000 school districts — educating 75 percent of the nation's students — provided leaders with a comprehensive picture of local priorities for spending an unprecedented \$190 billion in federal relief funding.

EdTrust Bootcamp

If you want to kick butt in the fight against educational injustice, you've got to train. The Education Trust boot camp in Memphis last October brought together civil rights advocates, educators, parents, students and community leaders for learning and action to advance education equity.



Road Trip!

Over the summer, EdChoice went on tour to New Orleans and Washington, D.C. to get some perspective. They brought together Black education advocacy leaders from across the country (including our own Chris Stewart) to discuss the educational challenges and opportunities facing Black communities today. Oh, and they made a documentary and a guide if you want to host a screening in your community! [Check it out, dude!](#)



Partner Event

HIGHLIGHTS

Pahara Institute

Pahara Institute had a great year, building their Pahara Fellows to nearly 900 leaders strong and growing!



Great Schools

In 2022, Great Schools partnered with The College Board and added new data on www.greatschools.org that can help inform parents' decision-making. Parents across the country can now see AP course lists on school profiles, giving them more insight than ever into rigorous offerings that can support their children.



National Charter Collaborative

After a long and laborious process with the Biden administration and grassroots advocates, the National Charter Collaborative got the U.S. Department of Education to prioritize policies that will help aspiring school leaders of color create and expand charter schools that ensure student achievement and support community needs. You can check out [their statement here!](#)



THANKS, PUPES...

Every achievement highlighted throughout this report was built upon a foundation of generosity from brightbeam's community of supporters. Their support helped us shine a light on the stories of incredible students, parents and educators. Through our campaigns on critical issues like science of reading, safe and culturally affirming schools, math for all, and more, we launched numerous podcasts, newsletters and reports, hosted convenings across the country to restore a democratic spirit of cooperation and common cause in the fight to ensure all children are thriving, and invested in new partnerships in cities across the country.

We're entering 2023 financially healthy thanks to everyone who made our mission possible, and we're hopeful about scaling our work to do even more good. With over 255,000 actions already taken in pursuit of our ambitious 2025 goal of supporting 1 million Americans to use their personal influence to speak up for children's rights to excellent education, brightbeam is seeing the power of our network grow and spread across the country. We're building digital communities who are engaged and taking action. The road before us is bright, and we're excited to continue building our base of partners and supporters to meet the opportunities ahead.

With brightbeam's support, 10 million Americans will be actively engaged in brightbeam's Campaign for Child Thriving by 2030.

We couldn't be more grateful.

2022 Financial Supporters of Brightbeam

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Carnegie Corporation
of New York

Chan Zuckerberg Initiative DAF

Charles & Lynn Schusterman
Family Foundation

Charter School Growth Fund

Ciresi Walburn Foundation

City Fund

Diverse Charter School Coalition

Great MN Schools

New Jersey Children's Foundation

San Joaquin A+

U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Foundation

Walton Family Foundation

Keep in
touch!!

See you
next year!

Not yet a supporter?

Become an institutional donor or take individual action to help children thrive by contributing \$50, \$200, \$1,000 or more to brightbeam. Your donation will help us achieve our goal of securing a brighter future for every child.

DONATE NOW