¡MASBAilemos!
Celebrating 50 Years of Closing Gaps

The Proceedings of
the Twenty-second Annual Conference of
the Mexican American School Boards Association

With a Foreword by
Jacinto Ramos, Jr.

Edited by
Dr. Jayme Mathias

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Foreword

MASBA President Jacinto Ramos, Jr.

This should *not* be just another book on your shelf.

MASBA, the Mexican American School Boards Association, is unapologetic in its advocacy for the *Latinx* students who comprise the majority in Texas and for the English Language Learners who are now 20% of our public schools. Our unapologetic spirit is evident in the pages of this book, which draws together the proceedings of our annual MASBA conference on February 20-23, 2020 at the Wyndham San Antonio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas.

Less than three weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic turned our world upside-down and temporarily shuttered our Texas public schools—creating an opportunity for MASBA to show real leadership during dark, uncertain times—nearly 400 superintendents, school board members and champions of public education gathered to speak about the issues affecting our students and their families, our districts and their employees, and our local school boards. This was no ordinary conference. It was our celebration of MASBA's 50th anniversary, and we were excited to welcome home many of the giants on whose shoulders we stand—the presidents who guided MASBA's growth throughout the years! While MASBA has always highlighted the special contributions of *Latinx* school board members, we decided at this conference to press certain issues and bring to the attention of attendees the many challenges faced by our *Latinx* students as well as by the teachers, administrators and school board members who serve them.

Under the leadership of my predecessor, Willie Tenorio, Jr. of the Hays Consolidated Independent School District, we planned and executed a conference that included the voices of young leaders, like Carlos Ojeda, Jr. and Roy Juárez, Jr., who inspired us with their stories, as well as with seasoned activists, like Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch and Dr. José Ángel Gutiérrez, who helped us to more clearly see the challenges to which we're called as educational leaders. Our breakout sessions explored a number of issues pertinent to our community, and I felt both humbled and privileged to lead two

of those conversation: on evolving trends in *Latinx* leadership and on the lies that have been propagated about Mexican Americans.

Rather than file this book on your shelf or allow it to get lost on your desk or in your closet, take a moment *now* to flip through the table of contents and see which chapters might be of interest to you. Dog-ear those pages or place your business card as a marker, so that you can open this book again to those pages. Place this book in a spot where you can easily grab it should you find a moment to read. As Dr. José Ángel Gutiérrez so plainly stated at our conference: "We can't have ignorant school board members approving ignorant teachers to teach our kids to be ignorant!" We are educational leaders, and we lead by example. We need to educate ourselves, particularly on those issues impacting our community, so that we can make a greater difference on the dais. This book, if left unread, will do no good and make no difference!

In the introduction to one of his breakout sessions, Trustee Alfonso V. Velarde of the El Paso ISD, a member of our MASBA Board, talked about his "claim to fame" as a school board member. What will be *your* "claim to fame"? After your school board service, what will you look back on with particular pride and satisfaction? What will people remember *you* for? What will be *your* legacy as an educational leader?

The students of our Texas public schools are counting on us not to merely fill a seat on the dais or a position in district administration and to bide our time. We are elected, appointed or hired to help them and to truly make a difference in our districts!

As we say in Spanish, *la unión hace la fuerza*. Unity creates strength. I invite you—I challenge you—to take advantage of the wisdom in this book and to join our growing *familia* of fierce advocates who lock hands, walk in solidarity, and stand up for the *Latinx* students and English Language Learners of our Texas public schools!

Así derechito,

Jacinto "Cinto" Ramos, Jr.
President, Fort Worth ISD Board of Trustees
Chair, Council of Urban Boards of Education
President, Mexican American School Boards Association

Acknowledgements

MASBA Executive Director Dr. Jayme Mathias

First, the great news: MASBA, the Mexican American School Boards Association, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2020!

Now, the less-than-good news: We're really *not* sure that MASBA turned 50 in 2020.

It's complicated.

Because a brief online history of MASBA by Teresa Paloma Acosta suggests that MASBA was formed in 1970, we began making plans in 2019 to celebrate MASBA's golden jubilee in 2020. As the conference neared and we completed a 350-page work on MASBA's history, though, we possessed no evidence that MASBA was indeed celebrating 50 years of closing gaps in our Texas public schools. Needless to say, the conference design presumed that the online history was correct, we celebrated our golden jubilee, and now we'll prepare to celebrate MASBA's *real* 50th anniversary in 2023, when we mark a half-century since MASBA's incorporation on December 6, 1973!

This golden jubilee conference was a tremendous event, made possible through the generosity of many people. As I'm fond of saying, "Teamwork makes the dream work!"

Please allow me to thank those who made this conference possible.

We thank all who joined us for this event. This conference occurred only weeks before the weekslong shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. One week before our event, the first COVID case in Texas was diagnosed at a military base in San Antonio. We were nervous and we took precautions, but we also trusted that the coronavirus had not yet spread through the state as it would three weeks later. To all who journeyed to the Wyndham San Antonio Riverwalk, we hope that you were inspired by this event and that you returned as real changemakers to your districts!

We so greatly appreciate the many sponsors who support our mission of closing gaps in our Texas public schools. Many were able to join us for this event, and we always love seeing the many friends who are part of our MASBA *familia*!

We express our gratitude to all our keynote speakers, to the MASBA Past Presidents who joined us, and to the many persons who hosted, facilitated and presented breakout sessions.

We thank our event planner, Yeraldín Yordi. This was the third annual conference that Yeraldín executed for MASBA, and we are grateful. It's difficult to appreciate the 330+ tasks on her list as she raced behind the scenes to make everything appear seamless and effortless to attendees! We also thank Salwa Yordi Echtay and the various volunteers who assisted Yeraldín.

Luis Armando Ordaz Gutiérrez of *Proyecto Teatro* oversaw the truly tremendous staging and decoration efforts, while Héctor Ordaz and our friends at PSAV assisted with all technical aspects of the conference.

We thank our conference D.J., Vincent Tovar of Team MASBA, as well as the many groups that performed for us, including our longtime friends from *Mariachi Campanas de América*, the Southside High School Jazz Ensemble of Southside ISD, the Medio Creek Elementary School *Baile Folklórico* of Southwest ISD, the McArthur High School *Baile Folklórico* of North East ISD, and *Mariachi Nuevo Cascabel* of San Marcos High School in the San Marcos CISD. Southwest ISD also generously provided a student STEM exhibit and had student journalists interviewing conference attendees.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a bite out of the events industry, but, now that vaccines are being more widely distributed, we'll look forward to the possibility of hosting you for MASBA's next annual conference, a celebration of Mexican American Studies and the fifth anniversary of UIL *mariachi*, on September 9-12, 2021, back at the Wyndham San Antonio Riverwalk. *¡Únanse a nosotros!* Join us!

Adelante marchemos unidos,

Dr. Jayme Mathias
MASBA Executive Director

¡A ver qué se puede aprender!
MASBA Tour of Best Practices

February 20, 2020

For the third year, MASBA hosted its annual Tour of Best Practices. Superintendents, school board members and friends of MASBA joined us for a tour of three districts.

Our tour departed from the Wyndham San Antonio Riverwalk at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, February 20, 2020, and returned at 3:30 p.m. We thank Southwest ISD for generously providing our transportation and a delicious *fajita* lunch.

We first visited **Edgewood ISD**, the home district of Dr. José Cárdenas who co-founded MASBA fifty years ago. There we witnessed how the **Burleson Center for Innovation and Education** is equipping determined students with the necessary skills to contribute to our society. Within the school, students operate a coffee shop, thrift store, screen-printing shop and even a bicycle repair shop. We were impressed with their courage and their willingness to speak with such a large group of visitors!

We then traveled to the **Southwest ISD** where the students of the **Southwest High School Aviation Program** were learning about aerodynamics and testing homemade parachutes to safely deliver eggs to the cafeteria floor 20 feet below their classroom halls. We also visited the shop where students are building…an airplane! *Mariachi Los Dragones* serenaded us during a delicious lunch at the Eagle's Nest, where he enjoyed a presentation on the district's bilingual programs.

We concluded our tour with a visit to **Southside ISD** where we learned about the **Southside High School Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program.** The students there participate in a variety of programs that assist them to be career-ready, including agricultural science, culinary arts, finance, forensic science, health science technologies, law enforcement and auto mechanics.

During our time on the bus, we built community, and we discussed what we witnessed at these sites. This "Tour of Best Practices" was a great learning experience for all who participated!

"Our Message for Tomorrow's Leaders: 'Your Voice Is Your Power!'"

Opening Keynote by Carlos Ojeda, Jr.

My name is Carlos Alberto Ojeda, Jr.—but you don't gotta worry about that. You can call me "Chu" because that's what my friends and family call me. I'm President and CEO of YouthSpeak. We're a youth engagement program. We do programs all across the country, working with students all the time. for

During our summer camp, which is when we get to work with students over an extended period of time, Atannual forI kick off the camp with an activity: I give each student an index card, and I ask them, "What do you think this program is going to be like?" Before they even hear us speak, they have a predetermined outlook on how our educational program will be. My favorite this year was: "I hope this program isn't lame as f"—whatever the "f" stands for!

For five days, we intensively work with these students on a college campus. We meticulously plan and create an amazing experience for them. And on the last day, I give them an index card, and I ask them, "What did this event mean to you?" These are their responses:

- "That even if we're young, we still have the power to make change." Ladies and gentlemen, that was a complete a sentence, with a period at the end!
- "It meant that I have a voice. Before, I didn't know I had a voice. But now I realize that I can do it."
- "It opened my eyes and helped me realize that I'm different and I'm meant to do bigger things than I realize."

These are the type of things we want our students to feel when they're in our education system. This is what we want them to shout at the top of their lungs! I know: You're saying, "You can just be cherry-picking the best of them"—but if I show you the actual evaluations, 90% of the students said the program changed their lives. Why? What's so different about this experience? We connect with these young people on a deep, personal level. It's about people like *you*, making a connection with *them*. I know this, because I would not

be standing here with you today had someone not made a connection with me.

It's about people like you, *making a connection with* them…. *I would not be standing here with you today had someone not made a connection with me.*

I grew up in Newark, New Jersey. I was a child of the 1970s, and I was the only five-year-old dressed like a pimp: with a three-piece suit and an Afro! I grew up in Newark, New Jersey, right across the river from New York City. From my crib, I could see the New York City skyline, but, growing up, I thought I was in Puerto Rico! Everyone in my neighborhood was Puerto Rican. They looked like me. They dressed like me. They talked like me. I never, ever, ever saw White people—except on TV and in the malls and movies. We'd say, "Look: White people! Take a picture!"

When you grow up, you only learn what your environment shows you. You only learn what your neighborhood teaches you. You can't be blamed for that as a young person. We can't blame our young people for the way they act, because their environment needs them to be that way. But life changes and you gotta change with it, and, when I was 10 years old, my life changed.

When I was 10 years old, I was riding my bike from my house to the corner, because *eso es lo que dijo* Mommy—that's what Mom said I could do. And I have one of those little, militant, Puerto Rican moms, that, if you don't do what she tells you to do, *ella te mata* [she'll kill you]. Don't laugh: She had a semiautomatic *chancla* [sandal]!

I rode my bike to the corner, and, when I got to the corner, there was a drug deal going down. One guy got angry at the other guy, pulled out a gun, and shot him in the head. I was 10 years old when I witnessed my first murder! I didn't even ride my bike back to the house; I dragged it with me as I ran! My mom knew that something was wrong.

One guy got angry at the other guy, pulled out a gun, and shot him in the head. I was 10 years old when I witnessed my first murder!

The cops came into the neighborhood and, as they got closer to my house, my father walked out. *Ahora, mi papa*: He's the total opposite of my mother. He's a tall, evil-looking, dark-skinned Puerto Rican. He came to me, and he said, "*Mira*

[Look], you didn't see *anything*!" I looked at him and said, "Okay." Then my mom came out, and she started yelling at my father—which was always funny when I was a kid, because my mom was so small. This time, she was crying. She looked at my father and said, "I love you, but I can't raise my kids in this craziness. *¿No viste?* Did you see what he just saw? I'm leaving, and I'm taking the kids with me—and there's nothing you can do to stop me!" In that moment, I thought that was the last time I was going to see my father—except my dad did something completely unexpected. He looked at me, and he looked at my mother, and he said, "Wherever you and my children go, I'm going." I was like, "Yo, *papi* loves us!"

They packed us up—everything we knew and loved—and took me from the only place I ever called home. They moved me from the New York City skyline, all the way to a place called Reading, Pennsylvania. There were horses and buggies in Reading, Pennsylvania. It was like the Amish mafia there! They spell their city R-e-a-d-i-n-g. What does that spell? That's right: They even pronounce the name of their city wrong!

It got worse: When they took me to school, the administrators theretook one look at how my mother was dressed, they took one listen to her heavy, thick accent, and they put me in bilingual ed. Back then, they put everyone who didn't speak English in a room together: It was me and a kid from Germany, and a kid from Korea, and a Jamaican kid—and I didn't know what that kid was doing in the class…because Jamaicans speak English! Sure, he had an accent. I asked him, "What are you doing here?" And he said, "I don't know, *mon*. They just told me, *yeah*." I've got news for you: When you put that many students in a room who don't speak English, we don't learn English—but we do learn how to curse each other out in other languages!

It got worse:
When my parents took me to school, the administrators there took one look at how my mother was dressed, they took one listen to her heavy, thick accent, and they put me in bilingual ed.

After a while, I knew I didn't belong there, so I went and I told my dad. *Ahora*, my dad, he's a Nigger Rican: He came from Puerto Rico, but grew up in the "Boogie Down Bronx," in New York City. He was

"street" from head to toe. He spoke mostly English, and barely any Spanish—which is the total opposite of my mother, who spoke mostly Spanish, and barely any English. Ladies and gentlemen, that is the secret to a long, successful marriage—because when they argued with each other, they never knew what they were saying! And I was always the one interpreting: My mom and dad would get into a heated argument, and my dad was like, "You're crazy!" And when he walked out, my mom would ask, "*¿Qué dijo?*" And I can never lie to my mom. I always told her the truth. So, I looked at her and said, "Mommy, he said you're beautiful—*como las estrellas en el cielo*, like the stars in the sky." And she said, "*Mentiroso*. You're a liar…but I love what you're saying!"

When I spoke to my mother, I spoke to her in Spanish. *Ésa es mi cultura*. That's my culture, and that's my language. But when I spoke to my father, I spoke to him in English, because that's my language, and that's my culture. You see, the beautiful thing about living in these United States is that I can pick and choose from the beautiful mosaic that composes it. I can pick and choose all the elements that connect with me, because no one gets to define me. *I* get to define me.

No one gets to define me.
I *get to define me.*

So, I went to my dad. He spoke English, and he's from the 'hood, so he spoke 'hood. So I rolled up, and I said, "*Papi*."

My dad was like, "What's up?"

I said, "Yo, man, they put me in bilingual!"

My dad was like, "For real?"

I said, "For real, for real."

He's like, "Yo, for real, for real, for real?"

I was like, "Yo, for real!"

That's effective parent-child communication!

My dad said, "*Mira*, we're going to school tomorrow, and we're going to fix this."

I said, "*Papi*, you're coming to school?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Why? I didn't do anything. I'm not in trouble."

He's like, "You're not in trouble; the *teachers* are."

I was like, "Word!"

Mira, the next day, I walked into school, looking at the teachers, like, "Y'all gonna get it! My dad's gonna punch *you*, and he's gonna punch *you*, and *you're* getting punched twice!"

My father went to them and said, "Excuse me. Why's my son in bilingual?" And they couldn't give him an answer. They put me there with no real reason. No one asked me if I could do the work. No one asked me if I could speak the language. No one asked me my hopes and dreams. That was irrelevant. They just labeled me and said, "*This* is who you are. *This* is what you're going to be!"

No one asked me
if I could do the work.
No one asked me
if I could speak the language.
No one asked me
my hopes and dreams.
That was irrelevant.
They just labeled me and said,
"This is who you are.
This is what you're going to be!"

They put me in a little box and told me how far I could go. But me, just like any child: I'm a wildflower. I'm not meant to live in a box. I'm meant to be free, to go as far as I want to and to reach as high as I need to. But you have to understand that, from the moment we're born, until we die, someone's always going to try to label us: "short," "tall," "fat," "skinny," "pretty," "ugly," "troubled," "gay," "straight," "confused," "illegal," "undocumented," "Arian," "Muslim," "Christian," "terrorist," "Red," "White," "Blue," "Black," "Brown." It's up to us to decide whether we'll live up to the labels people try to give us—or whether we rip those labels off and throw those labels away!

We cannot allow anyone
to tell our children
who they are
or who they will become.
Our children have
a destiny to fulfill!

We cannot allow *anyone* to tell our children who they are or who they will become. Our children have a destiny to fulfill! No one gets to define them. *They* will define themselves. Period. End of statement. No conversation.

My dad was my advocate. People said, "You should be ashamed of him: He cleans toilets for a living." In retrospect, I should have been ashamed of myself, because that man was a "lawyer": He stood his ground and walked into a room full of educated people, people he knew were technically smarter than him, but he knew that being uneducated is

different from being dumb. He knew his child deserved better, and he was my warrior. He was my advocate. Like MASBA has been for 50 years, that's what my father was for me: an advocate. He looked at them and said, "Is there a test you can give my son, to tell us where he belongs, because I know he doesn't belong here."

They gave me a test. I aced it. I spoke English and Spanish. I read in English and Spanish. I dream in English and Spanish—and even French now: "*Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?*" [Do you want to sleep with me tonight?] Yeah, I know that song: *Cochinos, ¿verdad?* [Pigs, right?]

The teachers apologized to my father and told him they'd put me in regular classes on Monday. We started to walk out, and, in that moment of joy, I was so happy. I was like, "Yo, we just punked those teachers, *¿verdad?* They were, like, scared of my dad! They didn't get away with anything!"

I couldn't even enjoy my moment of happiness, because out of nowhere, my dad slapped me in the back of the head—really, really hard. My eyes started to water, and I tried not to cry; I knew that, if I cried in front of my dad, he'd hit me again. But you know what happens when you're in the middle of crying and you try to stop crying: It gets worse. The more you try to stop, the worse it gets. I tried to talk: "*Papi…yo no…sé…por qué…*" I said, "Dad, why'd you hit me? *No hice nada*. [I didn't do anything.]" He said, "You let them put you in a corner, where you don't belong. You let them take your voice, the voice given to you from birth, that you can stand your ground, lay claim on your destiny, speak your mind, and speak for those who can't or won't speak for themselves." *Tu voz es tu poder*. Your voice is your power. With that voice, you can ask questions. Questions give you answers. Answers give you knowledge. And knowledge gives you power!"

Stand your ground, lay claim on your destiny, speak your mind, and speak for those who can't or won't speak for themselves.

My dad looked at me with all the love a father has for his son, but the damage was done: I believed the school didn't like me, so I didn't like the school. The school didn't believe in me, so why should I believe in them? By the time I was in the tenth grade, I got in trouble all the time. I had in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension,

detention: *cualquier* [whichever] "-ention," I was there! They wanted to put me in a special school…because I was "special." Some of my teachers tried to help me, but there were too few of them. Instead, I listened to the teachers who didn't like me, like my tenth-grade geometry teacher, who called me the greatest piece of garbage he'd ever seen in his life—and geometry was my favorite class!

I was told that I would never amount to anything. I had a teacher tell me that I would either die or drop out, but I would never, ever, ever hold a diploma in this hand—and I believed her, because when people tell you a lie enough times, you start to believe it's true.

I was told that I would never amount to anything. I had a teacher tell me that I would either die or drop out, but I would never, ever, ever hold a diploma in my hand—and I believed her.

For the next few years, I did barely enough to get by, until one day, in the twelfth grade, everything changed: This really, really beautiful girl walked by…and I fell in love! She went to the guidance office, so I went looking for some guidance! I walked in the guidance office, and there was a Puerto Rican college recruiter standing there. I didn't care about her; I wanted that girl's number! And I had my lines ready:

- "Mama, you look good."
- "Mama, if I could rearrange the alphabet, I'd make sure that U and I would be together forever."
- "*No te vayas. Mira, mira, mira* [No, don't go. Look, look, look]: On a scale of one to ten, you're a one, I'm a zero, and together we make a perfect ten!"
- "Wait girl, don't go. Just one more: Your daddy must have been a thief, because he stole all the stars in the sky, and he put them in your eyes!" When I do that joke in front of kids, the boys are like, "I gotta write that down. That's poetry!"

So I got that girl's number, and I was feeling really good, and I was about to walk out when a Puerto Rican lady, who was watching the whole thing, jumped right in front of me and said, "You're going to go to college!"

I very respectfully, very politely responded to her: "*Está loca*. [You're crazy]." And she wouldn't let me go. She kept telling me

college-this, college-that. She called my mom at home and spoke to her in Spanish. She called my father at work. I saw her everywhere. She was stalking me! I was like, "I gotta call the cops! What's the number for 911?" (Some of you got that joke; the rest of you will get it later. *Ahorita*, you'll be walking into the elevator, and you'll say, "*Mira*, that was funny!")

That counselor was crazy—and she was beautiful, inside and out. I had a crush on her, for the way she made me feel. No educator had talked to me the way she did. She told me that I *wasn't* garbage. She told me that *I* could go to college. She encouraged me to dream. She asked me questions that no educator had ever asked me: "What do you want to be when you grow up? What are you passionate about?" She invited me to visit a college: A free day out of school, an all-I-can-eat lunch buffet, and I get to be completely alone with this counselor? Darned straight, I'm getting on that bus! I went to my dad's room, got his cologne, and sprayed it all over me! I made a special mixtape of love songs for the trip—love songs from the 70s and 80s and 90s, because I wasn't sure how old she was and I wanted to cover all the bases! (I can't do that joke with kids: They're like, "What a cassette tape?")

We drove four hours into the middle of nowhere. I saw more trees than I've ever seen before in my life. I saw a rabbit. I saw chipmunks. I saw a deer. It was beautiful. We took a walk to the campus, and it was gorgeous. People were friendly. *Tenía un sentimiento*. I had a feeling, a profound feeling: *esperanza*, hope. I hadn't felt that before.

You have to understand: Where I come from, most of my friends are either dead, in jail, or worse. One of my best friends is on death row for double murder, because the streets will take you and twist you.

Here I was, on this college campus, and I didn't belong: It was a whole bunch of White students…and me. They took us into a room where they were going to start their presentation, and they sat all the kids up front. And me? I sat in the back, with my headphones on, listening to my music.

Here I was,
on this college campus,
and I didn't belong:
It was a whole bunch
of White students…
and me.

The Puerto Rican woman came in and realized that I was in the back. She saw me, and she smiled. And you know what my 15-year-

old brain was telling me when she smiled at me? "Yeah, she likes me!" Then she walked over to me, and you know what my 15-year-old brain told me as she was walking toward me? "Heck, yeah, she loves me!" She came up to me, and said, "Do you like what you see?" And you know what my 15-year-old brain said?

And she's like, "I'm talking about the university!"

"Oh, the university, Miss, is beautiful. I love it here."

She said, "Do you think you can go to school here?"

I said, "Definitely."

She's said, "You need to take the S-A-T."

What I didn't know then is that [taking out his hearing aid], I only have 5% of my hearing. I have to wear four hearing aids, and they're connected to my phone, so that I can hear. Without them, I can't hear a thing—which is great when your wife is yelling at you. (You're like, "Sorry, I'm having technical difficulties. You're going to have to come back later." Some of the men in the room are like, "That's a damned-good idea!")

It wasn't cool when I was a kid and everybody wanted to label me as a problem: a behavior problem, an attitude problem, this problem, that problem, every damned problem they could come up with, except for the one that I had: a hearing problem!

But it wasn't cool when I was a kid and everybody wanted to label me as a problem: a behavior problem, an attitude problem, this problem, that problem, every damned problem they could come up with, except for the one that I had: a hearing problem!

I went undiagnosed until I was 23 years old. At that time, I only had 47% of my hearing left. That meant that half of my life went unheard, half of my life went unresponded to, half of the "I love you's" that my mom said to me, I never heard. How did this happen? Simple. They labeled me "shy," and the label stuck. Does any part of me even look remotely shy to you?

But this is the way it goes: I stopped raising my hand in class. I felt stupid every time I made the teacher repeat herself over and over and over again. And I didn't want those looks, and I didn't want those glances, so I stopped raising my hand.

I stopped talking to my friends, because the joke isn't funny after the third or fourth time someone has to explain it to you. Pretty soon, my friends started making fun of me, because I couldn't keep up. So, I stopped talking to them.

And I stopped talking to my mom and dad, because when they would tell me to do something, and I honest-to-God didn't hear them, they would just assume that I was being lazy, that I didn't care, that I didn't appreciate them. How could I not appreciate the sacrifices my family made for me? The very fact that they would question that made me realize that they didn't understand me, so I stopped talking to them.

And soon I was completely alone.

I wanted to kill myself.

Last year, 1.3 million kids tried to take their lives—3,000 students a day! It's the number two killer of young people in America: not violence, not drugs, but self-inflicted violence!

And if you think things have gotten better over the years, you are mistaken: Last year, 1.3 million kids tried to take their lives—3,000 students a day! It's the number two killer of young people in America: not violence, not drugs, but self-inflicted violence!

I had to hold on to things. That's how I survived. I held on to the things that mattered—to the people that mattered—with dear life.

The thing that mattered to me was music. I grew up in the golden era of hip hop, with Biggie Smalls and Tupac. Every time I listened to the music, I could never hear the lyrics. They always sounded messed up. But I could always feel the beats.

I would listen again and again, even though I couldn't make out the lyrics. Kids have Google now: How many of you have googled the lyrics to songs where you don't know the words? (Those of you not raising your hands: You're the crazy people who sing the wrong words to songs! You're the people who, two years ago, when the song "*Despacito*" came out, you were like, "*De-spa-ci-to*, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh, it's a *burrito*.") You've got the tools; you've got to use them! I didn't have Google, so I went to my friends' houses, and I asked them to write down the lyrics. They would bring them to my house, and I would get every speaker in the house connected to one system. I would max out the volume, pump up the bass, and I would lay my head on the wooden table, so I could feel the vibration—because

that's how I listen to music: I can feel the vibrations. I can feel the difference between one voice and the beat, and, when the music would hit me, I would read the lyrics:

"It was all a dream,
I used to read 'Word Up!' magazine.
Salt-n-Pepa and Heavy D up in the limousine."

I had to fight for my hip hop. I had to earn my hip hop. Music saved my life!

My hearing is now through Bluetooth. I listen to music all day. I'm always walking around, listening to music. Something that I didn't have for so long is mine now! And it isn't just rap music. I started discovering *salsa*, *merengue*, *bachata*, *cumbia*, pop and country music: "There's a tear in my beer, cause I'm cryin' for you, dear!" I remember the first time I listened to rock music: I put on AC/DC, and, after the first yell, I said, "I'll have to come back to that tomorrow!"

I held on to the things that mattered.

As *Latino* educators, we you need to encourage our children to find their passion and to hold on to the things that matter in their lives. It could be science. It could be math. It could be poetry or art or athletics. It could be their culture, their religion, their faith—whatever it is that makes them *them*. Sif don't understand, and that's where hate sneaks in. There are a lot of things we don't understand—but that doesn't mean that we have to hate it! Most of us can admit that for part of our lives, we didn't understand our parents. Raise your hand if you didn't understand your parents, and your parents didn't understand you. But they didn't understand *their* parents, and their parents didn't understand them! And when these young people have kids in the distant future, they're not going to understand *them* either! I like to eat cookies with milk, and my son likes to eat cookies with water—and that's disgusting. He dips it, he eats it, then he drinks it. It looks like Metamucil, and I tell him, "Yo, you're 13. You don't need that bran in your life!"

As Latino *educators,*
we need to encourage our children
to find their passion
and to hold on to the things
that matter in their lives.

I don't need to
understand you
in order to love you.

But *ésta es la cosa* [this is the thing]: I don't need to *understand* you in order to *love* you.

As educators, even when we don't understand kids, we need to love first. Let them be who they are. Let them shine. Help them hold on to the things that matter and to the people who matter. And thepeople who mattered to me with my mom, my dad, my sister, and that crazy Puerto Rican counselor who I thought was on crack because she I was going to go to college.

She made me take the SAT. When she said "S-A-T," I didn't even hear the "T." All I heard was "S-A," and I'm like "I'm not writing any damn essay!" When I got my test results, I was scared to open them, because I was told that I was garbage, that I would never amount to anything, that I could either die or drop out. That counselor made me open it: I scored an 1100 out of 1600! *¿Quién era basura?* [Who was trash?]

She made me fill out an application to every school imaginable, then she came to my house, and I pulled out all the letters of acceptance—because I got into every school I applied to. *¡Chin!*

My mom was in the kitchen, because she wanted to give us privacy, and the counselor was like, "Where do you want to go to school?"

I said, "Miss, I want to go to *your* school."

She's like, "Why? I have a boyfriend."

I said, "Don't worry. We'll talk about that when I get there."

She's like, "*¡Deja!* [drop it]"

I said, "Okay, I'm just joking. I want to go with you, because you believed in me, and now it's *my* turn to believe in me." She reached into her briefcase, and she pulled out a letter. She put it on the table. She pushed it over to me, and the moment I read it, I began to cry.

"Congratulations…full-tuition scholarship…."

The moment I read it, I began to cry. "Congratulations… full-tuition scholarship."

I dreamed of going to college, but I didn't let myself truly believe that I could make it, and all of a sudden, it was real! Before I could say anything, my mom came in, crying and screaming, because she was so nosy, she was listening the whole time!

Then my dad walked in, and I've never seen my father cry, not even at funerals. *Nunca lloró*. [He never cried.] (Even when he watched "The Lion King," he didn't cry! That part when Mufasa passed away, my dad was like, "That's very sad.") I thought he was going to be emotional. He came up to me and said, "Good job. Don't forget to take out the trash." But I didn't care, because I had a scholarship!

On graduation night, I was wearing a cap and gown. That cap and gown mean the world to me: I earned them!

They called my name, "Carlos Ojeda, Jr.," and I walked up on the stage. As I approached the podium, where they were giving out the diploma, I started thinking about the teacher who told me that I would either die or drop out, but that I would never, ever, ever hold a diploma. I grabbed that diploma, and 100 Puerto Rican family members shouted my nickname, which I hated: "Chu Chu!" (Do I look like a train?) Then my mom—the only person who calls me this—yelled, "*¡Mi Chuchito!*"

I walked off stage, and I went looking for my family, but I couldn't find them. I went to a school that had 4,000 kids, so the commencement exercises were packed. Finally, the crowd parted, and I saw something I've never seen before in my life: My dad was crying. Before I could say anything, he gripped me—almost violently, as if the fool didn't know how to hug. He hurt my neck! My mom took a picture of it, because she said this was the moment that changed our family forever.

My mom took a picture of it, because she said this was the moment that changed our family forever.

My dad grabbed the back of my head. It hurt like hell. He knocked my cap clear off my head, and to this day, I'm pretty sure that the cap I picked up the ground wasn't mine—because it's too small, and my name isn't Susie.

But he looked me and said, "You can be whatever you want to be. You can go wherever you want to go. Don't let them put you in a corner. Don't let them take your voice. Your voice is your power!"

That moment happened because of people like you – because each of you is a dream-maker.

That moment happened because of people like *you*—because each of you is a dream-maker. Each of you has changed more lives than you'll ever know. People like you—and the work that MASBA does—changes lives. You made my old man's dreams come true. You change generations of families—and my family has never been the same since that moment that I left for college.

You are dream-makers…. You need to make more of these dreams a reality.

You are dream-makers. That's what MASBA has done for 50 years, and that's what you'll do continuing on. You have to. You have to do that good work You need to make more of these dreams a reality.

How do you do that?

You provide an uncommon experience, and students will reward you with an uncommon effort and attitude. *Esa puertorriqueña* [that Puerto Rican], Ms. Faith Ortiz, as opposed to the Kenyatta, MySpace or tease went above and beyond. An uncommon experience. AfterMy experiences through in school, graduating from college, to get the college, is uncommon. It is not the rule; it's an exception. I went to Bloomberg University and got a business management degree with a focus on human resources, a minor in marketing, and a minor in law. I became president of the student body, president of the *Latino* student association, and president of the Black student association—and I'm not even Black! I got involved in every organization on campus. I learned how to speak French. I learned to play the piano. I was the director of the radio station.

I graduated from college—the first person in my family's history to ever graduate from college. My grandmother got on a plane from Puerto Rico, flew four hours, then drove four hours, to see her grandson walk that stage. My first job paid me more per hour than my mother and father ever got paid, combined, in their lives. And I realized that "in order to rise up, I gotta wise up."

By the time I was 23, I already got my MBA, my Master of Business Administration, with a focus on business development, entrepreneurship, and organizational behavior. By 25, I was the youngest and only *Latino* professor in the history of Kutztown

University College of Business. I decided to become a motivational speaker, and, at age 25, I met Consuelo CastilloKickbusch.

Oh, yes. You want to talk about an uncommon experience?

She's one of the first *Latina* leaders to ever sit down and talk to me. Even though she was tired after a long day, even though she was worn out, even though her daughter wanted her to leave, she sat and talked with me, shared with me. That woman changed my life forever.

I have been blessed with amazing *Latinas*: my mother, my grandmother, Ms. Faith Ortiz, Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch—servant leaders who gave me opportunity, who guided me, and who helped me up when I was down.

At 25, I became a youth motivational speaker. I started my first business at 25, my second business at 27, a third business at 30. Ten years ago, I started YouthSpeak, a youth engagement company. We are now a multimillion-dollar company. We have worked with McDonald's and Target. We'e helped millions of kids across the country. And it's not about what I make; it's about what I give: Last year, we donated $1.5 million of free program resources to communities that need them the most—because it has to be reciprocal. We've got to give back as much or more than we take.

It's not about what I make; it's about what I give.

I also married the most beautiful Puerto Rican woman you've ever seen in your life. *Mira*, she's so hot that when we walk into a room, people look at her and look at me and go, "*¿Qué pasó aquí?* [What happened here?]" As beautiful as she is, she's equally intelligent. A couple years ago, she graduated—not from high school or college, because she already did that; she became the first medical doctor in our family's history: That is Dr. Sandra de Jesús Ojeda.

I can sit here and talk academics: about what MASBA has done, what it stands for, and where it needs to go, but I, as a storyteller, like to go more intimate. The eldest there: His is Carlos Alberto Ojeda, III. He's not named after me; he's named after my dad. Fourteen years ago, the world took him away from me and gave me

There are so many things I never said to my father. I never told him, "I love you" enough, because, as Latino men, that's not what we do.

something equally-amazing back. My son doesn't realize it, but he looks just like my father. He talks like my dad, walks like my dad, giggles like my dad, talks crap like my dad. And he reminds me of what my father taught me: that life is not measured by the breaths you, but by the moment in life that take your breath away.

There are so many things I never said to my father. I never told him, "I love you" enough, because, as *Latino* men, that's not what we do. I never thanked him for the things he did, never told him how proud I was of him. And I don't waste a moment: I tell this little dude every day, "*Te quiero. Te amo*. [I love you]."

We have to change the paradigm: Our kids need our love and our affection. I feel the pain that they feel when they're not getting enough love. You wonder why they're joining gangs? Because those gangs are giving more "love" than we are! Our boys have to be loved every single day. I tell him "*Te quiero. Te amo*" every day, even when he gets in trouble. We have to infuse love in our curriculum, love in our schools, love for our children. It's the cornerstone of our community and of our culture.

You wonder why they're joining gangs? Because those gangs are giving more "love" than we are! Our boys have to be loved every single day.

We have another son, Alessandro. He's evil. He has the list under his bed of the people who've pissed him off. I am on that list several times! There's only one person in permanent marker: his kindergarten teacher. They called us into a meeting, and immediately we thought they were going to tell us how amazing our kid was. They told us, "No, he's not going to move to first grade."

I said, "Wait, he's failing kindergarten? *¿Qué hizo?* [What did he do?] Did he eat the crayons?"

They said they gave him a standardized test, and he did not do well. Alessandro is hearing-impaired, like me. It's already started: They didn't give him a reasonable accommodation. They didn't expect a *Latino* parent to come at them with everything I did, asking, "Did you give him a reasonable accommodation? Did you test him? Did you give him the appropriate test? My son is not invalid; your *test* is invalid!"

I looked at the little man and said, "*Papi*, do you want to go to first grade?"

He said, "Yes."

You're going to have to work twice as hard as your friends, and it's not going to be fair, but the world is not fair.

I said, "You're going to have to work twice as hard as your friends, and it's not going to be fair, but the world is not fair. It comes with ups and downs, and you don't get to decide when they come. You get to decide how you engage them. And so you're going to have to wear hearing aids right now, at five years old."

He said, "Okay, *Papi*."

I said, "Hearing aids are beautiful, and you can get them any color: Mine are black, because I wear black glasses, but you can get them any skin color. *Papi*, do you want your skin color?"

He said, "No, *Papi*, I want red and blue, because those are Spiderman's colors, and he's savage!"

And I go, "Savage?"

And he said, "Yeah, that means 'cool.'"

But I said, "Aren't you scared that other people are going to make fun of you?"

He said, "*Papi*, I already talked to my peeps. I've got my friends, and they already know, and they've got my back. And other people might make fun of me, but you know what? Haters are going to hate!"

I looked at him and said, "Number one: No more hip hop for you! Number two: I'm proud of you! At ten years old, he's wearing his hearing aids, the smallest person in his class. He's the starting point guard for his basketball team, leading his team to the second round of the playoffs for the first time in ten years. He averages gets eight points and eight assists. He's the number three student academically in his class, he did the school show, he's running for student body president, and he's part president of the Spanish Club. And if you try to tell him what he is or is not, what he will be or will not be, he puts you on his damned list!

Por final [finally], we have our beautiful princess, Karina. She was born with a malformed kidney and a malformed hip. It was my worst nightmare: She inherited everything that was wrong with my genetics! By the time she was two, she was not hearing or speaking, so we knew she needed special treatment. By three years old, she had hearing aids implanted, so that she can hear. You know the videos you see of children hearing for the first time on social media? That was my reality. It was my voice that my daughter heard for the first time, *cuando le dije, "Hola, Mamá"* [when I said, "hello"]. When she smiled, I said, "She's going to be the end of me: She's going to take over this world!" But the doctors had other things in mind. The doctors began to give us a list of what she couldn't or wouldn't be able to do—not because those doctors are evil or bad, but because they're careful. She can't play sports because of her kidney: no soccer, no basketball. She's going to be delayed. She's going to have trouble. She's going to have socioemotional issues. She going to throw tantrums. She's not going to be able to communicate. She's not going to be able to make friends.

The doctors began to give us a list of what she couldn't or wouldn't be able to do.

"Can't." "Won't." "Never will." The world will always tell us what we can't, won't and never will do. But how do revolutions start? How does revolutionary change occur? When we defy expectations, when we realize we can, we will, and that we are destined. Do you think I let anyone put limits on this beautiful, little girl? She scored three goals in our last soccer tournament, and she celebrates like a pro! She learned to ride a bike before her brothers. She's funny, she's engaging. She attends regular school and a school for hearing-impaired students. She knows sign language, Spanish and English. She's one of the top students in her class. She draws amazingly. She's funny, she's hilarious, and she's crazy. She goes rockwall climbing at five years old, higher than I can. I lost her during a party, and I couldn't find her. I'm thinking, "My wife's going to kill me!" Then I heard, "Daddy!" She was up on the freakin' rock wall—without permission. She's like, "I just wanted to do it!" It's hilarious:

The world will always tell us what we can't, won't and never will do. But how do revolutions start? …When we defy expectations, when we realize we can, we will, and that we are destined.

She plays video games at five years old. The other night, I walked in on her playing "Call of Duty: Zombies" with her brothers. She's five years old, and you've gotta be 15 to play that game!

I said, "*¿Qué haces?* [What are you doing?]"

She says, "I'm killing zombies, *Papi!*"

She knows how to code. She goes to STEM lab. She is fierce. And the one thing that that I love: She sings at the top of her lungs. She sings in the morning. She sings when she eats. She even sink when she goes to the bathroom. *No sé si la ayuda* [I don't know if it helps her], *pero, mira* [but, look]…if it work!

When she sings it's pretty horrible, because she's hearing-impaired, so she's off-beat, off-rhythm, and off-tone. But she grabs the guitar, and she puts it on her thigh, so that she can feel the vibrations—just like how I used to listen to the table. She feels the vibrations, and you can watch her play, and her tone adjusts to the vibration she feels. I don't raise the volume to drown her out. I lower the volume, because I want to hear her voice!

If there's just one thing that I'll tell you, MASBA, before I leave: We've gotta listen to our children's voices. We've got to prop them up. Invite them here. Invite them to your school board meetings. Empower them. Give them the power. Show them. Prepare the next generation—not just by telling them that they need to be prepared, but walking hand-in-hand, side-by-side, into the future.

We've gotta listen
to our children's voices.
We've got to prop them up.

Hear their voices. Magnify their voice, because their voice is their power. Your voice is your power!

With those voices, we can ask questions. Questions give us answers. Answers give us knowledge. And knowledge give us what? Power!

That's the voice of our future. That's the voice of the hopes for our children. That's the voice of MASBA. Let it be heard now and forever!

Carlos Ojeda Jr. is one of the most dynamic youth empowerment speakers in America today. A former university professor and administrator, he now focuses his energy on empowering students to succeed by teaching them that

their voice is their power. Carlos is the founder of CoolSpeak, "The Youth Engagement Company."

Reflections on the Keynote by Carlos Ojeda, Jr.

"It was extremely mind-blowing—one surprise after another. It was just crazy to understand that he was 23 before he found out what was hindering him from moving forward. When he took out his earpiece, I was like, 'Wow!'"

—Justin Schwausch, Gonzales ISD

"One word: Amazing!"

—Adam Soto, Plainview ISD

"An emotional roller coaster:
He had me crying and laughing."

—Bill Lacy, Katy ISD

"Carlos proves that anybody can do what they want. Anybody. They can accomplish it. It doesn't matter where you're from: the *barrios*, the Bronx. If somebody can just put that seed in you—like they did for him—and water it, that's all it takes!"

—Lala Chávez, Lubbock ISD

"Carlos highlights the resiliency of the human being to survive."

—Connie Esparza, Aldine ISD

"I was really disheartened when I heard how that one person really brought him down, but it was amazing how another person could bring him up so much and mentor him and get him to be successful, despite all that."

—Dr. Ninfa Cadena, Carrizo Springs ISD

"He left me thinking about how many types of those students I have in my district, who, if one person were to reach out and show them some love—just imagine what they could be!"

—Elton Foster, Royal ISD

"He had a different mindset because he could overcome anything. So, when it came to the setbacks of his kids, it was as if he thought, 'Well, we'll see about that!' He didn't buy into professionals saying, 'Your kid will never do this or that.' Carlos taught me that our frame of mind as we approach problems is really important and that there's more than one way to accommodate people with special needs. A good attitude is key!"

—Charles Stafford, Denton ISD

"He had a list of things his daughter would never be able to do, and that was unacceptable. So, set that aside, make your own decisions, and set your own goals!"

—Darla Wegner, Del Valle ISD

Annual TALAS Superintendents Panel

Dr. Celina Estrada Thomas, Hutto ISD
Dr. Pedro Galaviz, Canutillo ISD
Jon Orozco, Waelder ISD
Dr. Rodrigo Peña, San Diego ISD
Dr. Carlos Ríos, San Felipe-Del Río CISD
Dr. Verónica Vijil, Fabens ISD
Juan Cabrera, El Paso ISD, Moderator

For several years, the annual MASBA conference has hosted a superintendents panel prepared and moderated by the Texas Association of *Latino* Administrators and Superintendents (TALAS). TALAS Co-founder and Former MASBA Legal Counsel Juan Cabrera, Superintendent of the El Paso ISD, prepared and moderated MASBA's 2020 TALAS Superintendents Panel.

Cabrera: Welcome to our annual TALAS Superintendents Panel! My name is Juan Cabrera, and I have the pleasure of serving as superintendent of the El Paso ISD. Nine years ago, I co-founded TALAS, the Texas Association of *Latino* Administrators and Superintendents, and we're here today with six of our TALAS superintendents. I'll allow them to introduce themselves!

Orozco: I'm Jon Orozco of Waelder ISD. It seems I represent small-school superintendents here: We have 324 kids. We also have one of the few three-year-old pre-K programs in the state, with 14 kids. We graduate 16 to 18 students per year.

Galaviz: I'm Pedro Galaviz of Canutillo ISD. We're a district of 6,200 kids at mile marker 8 in West Texas, right outside of El Paso.

Estrada: Celina Estrada Thomas, the proud superintendent of Hutto ISD, a district of 8,100 students—and growing. We had 600 new kiddos this year, and we're expecting about 800 new ones next year. Hutto is located just northeast of Austin and is considered a fast-growth area. Round Rock

is already built out, so everybody's coming east to Hutto. It's pretty exciting: We've got a lot of new development coming in, so part of our challenge is keeping up with all the growth. We started construction of our second high school, so the million-dollar question has been: What will the mascot be? Hutto is known for the hippos. We're the only hippos in Texas and the only hippos in the United States. We are branded and trademarked. Nobody else can be a hippo! So, with the construction of the new high school, they, too, will be hippos! Hippos north and south, east and west: In Hutto, everybody's a hippo from the time you're born, to the time you graduate!

Vijil: Good morning, *buenos días*. My name is Verónica Vijil. I'm currently the proud superintendent in Fabens ISD, 30 miles east of downtown El Paso. I was also an associate superintendent with this man to my right, Pedro Galaviz, in Canutillo, for three years. So everything that I learned—you can blame on him! We are a small district of 2,100 students, right along the border, so we have very unique experiences that we encounter every single day with our students. I'd like to give a shout-out to my board members here: Mr. Orlando Flores and Mr. Rey Sepúlveda. Thank you for your support, and thank you to MASBA and all the board members here for everything that you do!

Peña: Good morning, everyone. *Buenos días*. My name is Rodrigo Peña. I'm the proud superintendent at San Diego ISD in San Diego, Texas—not San Diego, California. San Diego is near Alice, Texas, in the Corpus Christi area, Region 2. This is my 20th year in education and my first year as superintendent. We have 1,531 students, and we've got one of our board members here with us today, Mr. Saenz.

Ríos: *Buenos días*. *Mi nombre es* [my name is] *Carlos Ríos*. I'm the superintendent of San Felipe-Del Río CISD. I am one of the few superintendents who gets to lead the school district in his own hometown, where I was born and raised. I didn't always work in Del Río. I've worked in Austin ISD, Seguin ISD, in Bryan, Texas, and in Laredo ISD. It's an incredible blessing to come home and be the

superintendent of Del Río. In two months, I will have been the superintendent there for seven years. We've been able to get a lot done. I'd like to acknowledge the leadership of our Board President, Mr. Raymond Meza, and my team here, which will be hosting a breakout session later today.

Cabrera: Thank you, superintendents, for being with us. In preparing for this, I told these superintendents that seven of the eight of us—all of us except for Carlos—are carpetbaggers. Superintendents come through town most of the time, and many times we're not going to retire in our communities. Together, these folks have probably worked in 20 different cities throughout their careers. Celina is from the Valley, but she's been all over, and now she's a Hippo. You never know where life's going to take you!

Seven of the eight of us… are carpetbaggers. Superintendents come through town most of the time, and many times we're not going to retire in our communities…. On the other hand, you, school board members, live in the community

On the other hand, you, school board members, live in the community—and my superintendent brothers and sisters aren't going to want to hear this, but Dr. García and I have talked about this: If someone has served on the school board for 20 or 25 years, how many superintendents are they going to see? A lot! And, if times are bad, it could be a whole lot! When I became superintendent of El Paso seven years ago, I wanted to know what makes districts successful. Irrespective of the academic program you choose, irrespective of the football coach—believe it or not—irrespective of all the other issues that we focus on, the number one issue that impacts the overall long term success of a school district is the continuity of the school board and how well they do in keeping students. If you have a stable school board, and they're focused on the right things, and they do a good job of recruiting, nurturing and supporting educators to stay. Most superintendents leave after three years. I come from the corporate world, so I thought: "I'm going to make some changes!" But school districts don't work that way. If you

want to make real, meaningful change, the magic number is seven to ten years: Try to hire a superintendent for seven to ten years, and try to have some stability, and hope your school board members serve for at least two terms or two cycles of high school graduates. If you get a superintendent and build a good relationship for seven to ten years, and if you focus and stay the course, you will have more success in the community. I don't care what software you buy. I don't care what your curriculum plan is. I don't care what your theory of action is. I really don't.

If you want to make real, meaningful change, the magic number is seven to ten years: Try to hire a superintendent for seven to ten years, and try to have some stability.

With that being said, your relationship with us, who, in many cases, might be passing through your communities, we have to find a way to work together if we want to have continuity and success. No matter how bad things get—and a lot of you have been through this—it's not always better to fire the superintendent and start again, which costs you a couple of years as you search for a person and rebuild the relationship. And it's like a marriage.

When you, superintendents, come into a new city, talk to us about training and building relationships with your "Team of Eight." School board members are volunteers, but this is our "job"—and sometimes board training isn't a priority for everyone. Give us your perspective on training and the importance of relationship.

Estrada: We joke that I'm the head Hippo, and I don't mind being one—as long as I don't end up looking like one! I'm going on my third year in Hutto ISD, and this is my first superintendency. And it's like a marriage. You're married to seven

This is my first superintendency. And it's like a marriage. You're married to seven board members. So, it's important to nurture relationships.

board members. So, it's important to nurture relationships. It's paramount. On any given month, I have breakfast, coffee or dinner with my board members on a recurring cycle. One of the board members is actually my next-door neighbor: I didn't realize it when I bought the house, and we rarely see each other outside of board meetings.

Our board is coming off of teambuilding just a couple of weeks ago, so we're still on that "high." I can't tell you how exciting that teambuilding session was. During the first two and a half years of my superintendency, we wrote a new strategic plan, and I was rolling along, carrying out the strategic plan, but the board members were feeling a bit disconnected from the strategic plan. They felt like they were going to board meetings and simply rubberstamping things. They wanted more of a voice in what was happening with goal-setting. So, we came together two weeks ago, we spent three hours one evening, brought in dinner, and we went to work on setting priorities and goals and looking at evidence of attainment.

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One of the main things for us is CCMR: College-, career-, and military-readiness is growing exponentially. We're doing great things as far as getting our our children ready to exit high school, but our board members noticed that accountability stops at graduation. Our job is to get them college-, career-, and military-ready and to get them graduated. Their question for me was: "Celina, you're telling us that half our kids have actually applied to college and have completed the FAFSA…but are they actually going to college? Are they actually showing up and finishing four years later?" We don't track that data. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does, for

students who go to public universities. That is important to our board. They want to know where our kids are going when they leave us. Are they working? Have they joined the military? And they tell me: "Don't just tell us that you've got a spreadsheet and you've checked it off, but we want to know: Are Hutto ISD children actually successful?" That's only one slice of our Board's goals, but those are the hard discussions we're having in our goal-setting meetings. It's not enough for us to say we're CCRM-ready; they want me to prove that we're doing it. Part of what's happening with our budget is that we're going to hire a Year 13 counselor, and that person will be responsible for tracking kids after they graduate. That's a huge investment, but it's part of what the Board feels is important to them. From an administrative viewpoint, we look at accountability in certain terms, but, for the board members, who are the community and who are going to be there long after I'm there, that was an important measurement piece to them. When they felt they were rubberstamping, there was something unfinished, so we brought it together in that goal-setting session. Now we're going to put some money behind it, and let's see where it goes!

Cabrera: Thank you, Celina. That was a great example of coming together to satisfy a need of your board. That's so important. Dr. Ríos and Dr. Galaviz, you've been in your districts for six or seven years, and you've been through a few board cycles. Your boards have changed. I've been in El Paso for seven years now, and Mr. Velarde has been with me almost the whole time. The quality and success of our work greatly depends on the relationship between us. Our best times have been when we work together, and our most challenging times have been when we weren't. It drives everything.

The quality and success of our work greatly depends on the relationship between us.

Galaviz: I don't subscribe to the "Team of Eight." I don't believe in it. I believe in a team of one: We're one team. As board

members, you chose to run for office, you chose to come to board meetings, and you're choosing to be here, to make a difference for our kids—for *all* kids, for the benefit of America. Part of being on the team is the relationship of seven different people with seven different ways of communicating. But the bottom line of your team has to be trust. You hired us to do something. Now, let us work. Ask us questions. Be open.

The bottom line of your team has to be trust. You hired us to do something. Now, let us work.

I'm very fortunate: I've gone through cycles, and many in Canutillo know that I'm there because of that guy, Mr. Rodríguez, because I believe in him, and Ms. Yglesias, because I believe in her and some other board members. It's about trust and commitment and trust that we're producing. Our job is an infinite game: My job is to set up the next superintendent and the next principals—whoever's going to lead—because I'm not going to be there forever. *Diosito* [God] woke me up this morning, and I gave my *bendición* [blessing], kissed my wife, kissed my daughter, but I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. I just know right now, today, let's do something. So trust, be committed, and know we're going to have conflict—but let's settle the conflict as adults.

I was reading a book on parliamentary procedure for rookie board members. It asked: When you talk to a board member, would your mom and dad be proud of you? Were you courteous and respectful? *You* control you. *You* control your values and ethics. So, again: trust, commitment, conflict, accountability, and let's get some results!

Ríos: I worked in Laredo and Seguin as a cabinet member, but Del Río is my first superintendency, so I can sit back and reflect on the seven years and see how I've grown as a superintendent. My growth has a lot to do with how our Team of Eight has grown. I can sit here and think but the nice things that we've done in Del Río, but the greatest thing that we've done happened in the last two years. To keep the Team of Eight together, to keep us moving in the same direction, we have to avoid the distractions, yet we have to have conversations about everything. We have concerns for the bus drivers, concerns for our cafeterias and equipment, concerns for the budget, concerns for so many things, but I have found that the way to keep the board together is through focus.

To keep the Team of Eight together, to keep us moving in the same direction, we have to avoid the distractions.

Our board president insisted that we focus on two things, because we can fight about everything, but the two things we're always going to agree about—the focal point of our passion and energy—have got to be student learning and climate. We might disagree about the time that kids get picked up and dropped off and how that operates. We might disagree about how many cafeteria workers are needed at every station. We might disagree about whether the head football coach should stay or go. But all those, at the end of the day, become distractions. As we go to trainings and reflect on our growth, the two things that have made us stronger are our focus on teaching and learning and our focus on employee climate.

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If you look at our board agendas, our board president insists that we always talk about student growth. We

might be having presentations on X, Y and Z, but he's going to insist that we talk about what we're doing with students who haven't passed the fifth or eighth grade, or why we haven't retained more students. That's what's important, and when we're focused on that, we're much better. When I started as superintendent, we were always in the 20th percentile of Texas schools; the last few years, we've gotten a B rating from the TEA. Last year, we received an 87. That doesn't happen just by showing up. It happens by being focused as a district. I encourage boards to keep that in mind. Everything has to be talked about, but, at the end of the day, the only two things that are not distractions are student achievement and the culture and climate of staff.

Cabrera: This is great. I want board members to walk away with a couple of "nuggets" that they can take back home, so we'll let the audience ask a few questions, but let's hear from the other superintendents who haven't spoken. Dr. Vigil?

Vigil: I'll add one layer to everything that's already been said. The trainings that we have on our Team of Eight focus on working together. Our work is very focused, and we know what we're there to do. So, we're setting goals and talking about student outcomes. The questions are great: How can we raise the level of achievement? But the important component is that those questions not be asked in isolation, or that we have trainings and then get distracted. If we don't embed student outcomes in all the work that takes place at those trainings and Team of Eight sessions, then it's a lot of wasted time. The work has to continue, and we must remain focused on the student outcomes. That's where the trust comes in that Dr. Galaviz talked about. Board members have to build a trusting relationship with their superintendent for the superintendent to go to work and tackle the day-to-day

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operations and do what the superintendent was hired to do.

Peña: With regard to trust, I have two more words that have a big meaning in any relationship—whether it's a marriage or the relationship between the board and the superintendent. These two words help us truly become a Team of Eight. One very important word is respect. You've got to have mutual respect in any relationship. The other word is communication, which is also key in relationship. If you, as a board member, have a question or doubt, you have to let us know. We're on the same team. We want the same thing: We want to make an impact on student learning and student achievement. When you think of trust, keep those two words in mind: respect and communication.

One very important word is respect. You've got to have mutual respect in any relationship. The other word is communication, which is also key in relationship.

Orozco: I'll wrap up a couple of things. I've been fortunate: We're a smaller community, and my board members' average service on the board is between 16 and 18 years. So it's extremely stable. We just had two board positions come up, and nobody in town applied. Those two board members have been on the board for about 20 years.

Trust and collaboration are important, but another important thing is the expectations we have for each other on a daily basis. That's important: how we move students from A to B. Being from a small community, we talk about how to get kids to state standards and to higher education. We're fortunate: We graduate 16 or 18 kids each year, so we can track them pretty easily without hiring anybody.

We have one board member who is relentless about attendance. I asked her, "What do you want me to do? Go pick each one of them up and bring them to school?" The next week, because we're a small community, I started doing that. The amazing thing is, after a month, the kids just started showing up to school on time.

It comes back to the expectations of the board, and the climate and culture of the community, and expecting kids to be in school. As professionals, we sometimes get bogged down in our lawmaking. We tell people, "You're supposed to go through these steps." We file on the absences of one or two children, but most of our children, from elementary to high school, attend school. If not, they get a call. After that, we leave a card on the door every time we go to the house, to remind parents to call when their children are going to be absent, so that we don't have to show up at their house and honk the horn—which becomes the talk of the day in the community.

I've had the privilege of the stability of the board and the sacrifices they've made.

I've had the privilege of the stability of the board and the sacrifices they've made. Those who've served on our board for several years have seen the district grow through many superintendents, and they want only the best for the children of the community. I'm very thankful for that and blessed to be in Waelder, Texas.

Cabrera: Thank you, Jon. Let's take a couple of questions from the audience. From my personal experience of Mr. Velarde on my board: I'm glad he served another term. There's a real affinity and respect in our relationship, and I wouldn't have said this two years ago, but we're going to have a relationship when I'm no longer the superintendent. That's what happens when you're "in the trenches" together. We have media at every single board meeting and committee meeting. If I make one move that puts us on the top fold of the newspaper, that impacts our relationship. It's hard because we have a very public relationship. I'm sitting on the dais, and, as soon as the meeting is over, board members are walking over to talk to the *El Paso Times*, and I think, "What are they going to talk about?" Our relationships are

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impacted by the story of the day and by the media: We have to have a public relationship and a private relationship, and the reason we are successful has nothing to do with our liking each other, as much as us trusting each other.

My goal as a superintendent is to make sure that my trustees never look bad. Trustee Velarde can tell you one thing, and this is what I recommend to superintendents: If I give him my word, he's going to stand up in public and say what I said, and I've never had to walk back anything in seven years. That's why he has my back. Forget all the education; the fact that he knows my word means something has built our relationship and makes a huge difference. That's what we need to work toward in our relationships. Let's go to our audience!

Audience: This is a fantastic panel! I'm R.J. Molina from Jim Hogg County ISD in South Texas. We have diversity in our school board, with representatives from the sheriff's department, former teachers, and a businessman, so we draw on their fortes. My concern is House Bill 3: It's a temporary fix. What's going to happen as a result of it? I tell our superintendent: We need to be cautious, because we don't know if the raises we gave our teachers are sustainable and whether the legislature will give us additional funding. I just want to know superintendents' thoughts on HB 3.

Cabrera: I personally will spend a lot of time at the Legislature on HB 3, making sure we can keep what we started.

Ríos: Public school funding in Texas hadn't changed for a long time, then along comes House Bill 3. Committees and departments are now writing the rules for how we're going to be able to use all that money. From my experience of public education, I can tell you that the Legislature is not going to flip or change from one day to the next. As a person who's made a career studying public funding, I think we can trust the Legislature and that funding is going to stay where it's at. But we, as school districts, have to keep in mind that we still have to run a budget and we can't go and "give away the farm." We have to be very

cautious in how we move forward. The Legislature will come back in a few years and say, "We're sorry you had to lower your tax rate and that you're not getting as much money as you thought," but they'll continue to fund public education. We have to continue to be prudent in how we spend our money. We can't just go out and start doing whole new things and buying new things, because we don't know how the economy is going to be in the next couple of years. But, as far as state funding, the Legislature doesn't come in and change your funding from one day to the next. We do have to stay vigilant. We have to continue talking to our legislators. But House Bill 3 is going to be here for a long time, and that doesn't absolve school boards and superintendents from their primary duty of being cautious every step of the way.

Estrada: I want to reiterate Carlos' message about staying involved with legislators and getting people out to vote and keeping our educators involved. If all of us—and if all educators in Texas—voted, we could carry any legislation. We've had several sessions with Commissioner Morath. He thinks that, as long as the Texas economy is strong, the funding is going to stay in place. We also have to be mindful and just be responsible with our budgeting and not get crazy. For example, in Hutto, we're getting an additional $6 to $7 million next year, just in growth, simply due to the economy and the strength in the Central Texas area. But again, we need to stay close to the budget.

If all of us – and if all educators in Texas – voted, we could carry any legislation.

Audience: I'm Raymond Meza from San Felipe-Del Río. Having had a long career—37 years—in education, as a teacher and administrator, I wonder how large and small district are going to handle recent legislature concerning mental health.

Cabrera: Yesterday, I was at a panel with 20 superintendents and the Commissioner. We had a four-hour meeting to discuss academics and House Bill 3. We spoke about mental health for the first two hours of the meeting. We spoke

about the ever-increasing number of SPED students and how we have some very seriously violent children in a lot of our schools. We spoke about cyber security risks. Then we spoke about school safety. What really struck me is that we had a conversation about these four topics, and we were just scratching the surface after two hours—and none of them have anything to do with academics. Talking about the importance of relationships, we become the nexus in our communities. If you're in Dallas or Houston or Austin, you have a lot more resources, but if you're in a smaller community, mental health services are more fractured. The problem is: A school district becomes a nexus, where kids have to show up every day with the issues they're facing. Our folks have been trained and are highly-educated individuals, but they never learned much about cyber security and what to do when kids bring guns to school. Going forward, mental health is going to be an issue, and it's going to be something we get more education on. Unless you've got mental health training in your background, we're doing the best we can to deal with issues that aren't in our core competency. Very few of us in these chairs know much about how to deal with mental health. How many of us can afford to open mental health facilities in our districts? We have to tackle that issue—and it's going to be a big one for us, because it'll involve money, time, energy and resources. One more comment from the audience, then we'll finish up.

Audience: Because of our district's size, we had an easier time putting in place a mental health program. We've contracted with a certified medical specialist who visits our campus twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and works with kids on issues ranging from dating violence to divorce and death. We created an MOU with his company, keep parent insurance costs down. If you have any questions, Mark Goulet of Walsh Gallegos designed it for us. It's been very positive for our kids, especially in low-income areas, and they enjoy those services during the school day.

Cabrera: Our time is up, but we know we all want the same thing. You hire us, as superintendents, to work for a temporary period. In the end, let's find common ground in kids and the goals we have for the community. Let's work together, and we'll have a lot more success!

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The superintendent of Hutto ISD, ***Dr. Celina Estrada Thomas*** *has dedicated her entire career to public education, first as an elementary and high school teacher for six years, then as a middle school and high school principal for 19 years. Possessing a strong background in research from her work with the Texas Education Agency and the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), Celina earned her Doctor of Educational Administration from The University of Texas at Austin and is now leading "Hippo Nation" to increased heights of excellence.*

A public servant who leads by example, ***Dr. Pedro Galaviz*** *has served as superintendent of Canutillo ISD for six productive years. Under his leadership, Canutillo has earned back-to-back A ratings in state accountability, was named the 2019 small district finalist for the H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards, and Northwest Early College High School was designated a 2019 Blue Ribbon School. With a focus on creating increased college and career opportunities for students, Pedro is creating a culture of excellence and high expectations in the Canutillo ISD.*

Overseeing the smallest district in our Superintendents Panel, ***Jon Orozco*** *serves as superintendent of Waelder ISD, where he is responsible for a single-campus district of 320 students in Gonzales County. An alumnus of Texas State University, Jon motivates his faculty and staff to strive to provide quality instruction focused on the highest-possible student outcomes for all learners. Being the chief education leader in a Texas town of 1,000 residents, he also highlights the importance of long-lasting relationships of trust between faculty, staff, students and parents.*

A former math teacher with unbridled ambition, ***Dr. Rodrigo Peña*** *draws on many experiences from his rising levels of responsibility in the Sharyland ISD, McAllen ISD, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, Kingsville ISD and San Benito CISD. In Kingsville, Rodrigo spearheaded the district's first balanced budget in years, adding a million dollars to its fund balance and turning a profit in the food services department. In San Benito, he oversaw secondary instruction, improving the district's state accountability rating. He now serves as superintendent of San Diego ISD.*

Dr. Carlos Ríos *has served as superintendent of San Felipe-Del Río CISD for seven years. Under his leadership, the district constructed and established its first early college high school with a CTE center and blended academy. A proud Texas A&M Aggie and former Naval officer, Carlos has served various districts, working his way from teacher to principal to central office*

administrator. In 2019, he was named Region 15 Superintendent of the Year. Carlos well knows that school reform and improved student outcomes can only occur with a well-established "Team of Eight."

With over 30 years of experience in education, ***Dr. Verónica Vijil*** *is completing her first year as superintendent of Fabens ISD, a rural district of 2,180 students 30 miles east of El Paso. Her early college high school provides T-STEM programs, where students work with robots, drones and rockets, and is currently working to open a P-TECH program. Fabens ISD was recently named a finalist for the H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards, and Veronica will be recognized next month as the Sam Houston State University College of Education Distinguished Educator of the Year.*

Our TALAS Superintendents Panel was moderated by TALAS Co-founder and Past President ***Juan Cabrera****. Juan has served as superintendent of El Paso ISD for nearly seven years, driving innovation and creating "schools of choice" for the 60,000 students of the district. With his Board, Juan has taken El Paso from the grip of state control, to becoming one of the highest-performing urban districts in Texas. A proud graduate of The University of Texas School of Law, Juan is an attorney and former elementary bilingual teacher.*

"Uniting People and Igniting Our Economy through Better Board Leadership!"

Keynote by Marisa Rivera

¡Buenos días, MASBA!

I want to thank Dr. Jayme Mathias and the MASBA Board for inviting me here. 50 years is a lot of years, and, when you think about the history of *Latinos* in the United States, that history is tied to our educational system!

MASBA, *¡hay mucho que celebrar* [There's much to celebrate]! During the past 50 years, you've tackled tough issues of discrimination, equality and diversity. For 50 years, you have continued the fight for closing the achievement gap for our students. For 50 years, you have demanded appropriate curriculum. For 50 years, you have promoted the advancement of the Mexican-American culture—of our *Latino* culture. You succeeded in securing recognition of *mariachi* as a UIL program. That's awesome And you're focused on students—especially on our *Latino* students and English Language Learners! Thank you for showcasing this. *¡Hay mucho, mucho que celebrar!*

Let's start by thinking about our situation in this country. We're not invisible. We've been in this country long before it was the United States. *Latino* history is part of American history—but many times America chooses to ignore or not mention our history in our school books. We're more than 59 million beautiful *Latinos* in this country. Sometimes we don't feel welcome. Sometimes they don't appreciate us. They don't give us the credit and the respect that we deserve.

Ahora, today, I'd like to set the record straight. Ana María Fernández, a *Latina* businesswoman and poet, wrote a beautiful poem called, "Listen, *América*." It goes like this:

We've been in this country
long before it was the United States.
Latino history is part of American history –
but many times America
chooses to ignore or not mention
our history in our school books.

Listen, *América*, you, the one to the north:
in the beginning, at the very moment of your birth,
we, all of us, were here!
We are the Mayas, the Aztecs, the Pueblos,
the Tajinos, the Caribes and the Anahuacs,
encountering our future with Europe,
named Colón, Cortez, de Narváez, Cobadilla and De León.
In our innocence, no doubt, we gave, too,
but the sweat and the tears did flow
and mix from the beginning, and we were here!
We were here when you were named *América*,
from *Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles* to *San Antonio* to *la Florida*,
our fates are here for all to see.
And so, too, dearest *América,* are we.
When the old continents prevailed, Africa was raped.
The blood and the sweat and the tears
flowed and mixed again.
And guess what.
We were here!
Born of seeds—some pure, most not—from everyone,
from valiant Natives, to bold aggressors, to unwilling slaves,
we, the offspring of all the variations that you made,
are still here.
Ancestral spirits roam our souls, their passion on their hearts,
while their voices echo gently in our nights:
"Your right to be here is an ancient right!"
Home of yesterday, but not today.
We survived, we adapted, and we prevailed.
We learned from you.
We wisely waited, and, as we waited, we grew,
and now we thrive,

but we will still not let them forget as long as we're alive,
that, in the beginning, from the very moment of your birth,
we were here!
And so we stand before you, united and more than proud.
We are them. We are you.
This land is your land. And it's also *our* land.
We've come of age.
We knew it then, and we know it better now.

Ana María Fernández wrote this poem in an attempt to rewrite history, which, in many times, is absent from our history books. The Hispanic community is not a modern phenomenon of the 21st century. We have been here from the beginning. We are the sons and the daughters of the Mayas and the Aztecs, the Tajín, the Africans, the Anahuacs, and the Spaniards.

With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 500,000 miles of México were ceded to the United States. We didn't cross the border; the border crossed us!

I always like to show the map of *México* and the United States: With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, 500,000 miles of *México* were ceded to the United States. We didn't cross the border; the border crossed us! We were here: in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, long before they were part of the United States of America. We're here for all to see. We're powerful. We're proud. We are *América*. And we are the future of this country. The economic future of the United States is Hispanic and—guess what—female! Watch this video from Telemundo, and see how we're portrayed. [Play video.]

What did you see? We're selling more tortillas than bread, and more salsa than ketchup. What about the age of those in the video? When we talk about our school systems, that's exactly what we're seeing in this video: the growth of the *Latino* community and its impact on our schools. But it's not only the schools, these are the employers and employees of today and tomorrow. So everything you're doing in your school systems has everything to do with the economy of the United States!

We can't continue to divide ourselves:
…En la unión está la fuerza
[Unity creates strength].

As *Latinos*, we must unite. I'm originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico, but I can pass for a *cubana* in Miami, or for a *mexicana* in Illinois. One year, my church even asked me to be *la Virgen de Guadalupe* [Our Lady of Guadalupe]. We can't continue to divide ourselves: "*Yo soy venezolana*." "*Yo soy mexicana*." "*Yo soy puertorriqueña*." ["I'm Venezuelan." "I'm Mexican." "I'm Puerto Rican."] *En la unión está la fuerza* [Unity creates strength]. All of us—all 59 million *Latinos* in this country—are the engine of our economy.

Of course, we need to think about our *Latinas*. I have to give a shout-out, because my favorite thing is to train *Latinas* and prepare women to take over the world. Ladies, it is possible! We're the majority in the world: We're 51% of the global population and 51% of the U.S. population. We are the majority, but we don't have the positions of powers that we need, to make the decisions that need to be made. *Latinas* are entering and graduating from college faster than any other group. *Latinas* open businesses six times faster than any other subgroup. We produce millions of dollars for this economy. So, ladies, do not apologize for being strong, smart, educated, bold and successful! Make sure that you have a seat at that table! Demand respect. Demand equal pay. Demand a position at the table—including a place at this table of MASBA board members!

When I need courage, and when I need leadership, I think of *mi mamá y mi abuelita* [my mother and my grandmother]. *Ellas son las que me dan energía* [The energize me]. They fought so many battles,, so that I didn't have to. I get energy, too, from our culture, from our backgrounds, our family, our work ethic. All of that comes from our culture! Be proud of your culture, because the future of the U.S. economy is Hispanic and female. So, let's take it on!

Be proud of your culture, because the future of the U.S. economy is Hispanic and female. So, let's take it on!

I also want to challenge us to think about uniting and being change agents. As board members, you have the opportunity to change so many things. I've been working in so many schools, thanks to my dear colleague, Lieutenant Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch, our keynote tomorrow. I have the pleasure of working with her in some of the

largest school districts and in districts with large numbers of migrant students and English Language Learners.

One time, we were going to do a board training the next day, so I said, "Let's go to the board meeting, so we get a feeling for the group!" They were celebrating the fact that their eighth-graders and ninth-graders were reading…at a fourth-grade level! I asked the person beside me, "Did I hear this right? Are they really *celebrating* that these students are reading on the fourth-grade level?" Are they English Language Learners?" No, they went to that school since Pre-K—for more than eight years—and they were reading at the fourth-grade level. How pathetic! As individuals and communities—indeed as MASBA members—we need to open our eyes and ears and demand reports to see what's happening with our students and to make sure they're on track!

They went to that school since Pre-K – for more than eight years – and they were reading at the fourth-grade level. How pathetic! As individuals and communities – indeed as MASBA members – we need to open our eyes and ears and demand reports.

But it's not all bad news. I've been working in education for 30+ years. When I started, the Hispanic drop-out rate was 50%! I remember thinking what a monumental task we had ahead of ourselves. Today, we've succeeded in reducing the Hispanic drop-out rate to 10%. It's an enormous battle that many of us who work in our schools and in higher education have continued to work on. We need to make sure we're part of that movement!

So, I want to ask you today: What is your commitment as school board members? What are you going to do differently today? We just heard a panel of superintendents. They talked about budget. They talked about consistency and about keeping superintendents and board members as long as you can. We have two choices: We can be part of the solution, or we can be part of the problem. If you're not part of the solution, guess what: You're part of the problem!

How many of you remember a teacher who made a difference in your life? You could be that board member who makes a difference in someone else's life! I just heard a board member who said, "I pick up students who are absent." What are the little things that *you* could be doing to make a difference?

What kind of board member are you going to be? What will be your legacy? Are you just a board member? Or, are you the best board member you can be?

What kind of board member are you going to be? What will be your legacy? Are you just a board member? Or, are you the best board member you can be? Are you the number one board member?

I know one school district that has a mantra of having a 100% graduation rate. Isn't that what everyone wants? But I keep going to schools where they have a 56% graduation rate or a 70% graduation rate. We should all be aspiring to a 100% graduation rate. Our graduation rate should be close to that. If we don't fight for that, we'll never see it.

What are your leadership skills? Being in a leadership position is a privilege. Many times, people take leadership positions because they like the titles. Consider the responsibility of leadership: You have the capacity to ignite innovation. You have the capacity to change the *status quo*. You have the capacity to change people's lives! Think about that, and use your status, your wealth and whatever it takes to make those changes!

What are the primary responsibilities of board members? Policy and governance!

You protect the public interest: Where the money's going?

You set the vision and the goals for your district. What is your vision, and is it shared by the rest of the board?

You adopt policies that give the district direction.

You set priorities and achieve goals. That's where you can infuse inclusion and diversity and make sure that your policies reflect your own beliefs!

You hire and evaluate your superintendent. Some of you have mentioned that you have superintendents and school board members who stay for several years. Several school districts in California have superintendents who don't even last 18 months. How can you have a school district that actually works under those circumstances? Board members, you need to strive to work with the superintendent you have!

Adopt and oversee all budgets. Obviously, everybody needs to do that.

Manage the collective bargaining process of school districts.

But what's the other thing you need to be looking at? Do people *love* working with you—or do people *have* to work with you?

Do people love *working with you—or do people* have *to work with you?*

It starts with your own leadership. Are you a team player? Can you actually move things along? Do you have children on your mind for every decision you make? You also have the opportunity to set up a bigger picture and to provide a voice to those who don't have a voice. Many times, we just want to "go with the flow," but data and proactive leadership are important. As board members, you have a huge opportunity to demand excellence for all kids—not just for the top kids, but for *all* kids. How many of you are servant leaders? How many of you are in this position to serve others and to serve our children? It's important to always keep that in mind!

Your voice is your power. Carlos spoke this morning on the importance of voice: Use your voice, and use it well!

I always like to think about a call to action: What are the things that you can do right away?

Adopt a vision for your district that supports diversity and inclusion. That's something you can do right away!

Develop students' socioemotional and academic skills. Those two are closely linked. If a kid doesn't have anything to eat, or is homeless, or was in a major fight last night—if a kid witnessed a murder yesterday—It will be impossible for him that studentto have a clear mind and take the SAT today!

Engage parents and families. Think outside the box and leverage local resources to bring students, parents, and the community together.

Constantly request data, and check for improvement,

Be fearless, and be courageous, because creating change is not easy—especially when we want to change

Be fearless, and be courageous, because creating change is not easy—especially when we want to change things that people are really comfortable with.

things that people are really comfortable with.

Don't take things personally as a leader.

Always keep in mind that you're there for what? The students!

Challenge the system and the status quo. Things don't have to stay the same way they've been for 200 years!

Challenge the system and the status quo. Things don't have to stay the same way they've been for 200 years!

Engage in board self-assessment. Do you trust each other? How are you empowering yourself and your board?

Close your eyes and imagine Bill Gates showing up at your school district and asking, "If you had all the money in the world, all the resources you needed, what would you change?" What would you do with teachers? What would you do with your board and your community? Visualize what a better district looks like! What is the change you so desperately want? And what will you do as part of that change?

So, now I'll ask: What did you see? What vision did you have? What things were different than they currently are?

Shift from problem-solving to vision-creating! Do any of you garden? You can't just focus on the problem—on the weeds! You have to plant seeds and water them. Sometimes, we can get so focused on fixing problems that we don't do what we need to do to make change happen!

After you leave here, continue doing the vision exercise. In fact, do it with your board! You are the architects and builders of your districts. You are the authors of your districts' stories! What will people say when you leave your board and pass on the work? What will you have done to actually make a difference? You are a change agents! Lead with courage!

As board members, you have tremendous capacity to inspire people and bring them to our schools. Let's be visible and dream big!

Marisa Rivera is the President of Mpowerment Works and the producer of "Latina Voices: Leadership Journeys." She enjoys reigniting a passion for education and inspiring people to become agents of change.

Four Characteristics of Successful Leaders

¡Dale! Luncheon Keynote by Honorable Ciro Rodríguez

Thank you, President Tenorio, for your kind introduction. You reminded me of a time when I was visiting a high school in Harlandale. The young man who was going to introduce me was really nervous. I told him, "I received my degree from St. Mary's, and I earned my master's from Our Lady of the Lake—but the less you can say about me, the better." Sure enough, he grabbed the microphone and said, "The less I can say about Mr. Rodríguez, the better"!

Thank you for allowing me to be here with you this afternoon. It's good to see Amancio Chapa here today. His brother, Jaime, was on the school board in the mid-1970s, while I served on my school board from 1974 to 1986. For those who are too young to remember, this was shortly after Senator Ted Kennedy's accident at Chappaquiddick in 1969, so Jaime Chapa used to start his speeches by saying, "I don't see what the big deal is with Chappaquiddick: My teacher used to always say, 'Chapa, quit it!'" I still remember that joke from way back then!

Let me recognize our sponsors. They are extremely critical, and we cannot make anything happen without them. As a former MASBA President, I'll share with you one story: We had an event. I won't tell you where it was, but I made the mistake of having an open bar—and I had to eat that bill for about six months! Sponsors, you make all the difference in the world! I tell kids, "Just because there's a park here or an event there, they don't just happen. People work hard to make these things happen." It's important that we keep that in mind.

Before I start, I need to share with you the urgency of where we're at, at this time in our lives and in this country. After the Civil War in the 1860s, there were some 19 African Americans who were elected to Congress before 1900. By the 1900's, there were none. There was a whiplash that occurred after the Civil War, with *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, *Plessy v. Ferguson*,

There was a whiplash that occurred after the Civil War... The same thing is occurring now. It took us almost 100 years, until the 1950s, for us to have Brown v. Board of Education. *Almost 100 years!*

and all those cases. The same thing is occurring now. It took us almost 100 years, until the 1950s, for us to have *Brown v. Board of Education*. Almost 100 years!

We cannot allow that to happen. When people say, "We've got to wait," I say, "We've waited long enough!"

I mean this sincerely: You can lose generations. And we've lost generations in the past, with both African American and Hispanics fighting for equity. We're losing: We have less Hispanic members in Congress now, than we did before this. We have a larger population than before, so we should have a lot more representation!

I had the pleasure of serving as a school board member, and I had the pleasure of serving in the Texas House of Representatives. This is what I learned: If you're 3% or 5% of the population, you're a novelty. You're okay. When you become 20% or 30% of the population, you become a problem and a threat. When you become 40% or 50% or 60% of the population, you're even more of a threat! As Hispanics, we're becoming more of a threat, and people are really suffering, especially in those places where we're 20% or 30% of the population. Every single day, people are telling our kids—who are U.S. citizens—"Go back to Mexico!" That happens every single day. Things may be okay in your backyard, but there are others who are suffering.

As Hispanics, we're becoming more of a threat.

We've all heard the name: Dr. José Cárdenas, the superintendent of Edgewood ISD. While most schools welcomed "King Antonio" of the Texas Cavaliers River Parade here in San Antonio, Cárdenas ran him out of Edgewood. To this day, we've never had a Hispanic "King Antonio." That's why we came up with the "Ugly King"—*el Rey Feo*. It was initially a mockery of "King Antonio." Things haven't changed, and people don't like to hear that. At some point, somebody's got to stand up—and when you get to be my age, there's no time to wait. I have a little granddaughter, and I don't want her to face that. We've got to continue that struggle. We've got to continue that fight.

You truly help shape our students, their minds, their curiosity, their potential, their imagination. You help inspire them to pursue the possibilities, to reach that American Dream.

I want to thank each and every one of you for what you do for our kids. And I mean that sincerely. I've been a school board member, a state legislator, and a United States Congressman, and the hardest job I've ever had—and I'm not saying this because you're here, but because it's true—was as a school board member. You are the catalysts that allow the learning community to exist. You truly help shape our students, their minds, their curiosity, their potential, their imagination. You help inspire them to pursue the possibilities, to reach that American Dream. You help introduce them to democracy. You are the ones who prepare them to open the doors of opportunity. They have to learn that life is full of doors that say "push" and "pull"—and some of them are locked—but you are there for them. The education you provide allows for confidence-building. And, if nothing else, if they don't get smarter, they do develop higher expectations. And that's essential. You have the capability to inspire young people to dream, to envision a better tomorrow for themselves and their families and our nation. Hope is essential for industry, the community and the individual. LBJ, when he spoke on the House floor on the civil rights bill, talked about *mexicanos*, because he taught in Cotulla. And he said, "I could see the lack of hope in their eyes." Some of us, perhaps most of us, have seen that. You can see when there's no hope or aspiration in adults or kids. I often ask kids, "What do you want to be?" The reason I ask that is because I dropped out of school in junior high. When I later returned, a coach in high school asked me, "Where are you going to go to college?" To this day, I've never forgotten that. That one question made all the difference in the world! That's why I still ask kids, ""Where are you headed to college? Where are you going?" And when they have no idea, I'm encouraged that I might be making a difference. It's important that we continue to work at building those aspirations.

In the same way that there are characteristics of successful individuals, there are certain characteristics that must exist if MASBA or any group or community will be successful. I'm a social worker by profession, and I can tell you when an individual is suffering from

low self-esteem. Communities and school districts can suffer from low self-esteem, too.

Communities and school districts can suffer from low self-esteem, too.

MASBA must continue to provide its members the opportunity to grow education, to become catalysts for change, to help create positive movements, and to draft the *amicus* briefs when we file lawsuits. The only reason we have universities—Pan Am in Laredo, and expansions of the UT System in Corpur Christi, San Antonio and El Paso—is because of the lawsuits we filed.

MASBA allows members to learn from each other, and that's when we learn the most: through dialogue with each other! MASBA provides strength that encourages us to create change and take risks. Nothing is more frustrating than to see a brilliant person who's unwilling to take a risk, to take a chance. Without taking risks, you'll never grow to your own personal potential—and your organizations will never reach their potential.

Serving as President of MASBA opened the door for me to run for and become chairman of the National Hispanic Council of the National School Boards Association. At that time, our main issues were spreading word of the importance of bilingual education, affirmative action, and equity.

From the perspective of social work, running for office is all about solving problems… Look at issues from that perspective. Take ownership of problems.

MASBA provides an opportunity to help others and to solve problems. From the perspective of social work, running for office is all about solving problems. When I've worked with organizations or communities—as a school board member, as a member of the Texas House, or in the U.S. House of Representatives—it was always about solving problems. Look at issues from that perspective. Take ownership of problems. Often, when we talk about issues like domestic abuse or truancy, we fail to take ownership of those problems, so we can't begin to solve them—and they remain problems. Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous Frenchman who wrote a book on our democracy, said, "The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of the functions performed by the private citizen." He acknowledged that the way we make things happen here in the United States is by forming organizations—organizations like

MASBA, or like the Computer Committee we established when I was on our school board, to establish an alternative school for kids who otherwise might have been expelled. When we begin to solve those difficulties, we move forward.

I want to briefly talk to you about four characteristics that are essential for any success. If you look at those who are successful, they have four characteristics. Remember: The most profound advice is usually the most simple and straightforward!

Your attitude is key, and your students' attitudes are key. Your perspective on learning and your understanding that education is an ongoing process is essential for success. Education is an ongoing process that doesn't stop when we get out of high school or college. People continue to grow and develop. I tell young people, "If you're not good at English or math, that doesn't mean that it'll be the case tomorrow. If you have failed today, that failure is never final—just as success is never final. We have to keep working. All successful people understand that education is a continuous process. So, the first characteristics of any true leader, of anyone who has been successful in life, is that they've learned that education is an ongoing process. I recall the story of one man who kept learning and growing: He started as a janitor at Home Depot, then he became the head janitor at a school, and then he was appointed to oversee the cleaning of 22 campuses. That's a leader! He kept growing. I want to challenge younger school board members: Don't stop there. Being on the school board is the hardest position you'll ever have. Run for State Representative. Run for the Texas Senate. Run for other offices. You're going to find that they're much easier than serving on your school board!

If you have failed today, that failure is never final—just as success is never final. We have to keep working.

The second characteristic of any leader is that they take chances, they take risks, they go out of their comfort zone and try new things on their school boards, in their communities, and in their classrooms. This allows them the opportunity to make mistakes and create growth. Take those chances. It used to be frustrating to hear clients tell me, "I want to go to college," then the next month they'd tell me again, "I want to go to college," and the following year, I'd see them, and they were still saying, "I want to go to college." I would tell them,

"I don't want to hear that anymore—unless you register!" Take those chances—in business and in running for office. Every position I've ever had, I lost first. The first time I ran for school board, I lost by 500 votes. Three years later, in the early 1970s, I ran and won! When I ran for state rep, I lost the first time. I ran again, and I won! After being in Congress for eight years, my district changed, and I lost—but then I won again! I ran for justice of the peace, and I lost. And now, I've run for J.P. and won! Everything that I've won, I've also lost. Most people quit after the first try. They never come back. Remember Ulysses S. Grant: If you look at his history, he was terrible. He lost a lot of fights, but he kept getting better, and, in the end, he won the war. Each of you can get better, too.

The third characteristics of true leaders is that they reach out and solve problems. One thing that I tell kids—and this goes for organizations, too—is that we'll always have problems. We wake up late. We displace our homework. Our grades slip. We need to take ownership of those problems. Leaders take responsibility for problems. We're good at blaming others. As Democrats, we blame Republicans. Rather than simply blame others, at some point, we have to take responsibility. I was in the U.S. House when we voted out the DREAM Act; the Democratic Senate failed to pass it. There's enough blame to go around. We could have done it. We have to make sure we take responsibility and move forward. The third characteristic of being a leader is the ability to work on and solve problems.

Rather than simply blame others, at some point, we have to take responsibility.

Finally, in order to be a leader, we need to set goals and objectives for ourselves and for our organizations. It's sound simple and plain, but a lot of people fail to set goals for themselves and their organizations. Look to the future. See it with hope, with *esperanza*.

In closing, if you don't remember those four characteristics, just remember the three, quick W's that I always share with kids. They also apply to adults.

The first W is for Wish. Wish to be successful. Wish to make a difference. Wish to move forward the agenda. Wish to create a positive state and nation.

The second W is for Want. You've got to really want it! Our country is at a true turning point, and, if it goes wrong, people will ask us, "Where were you at that time?" If it goes wrong, we're all in trouble—and future generations are in trouble, too. *En español, decimos, "Tienes que tener ganas. Y si no tienes ganas, no lo tienes."* [In Spanish, we say, "You have to have desire. If you don't have the desire, you'll never achieve what you desire."] If you don't have a wish, and if you don't have *las ganas*, it'll never happen. The wish and the want have to be there!

Finally, the third W stands for Work. Nothing happens unless you work. My mother died when I was 16. We lost our home and moved from house to house. My brother, who's a commissioner here in Bexar County, was six at the time, and he remembers coming home from school not knowing if we'd be there, because we moved around so much. At one point, we were homeless and lived in the courts.

It's important that we remember where we've been—and that we move forward.

I opened with a joke, so I have to close with a joke. I mentioned Amancio Chapa, so I'll make this joke about him. Amancio and I were out golfing, when Amancio hit his ball onto an ant hill. He swung his club and missed the ball, which stayed there with the ants—and it seemed he killed a million ants with that swing! He swung again, and it seemed he killed another million ants. By the third swing, the ants said, "It's apparent that, if we're going to survive this, we have to…get on the ball!"

Thank you for allowing me to be here, and thank you, MASBA for being "on the ball"!

¡Muchas gracias!

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and lived in the courts.
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and that we move forward.

"Homeless by Choice"

Excerpts from a Keynote by Roy Juárez, Jr.

As a teenager, I would never have dreamed of being in this room, speaking with leaders in education. Due to domestic violence, I was a homeless teenager here in San Antonio. I first became homeless at 14 years old, and then my nine-year-old sister and my two-year-old brother became homeless, too. I never thought I would graduate from high school, let alone obtain a college degree. I believed I would just have to work, so that my little brother and little sister could get an education and have a chance at a good life.

As a child, I dreamed of what I would become: My mind ran from geologist to astronaut, and pretty much everything in-between. I lived a normal, everyday life. I had both my parents, and, while they would fight often, I never knew any different.

It wasn't until the violence got really bad and I started comparing my story with my friends from school that I realized my family was different. Later in life, I learned that my story was sadly more common than it should be.

Before I share my life story, I must say that I love my family, parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Life doesn't turn out in the way that we, as children, thought it would. Life throws us some harsh blows, and, without a good foundation, those blows can rock our core and cause us to behave in unacceptable ways. That's likely what happened with my parents. They possessed a young love that lacked a foundation. They didn't know how to manage stress, effectively communicate, or build a healthy relationship. They didn't know what they didn't know. Which is why I am incredibly grateful I had the opportunity to receive an education, because it has taught me so much about myself and my family, but most importantly, how to build healthier relationships with them.

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I began my college experience at Northwest Vista College in San Antonio, Texas. College was like a foreign land, and navigating the admissions process was insane, but I did it, hoping that college would be everything my educators said it would be. One teacher told me, "Roy, go to college; it will change everything!" Another said, "Roy, education will set you free!" I did not know what that meant, but I knew I wanted something different. I did not enjoy the life I was living or the way I was living it. As a street kid, I had spent two and a half years living out of my bag, and I never wanted to go back to that life again. I needed to be educated, for my life to be different, to be better!

As a street kid, I had spent two and a half years living out of my bag, and I never wanted to go back to that life again. I needed to be educated, for my life to be different, to be better!

Today I can honestly say that my educators were right: Education changes everything! It changed the way I looked at life, my family and myself. Through no fault of their own, kids like me, kids who grow up in broken homes, don't truly realize the value of education.

As an international motivational speaker, I share with educators across the globe the power and influence they have on their students' lives. In some cases, they are their students' lifeline, the key to hope, the only constant, they hold the hidden secret to a better life.

I vividly remember when I earned my business degree from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas. I was delighted to receive my diploma, but a voice in my head interrupted the feel-good factor: "Why do *you* get to achieve this? What about the other kids like you? Do *they* get the same chance?"

At that time, there were 1.6 million homeless kids in the nation. I knew that many of them were not going to be as fortunate as me, which broke my heart. Today, there are an estimated 2.1 million homeless kids in the United States. How did we go so far in the wrong direction?

At that time, there were 1.6 million homeless kids in the nation…. Today, there are an estimated 2.1 million homeless kids in the United States. How did we go so far in the wrong direction?

After graduating from college, I got my first real job, working for my mentor, Ms. Kickbusch. It's amusing: At the time, I believed that, if I just

graduated from college, everything else would fall into place. I was excited to live what I thought was going to be "the easy life." I had worked really hard to get my diploma, and now life would pay me back! I was naïve. I didn't realize I would be fighting for the rest of my life—if not for me, for others.

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One day, about three months into my employment, Ms. Kickbusch called me into her office. I walked in, armed with pen and paper. She told me I had three months left with her company, and then she would let me go.

"What did I do wrong?" I asked.

"Nothing," she replied. "You have to discover what you are supposed to do."

I was incensed. I had just graduated from college and moved to a new city. I had only just found a roommate and convinced him that I had a stable job. I had no friends, and now I had three months before I lost my job!

I went home to my roommate, Nick, and told him that I just got fired. I was distraught. I hadn't even bought bedroom furniture. I told Nick that I wasn't sure if I would stay in the city or move back home. He was apprehensive, but he did let me rent his couch. I fought so hard to leave the streets, and I was back to sleeping on a couch! This was not what I thought life was going to be after graduation.

One night, with my back sagged into the couch, I was praying to God and asking what he wanted from me. That night, I had a dream where I saw myself walking into an arena of 50,000 young people. Everyone was clapping and cheering, but it wasn't for me. It was for them, for their communities and for justice.

I woke up on the couch as my roommate came home from work early the next morning. I sat up and told him that I was going to do a tour and that I planned on being homeless for the second time in my life. He was concerned.

I explained, "I want to help kids, so I'm going to cross the country, living out of my car!"

He looked at me as if I had lost my mind.

I had a goal: to speak at any high school, middle school, shelter or organization that would open its doors, and to share my story with as many kids as possible. I would tell them not to give up, and to fight for a better life.

For the next few days, I woke up early and went to Denny's to plan my tour. After spending the day at work, I would keep planning. One day, I walked into work, and Ms. Kickbusch was in the office.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Ma'am, I work here."

She smiled. "It's Saturday… but since you're here, I might as well talk to you."

I swallowed.

"What's your exit plan?" she asked.

"Can I be honest with you?" I responded. "I want to be homeless again!"

"Excuse me?"

"I want to cross this country, living out of my car and helping kids like me. Why do *I* get to make it? What about *them*? Who's fighting for *them*?"

Why do I get to make it?
What about them*?*
Who's fighting for them?

I asked that before I knew that there are amazing board members, like one of my mentors, Mr. Sylvester Vásquez of the Southwest Independent School District, who were already thinking about kids like me.

I wasn't alone—but tell that to a 14-year-old abandoned by his parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. I wanted to find kids in similar situations and tell them not to give up.

I want to thank Mr. Vasquez, who is with us today. He is a board member for the Southwest ISD, the district I graduated from. I enrolled at Southwest High School as a third-year freshman, and, it was in that district that I finally felt seen and loved by my educators. Mr. Vasquez supported my work from the first day we met. He has mentored me and been a father figure. With that said, "Dad, I expect Christmas presents!" I'm kidding.

So, I decided to live homeless again, but this time I was homeless by choice. It wasn't because of my parents or my situation. This time, it was my decision. I wanted to be the mentor, leader, and activist that

I needed as a homeless teen. I wanted to change lives, like the mentors and families who were willing to take me and invest in me.

My first presentation on the "Homeless by Choice" tour took place at a school in South Central Los Angeles. I talked to 15 students in a classroom. I was nervous, but I poured out my heart and my hopes for those students. I was extremely nervous; I even wondered if I had made a difference—or was this just a crazy dream?

When I finished, a young man came up to me and asked if he could speak with me. Initially angry, thinking I was doing this for money, he opened up and shared that my story was essentially his story, too. I told him, "I tried to get sponsors for this journey, but I couldn't get any. I have $16 in my pocket, and I don't even know where I'm sleeping tonight."

He leaned in and hugged and thanked me. He helped me to see that students want to trust us, but their life experiences cause them to have trust issues. He wanted to know why I was there before he believed my words.

Students want to trust us, but their life experiences cause them to have trust issues.

At that moment, I decided to stop chasing sponsors for my tour, because I didn't want that to stand in the way of my message. I would have to figure out a new way of funding my tour. Three months into that six-month journey, living "Homeless by Choice" cost me $20,000 that I didn't have, but I couldn't give up on kids who were suffering like I did. I started selling everything I owned, to raise money for gas and to get to one more city, one more shelter, one more organization, one more group of kids in need. When I ran out of things to sell, I borrowed money from friends and family. I even offered to pay back everyone with interest!

At one high school presentation in Odessa, Texas, a crying woman approached me and asked if I would speak with young men at a juvenile facility there.

"Of course," I responded.

The next day, I showed up at the facility, went through the intake process, and was sent to a room with no windows. All the young men walked in, dressed in fatigues, accompanied by their drill sergeants. I tried to interact with them, but many of them snubbed me. By the end of my talk, they all shook my hand, and some even hugged me—even though their drill sergeants tried to hurry them off.

One young man stood out. He was a respectful but funny jokester. As he walked off, I asked the director, "What's he in here for?"

She looked me deep in the eye. "Murder."

Apparently, during his freshman year, his father picked him up and told him he was going to kill a man that day. His father was involved in drug trafficking and gang violence, and he figured that his son, a minor, wouldn't get in as much trouble for committing murder. So, the boy took the gun, killed the man he was told to kill, and was arrested in Texas, where he was tried as an adult. The director said that she would have to move him in two month to an adult facility, where a rival gang would likely kill him within weeks. She cried, "He's 16, and he's dead!"

I only wish someone could have stopped him before that murder, given him a voice, and told him there was a better path through life.

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After hearing that story, I knew I had to create a loftier goal. I had seen and heard too much. I had to touch the lives of at least 100,000 young people! I ended up living out of my car for two and a half years. The tour ran me over $200,000. No grants, no sponsors.

I am often asked, "Why would you do it? Why make such a sacrifice?" The truth is, I remember what it's like to hurt, to live on the street, to go hungry and feel forgotten.

Do you know how hard it is to dream when you hold your two-year-old brother in your arms, and he is crying because he is hungry? Or when your little sister asks you questions and you don't know how to answer her questions: "What's wrong with us? What did we do that was bad? Why don't they love us?" They do love us, but they're broken.

How do we become so involved in our own worlds that we can't see the struggles of others? We must all make an effort to be better people. We have to love each other more. We have to be there for each other.

Fortunately, Miss Carmen, my best friend's aunt—a woman I didn't even know—told me she could take my younger brother, but not me. "I don't have room for you," she said.

Sadly, her mentality, "No room for *you*," can be seen all over this nation.

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I remember walking Baby Ray into Miss Carmen's house. It was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. In my bag, which I called a home, I took clothes, a picture of my family, and a notepad and pen. That's all I had. At 14 years old, I wrote two letters that I wanted to be read at my funeral, half-expecting not to make it.

Many families took me in. Some were good, others expected certain things from me which were not okay.

One day, I found myself homeless in Dallas. Hungry, I snuck into a hotel, where I discovered a banquet room with tables covered in white linen, holding fancy silverware and wine glasses. I sat down at a table in the far back corner, and the wait staff brought me a plate. A woman was speaking on stage, but I was there for the meal! She talked about growing up in Laredo, Texas, as the daughter of immigrants, and how her high school counselor told her that girls like her don't make it, that girls like her just make babies. Her father insisted that she go to her counselor and demand, "Why *not* me? Why can't I have *my* dreams?"

This woman grew up to be the highest-ranking *Latina* in the Combat Support Field of the United States Army. She broke all kinds of records because she learned to ask, "Why *not* me?"

I sat there, homeless, hungry, and broken, and I asked myself the same question: Why *not* me? If she could make it, *I* can make it!

After she finished speaking, I grabbed one of her cards, made my way back to San Antonio, went straight to Ms. Carmen's house, and grabbed Baby Ray. On the bus, a voice in my head tried to convince me it was too late for me, but not for my little brother. I took Baby Ray to a lady I knew and respected: Pastor Doris. I asked if we could live in her church if we cleaned it and had it ready for her services. She said no, followed by, "You're going to live with me—but under one condition."

With fear and anger in my voice, I snapped, "What do you want?"

Sensing my brokenness, she responded kindly: "All I want is for you to go back to high school."

I enrolled at Southwest High School as a third-year freshman, and I went the whole way.

After I graduated, I continued to hear the voices of my educators in my head: "You need to continue your education. You need to go to college!"

I enrolled in Northwest Vista College, and I admit I wasn't doing so well. One day, the dean asked me, "Are you coming to our event tonight? I want you to introduce our guest speaker: Retired Lieutenant Colonel Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch." What my dean did not know, is that I had heard Ms. Kickbusch speak before, when I was a homeless teen. Her words had inspired me not to give up.

Imagine what we can do in our schools and in our districts, through the policies *you* create—just with the power of words!

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Some people fight for a better car, a bigger house, or a fatter paycheck. That's fine: Chase what you desire. My chase was for my family. I wanted to see my siblings happy again, and my parents with a smile on their faces. I didn't want them back together; trust me, they are better apart. But I wanted them to be happy.

Today, in the audience, here at MASBA, I have a special surprise for you: It's my little brother, Baby Ray, who, as you can see, is no longer a baby! I couldn't be more proud of the man he has become. He is currently doing a yearlong internship with my mentor, Retired Lieutenant Colonel Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch.

He has been given the same opportunity that I was given: A chance to learn about life from a completely different perspective. He has been traveling with her across the country from boardrooms to migrant camps. I once asked her, "Are you as hard on him as you were with me?"

She chuckled and said, "He doesn't need it. He isn't nearly as bad as you were!"

While this is true, I took it as a compliment because I have worked hard to keep him from the horrors that I had to endure as a homeless teenager—some that I do not even like to think about to this day. My siblings are the reason for everything I do. I have worked extremely hard to be

My siblings are the reason for everything I do. I have worked extremely hard to be the best example for them and for the students I serve.

the best example for them and for the students I serve.

Let me tell you about my amazing brother. When he was a kid, I promised him that he would go to middle school, high school, and college. Guess what. Baby Ray graduated with a degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio and is now completing an internship with Ms. Kickbusch. During that internship, they worked with Verizon, and the COO of Verizon fell in love with Baby Ray, and Baby Ray is now preparing to move to New York, where he'll be one of 20 Verizon Fellows.

This is why I have worked so hard for my baby brother and others like us. If you educate homeless kids, there is no stopping them! They will change the world! Growing up homeless required us to work harder. It was also a breeding ground for creativity, diversity, interpersonal communication and stress management.

If you educate homeless kids, there is no stopping them! They will change the world! Growing up homeless required us to work harder. It was also a breeding ground for creativity, diversity, interpersonal communication and stress management.

I've now crisscrossed the country, spoken to hundreds of thousands of young people, parents and educators in every state and abroad. Today I am preparing for my "Homeless by Choice" world tour, to touch the lives of as many people as possible in 19 countries. But nothing makes me more proud than to see my baby brother succeed!

As school board members, you oversee your superintendents. They oversee their principals, who oversee their teachers. If you keep going down, we, your students, are there. We are the beating hearts of your districts, but sometimes we're so scared to be seen that we go into hiding. I ask you today: Please see us, and please don't forget us!

My dreams are coming true because someone cared for me. My baby brother's dreams are coming true because someone cared for me. Kids like us need to be seen, and you have the power to make sure we are!

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Don't simply blame our parents. They're human, too, and many of them come with stories just like mine. If we want to build strong districts, they need training because they don't know what they don't know.

Don't simply blame our parents. They're human, too, and many of them come with stories just like mine. If we want to build strong districts, they need training because they don't know what they don't know.

My family decided to forgive and work towards having healthy relationships with each other. Today, we are incredibly close as a family. We love our mom and our dad—and we forgive them. We don't want them to hurt anymore.

My mentor once told me: "Roy, you can be a victim, a survivor, or a role model. We need more role models in this world." This is who and what I strive to be. Our children deserve the best role models in their districts.

To all the stakeholders that serve children, thank you for all you do. Never give up, and never stop fighting for our most vulnerable students!

Roy Juárez, Jr. is no stranger to many school districts in the San Antonio area. An international motivational speaker and the author of Homeless by Choice, *Roy was left homeless in the streets of San Antonio at age 14, having to care for his two younger siblings. He asks, "Do you know how hard it is to dream when you're homeless and holding your hungry, two-year-old brother in your hands?" Roy graduated from college in Texas and now regularly speaks with kids about not giving up on their dreams. Roy's message is one of hope, perseverance, and the power of education!*

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Reflections on the Keynote of Roy Juárez, Jr.

"We've already booked him for the Plainview ISD in August!"
—Adam Soto, Plainview ISD

"He's amazing—that he could overcome where he came from, to be on stage. For me, the most emotional moment was when his brother walked on stage with him. I thought, 'Oh my gosh, what an impact one person can make on another.' In the Grand Prairie ISD, we have 2,000 children who are identified as homeless under the McKinney-Vento Act. That's a huge population, so we implemented the Connections program to identify resources for those children and their families. It's a tough situation."
—Gloria Carrillo, Grand Prairie ISD

"One person can make a difference in somebody's life—and that can be positive or negative—but one person can make a difference."
—Randy Bates, Jr., Aldine ISD

"In the end, he loved and forgave. How many of us could do that? They really blew me away. I bought his book and have read several chapters already!"
—Gloria Torres, Gonzales ISD

"I purchased his book because I thought it was important enough for me to go home and share what I witnessed—and it was awesome!"
—Lala Chávez, Lubbock ISD

"It's interesting that Roy spoke about not being seen. On paper, you would expect everything to be okay for a student with a mom, dad and family. We don't think that such a student could possibly be homeless. Roy reminds us that we have to see every kid!"
—Robert Selders, Garland ISD

"At Winter Camp in Galveston and again at the TASB Summer Leadership Institute, two other members of the TASB Board and I will be presenting a session on dropouts. One of the big factors influencing the dropout rate is homelessness. I'll be sharing the story of a young lady who, after her grandmother died, she became homeless in the ninth grade. Her parents essentially abandoned her, and she sofa-surfed. She got into our alternative school and graduated a semester early. She had the motivation. Homelessness, though, is epidemic."

—Bill Lacy, Katy ISD

¡Los Graduados! Annual Graduates Panel

The following panel was moderated by Dr. José Leyba of the Association of *Latino* Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS) and included Eric Arrellano, Lillian Cervantes, Alejandra García, and Carolina Hernández.

Leyba: Thank you very much for allowing me to join you again here at the Mexican American School Boards Association. I'm very pleased and honored to be here with you. As a former superintendent, I know the challenges that you face—the pain and the complaints—but also the great "benefits" that you receive. I sincerely appreciate what you do. As a superintendent, I could not have done what we did for kids, like Roy, without the support of my board. During the nine years at my district, I served with 15 school board members, only one of whom stayed the whole nine years. It was always a challenge to make sure that board members understood that we were there for children. It was important for them to understand that we wouldn't always agree, but that we would always keep the best interest of students in mind. So, thank you for always keeping the best interest of students in mind!

I represent ALAS, the Association of *Latino* Administrators and Superintendents. We're a nationwide organization with 17 affiliates—we just started a new affiliate in Kansas City, Missouri. Believe it or not, we have an affiliate in Nashville, Tennessee, where a former superintendent recently said, "25% of my students are *Latino*, but we have no administrators who look like them, no one who understands English Language Learners, no one who can communicate with Spanish-speaking families." As demographics keep changing, we need MASBA to do what ALAS is doing: to branch out to other states and to help board members outside Texas to understand their role

"25% of my students are Latino, *but we have no administrators who look like them."*

in serving our children. The first *Latina* school board member was recently elected in Nashville, Tennessee. I was recently speaking with another *Latino* school board member, Jason Esteves, of Atlanta Public Schools. His district hosted a listening session for parents in English, where one Spanish-speaking parent asked, " How can we trust you when you talk about equity and social justice, but don't speak our language?"

Hopefully, you will spread the good word of what you've done during these 50 years and become a national leader. My hat goes off to all of you, for what you do.

We have a great student panel today. I'll ask our students to introduce themselves and share with us their stories. We'll start by focusing on their success. Many of our students still aren't graduating from high school and going on to higher education. Leaders like you have encouraged them. Let's have a candid conversation and ask them why they succeeded where some of their friends didn't.

First, we have Alejandra García, a criminal justice major at St. Mary's University.

We have Eric Arrellano, who will graduate from the University of Texas at San Antonio in May with a degree in Mexican American Studies.

We have Carolina Hernández, a graduate of UTSA who studied criminal justice and psychology.

And we have Lillian Cervantes, who is studying public administration and women's studies.

Tell us your story. Tell us about your family and education. Tell us why you made it, when a lot of your classmates and families members didn't.

Cervantes: I'm a San Antonio native, and growing up here, in the greatest city in the world, shaped my identity. Both my parents were elementary school teachers, so they fostered in me the value of education from an early age. I wouldn't be here without the support of my parents, grandparents, and the community that raised me, including the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center. I value

education, gender equality, and the importance of identity. I attended the Young Women's Leadership Academy in San Antonio ISD, and I recognize the privilege of having attended that school over others. In high school, I participated in programs that connected us with private school kids and those who weren't socioeconomically disadvantaged. To see the stark differences in our educations fostered my passion for educational equity and justice.

García: I'm from San Antonio, and I attended Northside ISD schools. I attended Texas Woman's University in Denton for one year. Next year, I'll graduate from St. Mary's University with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

Arrellano: I graduated from high school nine years ago, and I'm a Mexican American Studies major at UTSA—so it's taken me a while. I was born in Fort McDowell, California and raised here in Central Texas most of my life. I attended Harris Elementary School in Austin. My family then moved to Round Rock, where I finished elementary and middle school and graduated from Stony Point High School. I'll be a first-generation college graduate. Since I was little, I had the idea of going to college. At six years old, I remember being jealous of a girl who was smarter than me. It was tough growing up: My mom and dad fought all the time at home—but I knew I had to go to school and then to college. It's been a struggle to work and go to school and integrate into U.S. society.

Hernández: I grew up in Round Rock and went to the same schools as Eric: Robertson Elementary, Hopewell Middle School and Stony Point High School. My family is from *el estado de México* [Mexico state]. Round Rock was a rather wealthy, safe place, but my family had hardships. One of the reasons I made it was because of my older sister, who cleared the path for the rest of us. She was the first in our family to go to college. She taught us how to succeed, which high school years count the most for college, and how to apply and get into college.

Leyba: Our audience is comprised of school board members—the people who make the policies and run school

districts. They're responsible for the success of students of What were some of the obstacles that kept some of your family members or friends from graduating and getting to the point where you are today?

Cervantes: Fortunately, I had the support of administrators and teachers to graduate, but, as *Latino* students, we don't see ourselves in our textbooks. My school didn't offer any identity curriculum, so I didn't understand a lot about *Latino* history until I took a *Latino* Studies class in college. There's very little that compels a student to invest in their education when they can't see themselves in it, or when they have only White teachers who don't understand them or the situations they're coming from. We don't see ourselves in Christopher Columbus. I wonder how policymakers might force administrators and principals to create the environment that their students need.

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García: I was prepared by Northside ISD to go to college, but we don't see ourselves in our textbooks. We learned about Martin Luther King, Jr., but we didn't learn about civil rights leaders like César Chávez or Dolores Huerta. We weren't provided that path to see what we could be.

Arrellano: We're definitely underrepresented, not just in the textbooks, but also in staff and teachers. We don't see as many *Latino*, Mexican-American, African-American or Asian-American teachers—and that affects us. Racial biases exist. I took a test and didn't have to go to ESL, but it seemed like the students who went into ESL programs never got out of them. Many of my friends and classmates didn't even think about college. It's as if school just keeps students where they are, rather than expand their mindsets and ideas. There are also a lot of police in our schools, which is a form of intimidation for

students, especially when you're targeted as different or, in the words of Donald Trump, as "criminals and thugs."

Hernández: Our middle and high school didn't have adequate counseling services for kids with trauma and hardships. I experienced hardships at home, and I didn't get the help that I needed from counselors. Our counselors were more focused on scheduling our classes; they didn't stop to ask what was going on with us or why we weren't succeeding. One of my friends tried to go to counseling but was turned away because the counselor was too busy and had too much on her plate. There's a real disadvantage with dual language classes, too: In my experience, it's impossible to meet the needs of all students, so the English students are working on computers or tablets, while the Spanish students are sitting on the carpet and getting the attention of the teacher. One group of students is always advantaged, and the other is always disadvantaged. We need to find a way to give all students the attention they need.

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Arrellano: Unity is a big problem, too. Our schools aren't unified. There are a lot of cliques and groups: the Whites, the Blacks, and the Mexicans. That's a problem, and there's a lot of racism. I feel that our principal, counselors and staff could have done a better job helping us overcome those groups and cliques Those cthat lead to discrimination, fights, and a lot of tension. And the "opportunity centers" in school districts are often like little prisons; they're little jails, where we send students to get better. I was sentenced to one of those schools for 30 days because of a fight with another student. It's pure tension at schools like that. Nothing good comes out of those places, but I definitely saw a lot of my old friends go into them. They're a pipeline leading students to worse things.

García: It's also important for us to be really honest with students about the college admissions process and how much college costs. Many students can't afford college

application fees, let alone moving to a college in California. We need to rework the college-bound advising programs in our high schools. Those counselors won't work with kids who don't increase their college graduation percentage. They say, "We don't want to work with you." That's a big problem.

Leyba: I'm sure many of us are thinking about our high school counselor, who told us, "Don't worry about going to school. You come from 'the other side of the tracks.' You should work in construction with your *tío* [uncle]." When we speak about trauma, in my case my mother and father would come home *todo pedo* [entirely drunk] *y me pegaban* [and they used to hit me]. After trauma like that, how are we supposed to focus on learning at school? Let's switch it up: Who or what helped you become the person you are today and helped you to graduate?

Hernández: My older sister definitely was the person who helped me graduate. From a very early age, she took on the role of a "second mom" to me. She got us up in the morning, fed us, and made sure we got to school on time. As she got older, she struggled with trauma herself, and she didn't have counselors to help her through it. Also, when you grow up in a *Latino* family, you're afraid of the system. We think that we can't look for help from teachers or others because they'll take us away from our families. My older sister joined College Forward, which took her on college visits, paid for her SAT and ACT, and helped her figure out how she was going to pay for college, find a place to live, and learn about meal plans. She shared that knowledge with us and helped us apply to colleges. After I moved here, she helped with rent and food. She was the loving, caring adult in my life who helped me succeed.

When you grow up in a Latino *family, you're afraid of the system. We think that we can't look for help from teachers or others because they'll take us away from our families.*

Arrellano: I'm a product of my environment. I want to thank my mom. Seeing her go through struggles made me want to be better, so that I could one day get her out of where she

was. I would go to school every day excited by the idea of graduating and going to college and becoming a better person, so that one day I can be sitting where you're sitting, wearing those nice vests and everything. I plan to go to law school and earn my graduate degree and teach. I want to be a voice for others and help them, because I know that there are more people like me out there who are doing worse than me, with no one to help them out.

García: I grew up in a one-parent household, with just my father, so my biggest help was a counselor I had. My parents were ridiculed in school for speaking Spanish, so they decided not to teach me Spanish, and, as a result, I felt weird about my heritage. My counselor taught me to apply for schools and embrace my heritage. My dad was always working, so I was on my own. I would go to school early, to speak with my counselor.

Cervantes: It takes a village, and I knew from an early age that I was going to go to college. It wasn't an option. I was going to figure it out. The biggest person in my life outside of my family and neighbors was definitely my high school counselor. Overworked and making student schedules for my entire grade, she doubled as my college advisor. She guided me through the entire process, reviewed my resume and all my essays, and practiced interviewing skills with me. My senior year, I was accepted into ten universities. She guided me through every facet of the college application process, including financial aid. My high school is very lucky to have someone as amazing as her. That needs to be duplicated across all schools because students need that support.

Leyba: We've learned a lot today from these students, and all the persistence studies tell us that the relationship with one caring adult is what makes a difference in the success—or lack of success—of a child. We heard today of the influence of a mom, a sister and counselors. My greatest influence was my brother. He was brilliant. He was in the AP classes, while I was in the DP classes—the dumb people classes. If it hadn't been for him, I wouldn't be here with you today.

Let's take audience questions.

Audience: If you were a school board member, with the opportunity to create policy to help students, what policies would you create?

Arrellano: We definitely need more resources, more money in our schools. We need better teachers. And we need better programs and better field trips.

Cervantes: My policy would be that schools offer universal, free breakfast and lunch. Having hungry kids doesn't help anyone: It doesn't help their behavior, and it doesn't help their teachers. Some kids are starving and don't know where their next meal will come from. We also need textbooks that contain *Latino* Studies, books with more than a passing mention of César Chávez.

Having hungry kids doesn't help anyone: It doesn't help their behavior, & it doesn't help their teachers. Some kids are starving and don't know where their next meal will come from.

Hernández: I'm a psychology major, so I'm big on mental health. But We need someone on campus taking care of kids who are "on the radar." We also need programs, like Communities in Schools, to help kids thrive in the education system.

García: We need better teachers and better training for teachers, so that they're better trained to work with Mexican American students.

Leyba:Before this panel, I told our students to express their voice—and they did more than that. Let's give them a round of applause!

"¡Que Tengan la Visión de Ver Más Allá!"

Keynote by Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch

I'm reminded of my childhood, when I was trying to learn *el english*. My teacher said, "You have to write an essay." *Dije* [I said], "I know a lot of *eses*." They said, "No, an essay is a writing assignment." *Dije*, "*Oralese* [Orally]."

¡Muy buenos días! [Good morning]. *¡Qué bonito es hablar el idioma donde no te pegan los maestros por hablar el idioma nativo en el cual naciste, y cual es tu herencia, y del cual nunca vas a avergonzar!* [How beautiful it is to speak a language and know that your teachers won't beat you for speaking your native language, the language that is your heritage, and the language of which you'll never be ashamed!]

For those who don't speak *el español* [Spanish], don't worry: Those rulers worked, and I learned English! So I'll speak in English as well.

Thank God we live in a nation and have come to a time in history when a young, Brown *chicanita* [little girl] from *el Rincón del Diablo* [Devil's Corner], although she was struck with a ruler on the back of her hands for speaking her native language, for speaking proudly of her heritage, that there's a day still in this country where she can be all things, inclusive of her Spanish heritage!

Having worn a uniform to defend our freedom—not just in foreign countries, but in our own homeland—allow me to salute my brother *veteranos* [veterans]. Please stand and let a grateful nation say, "*¡Gracias!*"

When we talk about being immigrants and about how American "they" are, I know that in *mi familia* [my family], we learned that America is about *all* of us. We were ten children in my family, and eight of us are *veteranos*. I think of my own brother: His teachers didn't think he could learn, but he was brave enough to go to a place called Vietnam! He didn't need to read and write; he just needed to love his country enough to take two bullets in his hip. Don't ask me if an immigrant is brave enough to be an American! We paid that debt over and over and

Don't ask me if
an immigrant is brave
enough to be an American!
We paid that debt
over and over and over again.

over again. We cleaned everybody's house. We raised everybody's babies. It's our turn, Mexican American school board members, to step up and ask the tough question: What's happening to our children? It's your job to be the guardians and stewards who make it happen for them! *Mujeres* [women], we're strong—so *¡ésas también!* [them, too]!

I'm humorous. Can you tell? The other day, I was in *Califas* [California], and I got sick. I'm going on 66 years old. Trying to do his job, the young, *Latino* doctor asked my entire family history, and I told him, "Just give me the drugs: I'll say 'yes' to drugs today!" But he kept asking questions.

He asked, "Do you have all your teeth?"

Dije, "*¿Qué te importa* [Why does that matter]? I have most of them. *Si quieres, te muerdo* [if you want, I'll bite you]. Is that experiential enough, or do you need more empirical data?"

He laughed, and he continued with his questions. He asked, "Are you missing any limbs?"

Dije, "*Mira, mi hijito* [look, dear son], there are parts of me that leave before I get up, and I have to chase them!"

He apologized for laughing—and he continued with his questions. "Do you drink?" *Dije*, "*Mi hijito*, I live in Las Vegas. That should be self-explanatory!"

He kept going: "Are you sexually active?" *Dije*, "Do you have a referral? Are you going to give me a prescription? What makes you think that, because I'm old, I'm dead?"

Finally losing his composure, he said, "You need a therapist!"

I responded, "Don't make me get the *chancla* [sandal] out!"

At my age, you have to laugh at life.

Thank you, *mis hermanos* [my sisters and brothers], for being here. I'm grateful to all of you. I was a young *chicanita*, and I was scared. It was difficult trying to find someone who believed in me, someone who would open the door and let me speak with their *chavalitos* [kids] and teachers and share what I knew in my heart.

I'm grateful to Dr. José Ángel Gutiérrez of *La Raza Unida*, Barbara Flores, Dr. Ángela Valenzuela and others who helped us gain a richer understanding of who we are. So many of them fought in those early

Here we are, still fighting the big fight for equity and inclusion!

days to make sure that we received access—and here we are, still fighting the big fight for equity and inclusion!

The research clearly shows that children believe and aspire when they see and hear and learn from people who look like them. That doesn't mean that I don't learn from my Black brothers and my White brothers. We can learn a lot from one another—but don't think that I don't belong at the table. I still find people today who say to me, "I'd like to speak with your CEO." I reply, "Give me a second…." We're still working against mindsets and perceptions. I also get the other end of the spectrum: "*Esa chicana* [that *Chicana*]: She's preying on the poor and making money." With God as my witness, of the six million I've earned, I've given $5.4 million back to the *barrios* [neighborhoods]. I'm not ashamed to be the world's poorest millionaire! To this day, I don't think there's a better meal than three *tacos* and a Coca Cola. I don't need to eat three anorexic shrimp at a four-star restaurant for $200: Feed the shrimp, then invite me!

Our schools teach a model of individual success, and our society reinforces the things we should "want" to have. When I think about all the children that I've "adopted" through the years, like Roy and Carlos and so many others, and the hundreds of thousands of dollars that I've invested in them without an IOU—except I joke with them, "You better take care of me when I'm old and chasing the parts that have left me!" Creating wealth is *not* about you. It's about what we can do to make somebody else's life better!

Growing up in Laredo with my *papi* and my *mami*, I recall going Easter shopping one afternoon. The secondhand stores, *las segundas*, were right on the border, where international commerce happens. Farther in are the stores for the local *gente* [people]. I didn't know at the time that my parents were raising ten children on $400 a month. I was so enthralled by the display inside one store window: of a larger-than-life rabbit playing with a girl in her hat and dress. I put all ten fingers on the window, imagining how beautiful it would be to own that rabbit! The moment was shattered by a woman, who came running out of the store, yelling at my mother: "Get her greasy fingers off that window! Why do you let your child do that when you know there's nothing in this store that you can afford?"

My mother cast her eyes down and asked me, "*Mi hija, ¿qué has hecho?* [Daughter, what have you done?]" She said to the woman, "*Si me da un trapo, la limpio – y disculpe* [If you give me a rag, I'll clean it. I'm sorry]."

The woman replied, "I would never give you a rag: I'm the manager!" She turned to her custodian, *Señor Don José*, and she said, "José! Give this lady something to clean her daughter's greasy fingerprints!"

Embarrassed, Don José said, "I'll clean it."

She insisted, "No! I want *her* to clean it!"

My mother cleaned the glass, and, as we walked away, she said, "*Mi hija, ¿por qué haces eso cuando sabes que yo no tengo?* [Daughter, why do you do that when you know we can't afford it?]"

When people call me a self-made millionaire: I make money to give it to maids and janitors and children. Once when I was *en el norte, en la pisca* [in the north, where *Latinos* go to harvest], I gave a waiter a $50 tip for an $18 meal. He came to me and quietly said, "*Señora, si no sabe sumar, yo le ayudo* [Ma'am, if you don't know math, I'll help you]."

I said, "*No, mi hijo, sé sumar. Lo que no sabes es cuánto me vales tú* [No, son, I know how to add. What you don't know is how much you're worth to me]."

He cried. He told me that the restaurant owner charged him $300 per month to sleep on a cot in the kitchen. Who owned the restaurant? A *Latino*! Let's heighten our awareness of our own sense of self. Let's never forget where we come from!

I recently spent a day with Jayme, the amazing leader of this organization, and his beautiful mother. He's an intellect, a genius, but he never forgot where he came from. He's one person. We need to follow his lead and synergize our energy. We can't be *celosos* [jealous] and *envidiosos* [envious]. We're finally at the table: Let's act like we own it!

We can't be celosos
and envidiosos.
We're finally at the table:
Let's act like we own it!

When you're searching for a superintendent or administrator, make sure equity is foremost on your mind! And if you have a *Latino* superintendent, support him or her! Don't be one of those trustees who say, "I got you your job—and now you owe me!" *¿Qué es eso?* [What's that about?] Work with them, coach them, mentor them. The

research tells us it takes five to eight years for a school district to achieve consistent excellence.

I've been in 1,000 school districts now. Superintendents cry and tell me they were never given a chance. They tell me their boards expected miracles.

We are here for a reason: to serve others. And I'm at a point in my life where I don't care if I'm politically incorrect. I see school board members "asleep at the wheel." Our children are hurting. How could Carlos go undiagnosed for 23 years? Why did Roy have to hide and attend four high schools before finding a Ms. Barrera? I thank my five daughters for accommodating their lives to an activist. I'm grateful to my White husband. I told him from day one: "I will never give you my life, but I will share my life with you. Don't ever try to change me, and don't ever complain that my community is at the heart of who I am. The day that you give me an ultimatum, you already know the answer." He's put up with this *chicanita* for 29 years—and he knows that I am one with my people. I am one with *mi gente*.

I see school board members "asleep at the wheel." Our children are hurting. How could Carlos go undiagnosed for 23 years? Why did Roy have to hide and attend four high schools before finding a Ms. Barrera?

We need to stop and ask ourselves why our school districts are still struggling with the issues of equity and inclusion. Why do we still have magnet schools—"star schools"—at the expense of other schools? I'll be controversial: Why in the world would you put a magnet school in a *barrio* if no students from that *barrio* can attend the school? Let's put an end to this "show"! Let's stop bragging about our districts having Advanced Placement courses when our *Latino* students still have the lowest participation in those courses and when we don't have *Latino* teachers teaching those courses!

Let's stop bragging about our districts having Advanced Placement courses when our Latino students still have the lowest participation in those courses and when we don't have Latino teachers teaching those courses!

Challenge your districts! Ask, "What's going on here?" Tell them, "I don't want a single magnet school. I want *all* our schools to be magnets, so that our students don't have to be bused out of their barrios, to

other schools!" I challenge you to be unpopular by asking the most uncomfortable questions about our kids! Our kids weren't born dumb; they had watered-down curricula! Our kids are brilliant, and our *barrios* teach success at the Ph.D. level! Neurology is finally catching up with the idea that poverty is not a deficit. Finally, the brain people are saying, "Oh, my God, these people *are* smart!" They say, "We need to think 'outside the box.'" I never had a box! I had to make my own fricking box! Ikea and Tupperware had nothing on us. Remember the chickens in the *gallinero* [hen house]? We created Whole Foods: there was nothing synthetic in our diet!

People say to me, "You were lucky." I say, "No, *all* our kids are blessed! All our kids have potential!"

Roy talked about being tough. He is tough. All the kids I've taken in have been tough. I tell them they're the reason I have to work miracles on my hair every two weeks. But they were worth it. With children who are traumatized and wounded, we need to meet them where they're at, not where we want them to be.

We don't have to fix the kids; we have to fix the adults*!*

Midway through my career of serving children, I came to a realization: We don't have to fix the kids; we have to fix the *adults*! After that realization, I changed the direction of my life, to work with families. The Family Leadership Institute will be my legacy. It will be my last effort at equity and inclusion. We're the only model in the nation to this day that brings school board members, superintendents, teachers and parents together—and we say, "leave your title at the door." Educators are sometimes uncomfortable sitting with parents. We work systemically and holistically at social and emotional learning, inspiration and motivation, so that parents can believe that college is for their kids. And our *familias* experience true healing.

I love to tell the story of a high-ranking administrator who came to our Family Leadership Institute and saw her table mates. She had three Ph.D.'s, and she said, "I'm just saying this out of respect for our parents: I think I'll make them uncomfortable."

I replied, "That's just your intrinsic bias talking. If, after one day, you don't appreciate the wisdom of these women who just came out of the fields, no worries: I'll refund your money, and you can go back to Colorado with your narrow views."

She agreed to stay for a day. During our ten-module approach, something touched her heart, and she broke down and shared with the mothers that her son was in rehab. He received "the best of the best" and was now a heroin addict. One of our mothers from *la raza* hugged her and said, "*Ay, Señora, lo que usted no hizo, es lo que hago todos los días: Les digo que son los hijos más bellos del mundo*." This Spanish-speaking mother said to the highly-educated woman: "I dare to tell you that what you have failed to do is to be emotionally present in the life of your son. I don't have a big house like you do. In fact, I live in an unfinished garage, and my children are close by, and I tell them that, even though they get the best of me—they make me so mad!—but at the end of the day, they kneel before me, and I bless them, and I tell them they're the best gift God ever gave me. If you love your son, go, tell him that you have failed him."

The next day, I was ready to refund her money. She said that she called her son the night before, and said what the parents told her to say, and her son replied, "I've been waiting for you to say that for twenty years! You were always too busy in pursuit of your success, and you forgot that I was just a child."

Our *barrio* needs to look inside and heal from within. We need to reach out to the students who are depressed and thinking of suicide. We need to help those families that struggle with secrets. We need to hear the wisdom of that *machista* father who recently said to us at the Family Leadership Institute, "*Señora, es que yo no sabía que, si a mi hijo no le digo que lo amo, alguien más me lo va a robar*." He cried as he realized that by not hugging his children and talking with his sons, he risked losing them to something like prison. I've worked with incarcerated children, and 100% of the babies I've served all wished for a *Latino* father to hug them just once and say, "*Te amo* [I love you]."

I work with *Latina* girls who have issues with their mothers. Many of them are now young moms. They say, "She never loved me. She only pulled my hair. She always made me take care of all the other kids. She never thought that I could play with dolls."

As school board members, we need to bring the answers before the problems. We have to be progressive and aggressive in helping our children. If we take care of their hearts, their brains will do their job.

As school board members, we need to bring the answers before the problems. We have to be progressive and aggressive

in helping our children. If we take care of their hearts, their brains will do its job. Neurology has proven that things don't go from the brain to the heart, but from the heart to the brain. I hear teachers say, "I didn't go to school to be a psychologist or a psychiatrist. I've got to *teach* them!" I say: "Love them first, and you won't ever have to teach them. They'll want to learn because of their relationship with you!" If you're in a relationship with *Latino* children, they will never fail you because you are *familia*.

This room needs to have an equal number of people under 45! I hope every MASBA member takes a pledge to go and find that school board member under 45.

I'm about to get annoying: How many of us in this room are younger than 45? What's wrong with this picture? This room needs to have an equal number of people under 45! I hope every MASBA member takes a pledge to go and find that school board member under 45. They may not know that they're going to be the next school board member. Take them under your wing and say, "Don't make me pick up the *chancla!* I'm going to share my 40 years of experience, I'm going to work on your campaign, and I'm going to make sure you get elected. Come to my house tonight, and you're going to learn how to be a school board member!" That's how we ensure that the pipeline of equity and justice endures!

When the Pentagon, called me and said, "Colonel, you're going to make history: You're going to be a battalion commander and a general in two months. The world is going to learn about you through CNN!" I immediately recognized that there wasn't an eligible *Latina* to fill my spot for three years. That was a problem—and I could be a solution! We need to find our successors, and we need to inspire the next generation. We have to nurture and grow our own. Let's share the knowledge that we've gained during these years of speaking up!

In 1948, my parents moved north, and no one gave them a place to live. For six years, they lived in a boxcar. My parents and four brothers made it their home. We come from visionary people who invented and created for thousands of years but weren't written about. In a boxcar that had no windows, my mother wanted to put up curtains. My *papi*, a typical *Chicano*, thought, "*¿Qué tiene la vieja?*"—which means "darling" in English. (Try it; it'll keep your marriage strong!) My father and a co-worker from the steel mill soldered pipes, and my mother hung curtains. My father finally worked up the

courage to ask my mother why she wanted curtains. She said, "*Aquí me trajiste*. You brought me here. *Aquí voy a tener mis hijos*. I will raise my children in this boxcar. *Pero aquí no se queda la historia de los Castillo*. But this is not where the story and legacy of the Castillo's will end. *Mis hijos irán a algo mucho más mejor.* My children will strive and excel. *Porque yo quiero que tengan la visión de ver más allá*. I want my children to look beyond these steel walls!"

MASBA, look beyond the steel walls. It's in your hands to be thinking about raising up that next generation of leaders to support our *Latino* children. If you're thinking of retiring from the school board in a year, don't—until you make sure that the person who will sit in your chair looks like us and understands us from firsthand experience. Let's find them. Let's encourage them to come to the table!

Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch is known throughout the nation as one of the most passionate and charismatic Latina *voices on leadership. A native of a small barrio in Laredo, Consuelo overcame poverty, discrimination and illiteracy, to become the highest-ranking* Latina *in the Combat Support Field of the United States Army. One of* Hispanic Business Magazine's *"100 Most Influential Hispanics in America," Consuelo has since dedicated her life to empowering a new generation of* Latinx *leaders, and she has worked with over one million "diamonds in the rough" and their parents through Educational Achievement Services, a company she founded in 1994. Consuelo founded the Family Leadership Institute, a multi-faceted educational program focused on providing* Latinx *immigrant families with knowledge, tools and inspiration to help their children succeed in school and life.*

MASBA, look beyond the steel walls.
It's in your hands to be thinking about
raising up that next generation of leaders
to support our Latino *children.*

Reflections on the Keynote by Consuelo Castillo Kickbusch

"I've heard Consuelo speak before, and she's dynamic. I want somebody like her to come and speak to our teachers at convocation!"

—Gloria Carrillo, Grand Prairie ISD

"Consuelo is amazing. This is the third time I've heard her, and every time I say, 'Wow!' She came to our convocation in August, and all our employees loved her. A self-made millionaire, she does flash the 'bling-bling.' I don't know if you've talked with her: She won't shake your hand; she's a hugger!"

—Trustee Adam Soto, Plainview ISD

"This was my third time hearing Consuelo. I had the privilege of introducing her at a TASB conference a few years ago. Her convictions are as high as you could want, and she lives them. She takes in these kids and insists that they enroll in school. She's really smart, and she lives what she believes!"

—Charles Stafford, Denton ISD

"Consuelo is very real. You can easily relate to her. My biggest takeaway was: 'I don't have a box'!"

—Dr. Ninfa Cadena, Carrizo Springs ISD

"Our motto at Lubbock ISD is 'Every Child, Every Day.' Consuelo doesn't say that, but it's exactly what she's telling us!"

— Lala Chávez, Lubbock ISD

"Consuelo is awesome. Whatever she puts forward is what she lives. She shows it in her love for the kids. You can feel her passion!"

—Gloria Torres, Gonzales ISD

"Consuelo reminded me that we have to meet traumatized kids and kids who are hurt where they are, and not where we want them to be. We have to do the things that they need."

—Robert Selders, Garland ISD

"Consuelo encouraged those whom she helped to 'pay it forward.' That just builds. That's the challenge we have as trustees: to raise up children in our districts who are socially-conscious and who are reaching out and pulling up others."

— Elton Foster, Royal ISD

Three Fundamental Questions

La Campana Keynote by Dr. José Ángel Gutiérrez

One of the benefits of being a college professor or teacher is that you have a class and you can continue conversations from one class to another. We'll get the conversation started today, and maybe I can finish when you invite me back the next time!

I've written several books, but one of them is *A Chicano Manual on How to Handle Gringos*. You've got to call a spade a spade. At the beginning of that book, I propose that we teach the answers to three fundamental questions, so that we can become fully human and contribute to humankind.

Question #1: How does the world work? 90% of the population doesn't know how the world works. They spend their lives trying to figure out how to survive from one day to the next. They're not thinking of voting and issues. They're thinking about how to put food on the table. In South Texas, unemployment has been between 37% and 39% for decades. Seven or eight percent of people proceed to the next question.

Question #2: How do I make the world work for me? It's not about *us*. It's not about group cohesion. It's not about us working in solidarity to fix the world. It's about *me*. The last two or three percent come to the third question.

Question #3: How do *I* make the world? Those are the doers. Many of you, those who have adopted a social justice agenda as part of your consciousness. If you're not going to make the world better, why are you breathing my air?

If you're not going to make the world better, why are you breathing my air?

That motivation has inspired me for the longest time. You'll find my story in MASBA's new history book, on pages 10 to 16. There's more to that story. It didn't happen by magic.

The basis of our contemporary civil rights movement was led by students, and when the students led, the so-called "leaders"

followed. There were well over 300 school walkouts in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s. To this day, there's no database or documentation on where they were. Nobody knows! In Texas, we had over 50 walkouts—and nobody knows about them. It's tragic. At one of the first walkouts, the kids were expelled forever. They paid the price, and we enjoy the benefit.

Uvalde is the hometown of former Vice President John Nance Garner, III. At the beginning of his career, he served as the U.S. Congressman from Brownsville to Laredo. Former Texas Governor Dolph Briscoe was also born in Uvalde. Only three years ago, Uvalde CISD was removed by court order from the list of districts that still had not desegregated. That's the mentality of the people who've been running the government there, from the top to the bottom. They haven't disappeared. They're still there.

We advised the kids of Uvalde not to walk out. You know how it is: You tell your children not to do something, and they do it! We warned them: "If you walk out, they will flunk you. The guys will go to Vietnam, and the girls will never go to college." They didn't listen. In April, they walked out. Ruth Webb, the woman in charge of the Selective Service Board in Uvalde drafted all those boys for compulsory service. If you weren't in school, you were at the top of the list. Every one of those *Chicanitos* was sent to Vietnam within months. Before the summer was over, they were out of basic training and facing bullets in Vietnam. 90% of those young boys died in Vietnam. That was when we of Mexican origin were only 4% of the population in the United States—but we were 26% of the casualties in Vietnam!

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I came from the walkout in *Cristal* [Crystal City]. That was a success story. We used to wear our "merit badges," our buttons, as a symbol of solidarity. You didn't have to ask people if they were *Chicano*. You just looked for the buttons, which were a symbol of our solidarity. At the bottom of the MAYO button, the yellow one here, were the words *La Raza Unida*. We were organizers. We didn't start in the middle of the alphabet. We had to start with A,

how the world works, in order to get to Z, how *we* make the world. We already had the slogan, *La Raza Unida*, when we were doing the walkouts and encouraging people to take the risk, to take the gamble and win. You don't have to have a political party to run for non-partisan offices, but you do for higher offices. So, we formed our own political party and ran in four counties, including Hidalgo, San Juan. We ran 16 candidates and won 15 races. Before you knew it, we had spread like wildfire and were in 17 states and the District of Columbia. In 1976, we elected a school board member in Washington, D.C.: Frank Shaffer-Corona of the Adams Morgan School District.

We were derailed by the Democrats, the dictatorship party in the South from the Civil War until 1994. They were *the* party in the South, and you could vote for them, against them, or not vote. And *la raza* had to pay the poll tax. We were young, but smart. We knew that, in order to win the primary for that one-party dictatorship, you needed 50% plus one vote. But whoever gets the most votes in November wins it all. We said, "Let's just run in November! If we create a political party of our own, the opposition of 60% will divide—30% and 30%--and we'll win with the remaining 40%! That idea spread all over the country, and we were derailed by the Democratic Party, which accused us of taking votes away from them and helping Republicans.

We are here because of the walkouts. That was the beginning of educational reform.

We are here because of the walkouts. That was the beginning of educational reform. There were only a handful of cities—particularly in the Valley and in border cities through El Paso—that had school board members who were *mexicanos*. There were even fewer *mexicanos* serving in universities—and those that did were not from Texas. That's what led to the meeting alluded to in MASBA's book, where the National Task Force *De La Raza* brought together school board members in one corner of a room and university professors in another corner of the same room, and MASBA and TACHE—the Texas Association of *Chicanos* in Higher Education—were born. José Cárdenas, the first *Chicano* superintendent of Edgewood ISD was there. He became superintendent there as a result of the walkouts. In all the

walkouts—from California, to Lansing, Michigan, to Denver, Colorado, to Crystal City and Edcouch-Elsa—we said, "We want *Chicano* teachers, *Chicano* personnel, *Chicano* administrators, *Chicano* food in the cafeterias, and *Chicanos* in our books! We want to know about *us*—and not just about *you*! José Cárdenas was only the fifth *Chicano* superintendent in the entire state. Before my term was over, we received a grant from the Carnegie Foundation to train superintendents. We said, "We don't want *your* superintendents. We want *Chicano* superintendents! We need to tell *our* story, we need to shape *our* destiny, we need to be the ones who govern!" We wanted to make the world!

"We don't want your *superintendents.*
We want Chicano *superintendents!*
We need to tell our *story,*
we need to shape our *destiny,*
we need to be the ones who govern!"

We'll stop our history lesson there, and we'll pick it up when you invite me back. Now let's talk about what MASBA ought to be doing during the next few years.

Next Monday, last Thursday's Supreme Court ruling will take effect across our nation that immigrants cannot receive medical services. This will be enforced by the Department of Homeland Security and other police agencies. You have kids in your schools who are citizens, but their parents are immigrants. If the flu or the coronavirus comes to your school, no one will be able to treat the parents of those students.

Last Thursday, a Californi judge awarded $54 million to parents who sued their local school district for not teaching their kids how to read. School board members and superintendents, you're liable—at least in California, and that was a federal case. That's coming, too.

Redistricting is also coming. It's a touchy subject, especially for our sisters and brothers in the Valley, who run large districts but still demand single member districts. The Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965, but a court determined that it was applicable only to four southern states with Blacks. We had to fight for ten more years, until 1975, to get it extended. You need to know about

Modesto Rodríguez: He was the only *Chicano* from Texas who went to D.C. to testify to extend the Voters Rights Act to cover us, as a language minority. When he returned home the following weekend, he was beaten so badly that he didn't recover for months and he ultimately died from those injuries.

These are real stories, hidden stories that not even your teachers and superintendents know.

We're not talking fiction here. This is not the remake of a fiction novel. These are real stories, hidden stories that not even your teachers and superintendents know. I hope that you push your legislators to sanction school board members who don't attend continuing education.

Every time MASBA gathers for its annual conference, it needs to share a top ten list of the most recent books written about us, people of Mexican origin. I didn't say *Latinos*, I didn't say Hispanics, and I didn't say *Latinx*. We are 64% of the Spanish-speaking population in the United States—and we're making a lot of babies. The U.S. in U.S.A. is *us,* people of Mexican origin! Don't you think that you ought to read those books? Don't you think that your superintendents, principals and teachers should read those books,, too? Shouldn't we know the latest books about us? We still have only two publishing houses that print our material: *Arte Público* Press at the University of Houston and Bilingual Review Press in Arizona. It behooves us to read books about us, written by us! We have a distinguished writer here, Professor Emilio Zamora, who will surely echo this and say, "You need to know what we're writing about!" Come to our next session, to hear some of the lies people have told about us in the past. They're still telling them! That's the fight at the moment: that we want Mexican American Studies—but there's no textbook, so we get all sorts of people who don't know what the hell they're talking about who write textbooks that we don't like! Don't stop there: You should also get to know the top ten recent documentaries about us!

It's time for us to "B" free—and I'm not talking about the five B's of *la raza*: bingo, *bautizos*, *bodas*, *bailes y barbacoa*. I'm talking about bilingual: *Puedo hablar el español correctamente*. Biliterate. *Leer*. And bicultural. Live it! You can't just say "*Chicano* power"—and

not know how to spell it or what it means. It's about doing, being a doer, making a change, and having a social justice agenda.

Those are my recommendations for you. Our books were here two centuries before there was English on this continent. Our history doesn't start at Plymouth Rock or Jamestown. How many teachers look at our kids and say, "*You* were here before we were; there was a *Spanish* America before there was an English America"? How many teachers help our kids to understand that we're not all "illegal aliens"?

Our very existence is resistance, and I applaud you for that!

A co-founder of the Mexican American Youth Organization and organizer of school walkouts, Dr. José Ángel Gutiérrez was elected to the Crystal City ISD Board of Trustees in 1970 and was instrumental in MASBA's founding shortly thereafter. A professor emeritus at The University of Texas at Arlington, Dr. Gutiérrez played a role in the founding of such organizations as the Intercultural Research Development Association (IDRA), the Raza Unida *Party, and the National Association for* Latino *Elected & Appointed Officials (NALEO).*

How many teachers
look at our kids and say,
"You *were here before we were;*
there was a Spanish America before
there was an English America"?

Reflections on Keynote Luncheon by Dr. José Ángel Gutiérrez

"I was impacted by the consequences that many of the people faced as a result of the walkouts. We take them for granted, thinking that they continued on their merry ways. I didn't realize that many of those students were drafted and killed in Vietnam—just because they had the audacity to walk out!"

—Dr. Ninfa Cadena, Carrizo Springs ISD

"We have to remember that we're all standing on the backs of others, on a foundation that others have laid. We need to build on it and be the 'backs' for those behind us!"

—Elton Foster, Royal ISD

"Generationally, we keep getting farther away from those people on whose backs we stand. We need to not let ourselves as a culture and as community forget the 'backs' that we're on. As each generation goes, we forget. Our children and grandchildren didn't live that history. We have to remind people. History may not be pretty, but we need to remember where we've been!"

—Bill Lacy, Katy ISD

"I'll remember from this keynote the three things we need to become: bilingual, biliterate and bicultural!"

—Brenda Rocha, La Vega ISD

"I work with Dr. Gutiérrez at our Dallas law office, and I hadn't seen him in the context of being a professor. He has a deep knowledge of the history, and it's important that we know our history. Where do we come from, and how will we get to where we're going? In the Grand Prairie ISD, where 68% of our students are Hispanic and 17% are Black, I'm excited by all the studies that we're bringing into our elementary schools. It's really important for our students to know their history!"

—Gloria Carrillo, Grand Prairie ISD

"Anti-Racism Perspectives on Education Justice!"

Alycia Castillo, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition
Eric Ramos, Austin ISD Teacher
Emily Sawyer, Austin ISD Parent
Ali Takata, Austin ISD Parent
Bella García, San Antonio ISD Student Coalition
Vincent Tovar, MASBA Associate Executive Director
Host & Moderator

How does an anti-racist mindset with a focus on education justice affect and inform decisions on issues such as school choice, integration, discipline, and distribution of resources? How do our choices and institutional structures perpetuate injustice and disparities in educational systems? How might we move toward justice and power for those who need it most? Join us for a spirited conversation on anti-racism and education justice!

Tovar: My name is Vincent Tovar. I'm a parent and former teacher of the Austin ISD. I now serve as Associate Executive Director of MASBA. In our general session, Roy mentioned the word "racism," but the word that we haven't yet heard during this conference is "anti-racism." We're here to discuss and analyze that word in the context of education and in the context of equity—in curriculum, training, discipline, dress codes, construction, and other areas. Ibram Kendi defines anti-racism as interrupting any practices that predictively and disproportionately have negative impacts on people of color.

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I now invite our panelists to introduce themselves and to tell us about their role in their community and the issues they're most passionate about when they view education through the lens of anti racism.

Ramos: I'm Eric Ramos. I'm a middle school history teacher in the Austin ISD. I view my role as a teacher through a social justice lens, always asking myself what I can do for our students inside the classroom and in the public sphere—at school board meetings and on district committes.

Sawyer: I'm Emily Sawyer. I am a parent in the Austin ISD. I have five students who attend Austin ISD schools. I am interested in how to engage parents on our role in creating a more equitable and just education system by thinking about what we, as parents, are asking of our schools and our school systems.

Taksta: I'm Ali Takata, and I'm also an AISD parent. I have two children in elementary school. One of the things that's important to me is how White and privileged parents show up in predominantly Black and Brown spaces. In the context of school integration, do they show up with an agenda of building community, or with their own agenda of what's best for *their* kid? That's the angle that I come at this work with.

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Castillo: My name is Alycia Castillo. I am the Youth Justice Policy Analyst for Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. We are an advocacy agency that's dedicated to ending mass incarceration. My work is focused on youth justice. I'm working with the juvenile justice system. We know that there are stark disparities all across the criminal justice system; that's no different in youth justice. More recently, I've been working on the link between school justice and the criminal justice system.

García: My name is Bella García. I'm a senior in the San Antonio ISD and a member of the San Antonio ISD Student Coalition. I'm really big on student voice, on representing yourself as an individual, and on representing your community. My big thing is making decisions *with* youth, instead of *for* them.

Tovar: Emily, Ali and I recognize that we are privileged, but we send our kids to schools that would be considered "bad schools" with "bad kids." Eric teaches at a "bad" middle school. My first question is for Emily and Ali: What motivated you to send your kids to schools that aren't chosen by other privileged parents for their children?

Takata: I have two daughters, and, after three years in our segregated, White, overprivileged, neighborhood school, I decided to transfer them to a public school "on the other side of town." Their school is now predominantly Black and Brown, and 89% economically disadvantaged. We are an Asian, mixed family. I'm Japanese and Italian; my husband is Sri Lankan. So, our girls are mixed, and they will be a minority wherever they go. This has been one of the best decisions that we've made. In the context of school integration, I feel it's super important for me to always be aware of my privilege, of my position at the school with other parents, how I show up, and how I talk to administrators. I'm aware that my girls will be pushed up the proverbial "ladder" more than other kids. It's my work to be sure they're not privileged in that environment.

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Sawyer: I have four sons in elementary school, and they attend a school that's about 50/50, a mix of economically-disadvantaged and privileged families. That school has undergone quite a transition in the last few years: from being predominantly economically-disadvantaged, Black and Brown, and now it's becoming less so. I see that transition, and I notice the ways that the privilege of Whiteness and the privilege of being economically advantaged quickly becomes normative in a space. I see it as my responsibility to *not* be a part of that transition into the normativity of Whiteness and privilege. Like Ali, I ask how I can show up in a space and not take

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over that space. As a White, upper-middle-class woman, I walk into very few rooms where I don't feel comfortable and welcomed. I have to be mindful not to take over spaces where everyone needs to feel comfortable. Part of my choice in sending my children to schools where everyone is not White and privileged is that I want them to grow up knowing what it feels like to *not* be the norm. There's a lot of underlying work, though, and I have to help my kids understand why environments are the way they are.

Tova: How have Black and *Latinx* parents approached you or responded to you coming into what might be considered "their" schools?

Takata: My family has been welcomed, and I really am mindful about how I act and what I choose to do, particularly at PTA meetings. It's about "stepping back." I'm not interested in taking over spaces or imposing what I think the PTA should do, or how much money we should raise. It's my job to be part of the community and support the community, which means really shelving what might be important to *me*, because I'm part of the community.

Sawyer: I agree. We have been extremely welcomed into our schools, really brought into the family and made to feel like a part of the fabric of the community. It's really special to me. I also see it as my responsibility not to take advantage of that. Vincent has really helped me figure out how to navigate a lot of that, to accept criticism, and to listen and really hear without imposing my ideas for what makes sense onto a place that I'm learning about and don't fully understand. It's been a wonderful experience for me, and I want to make sure that I'm doing the best I can to make it a wonderful experience for the folks that have welcomed us and made us feel a part of it.

Takata: The people in our school community have no reason to trust me, yet I'm part of their community. It's really incumbent on me to prove it. Some of us in this

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integrated community say we need to "show up, shut up and stay put."

Tovar: You already have access. Your kids are already considered "good," so you can step back and help support those who are considered "bad." "School choice" is a phrase we often hear. Privileged parents choose privileged schools or schools where there's a critical mass of privileged kids. With the lack of affordability in Austin, we're seeing a lot of underprivileged schools now receiving a lot more privileged families as underprivileged families are priced out of neighborhoods. Eric is a teacher at Martin Middle School, which is over 95% Black and Brown, with 25% of nearly 600 students identified as Special Ed. A lot of Black and Brown kids come from other parts of the city, where they're not treated well in "privileged" schools, where the staff doesn't look like the students. Eric, what have you noticed as a teacher?

Ramos: In addition to what you've said, 30% of our kids are English Language Learners, and many kids are under-identified for Special Ed. "Bad schools" and schools with "bad kids" need special training, to change the mindsets of teachers. If a teacher has the mindset of "I'm glad you're here! It's a new day! Let's go!", there's not a "bad kid" in that class! Some teachers do this naturally; others need training.

At Martin, we're starting to see an influx of more privileged families, partially because of our new Innovation Academy, but also because of gentrification and the neighborhood where the school is located. We're now seeing a bigger divide between those kids who are considered "better" and who label other students as "really bad." They come from privileged environments, and they don't understand and respect where other students come from. They don't understand that not all students are the same. They don't understand that walking around in the back of

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the room during class doesn't make a student "bad"—but that maybe that student lives in a small house and needs the space to walk around.

A lot depends on campus administrators. They influence the environment of teacher and students. They influence whether teachers feel safe approaching them for help and without fearing retribution.

Tovar: During our panel of graduates, we heard graduates say, "We need better teachers" and "We need better training." In underprivileged schools, we train our teachers—then they leave in two years. Then we train the new teachers—and they leave in two years! The turnover is high. Most schools in a district pay teachers the same, so teachers will choose to work in schools where the work is not so difficult, where you don't have to prepare tacos for kids like Roy, whose bellies aren't full. There's an inequity there. Let's get a student perspective.

García: I attend an all-girl school, a public charter school. For the past seven years, since middle school, I've been part of this close-knit community of all girls, and I've literally grown up with them. I recognize my educational privilege, and I see schools and students labeled as "good" or "bad." The "good" students are the faces on our websites. As a student organizer, my main priority is making sure that "good kids" aren't the face of the movement. We've been working on a Student Bill of Rights for a district that is 81% economically disadvantaged. We're a low-income school district. We need to make sure that all schools have teachers that invest their time in their students, as the teachers at my school do. We need to ensure that all schools are telling students "You can go anywhere," rather than set the bar at community college. We unfairly label students and schools, and it's hard for students to detach from such labels. We need to give students voice. We need to hear their perspectives. We

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need to give them a platform and the opportunities to determine their future.

Tovar: A lot comes down to the idea of superior and inferior groups. In order to feel better than somebody else, you have to create another category of people, based on money, skin color or where they live. In order for to have "great schools," we have to have "really bad schools." We "need" greatschools.org to assign stars to schools and report which schools have the highest test scores—because those are the "best schools." My daughter is 13. Last year, when she was in the seventh grade at a magnet school, her teacher asked about the high school attendance zones of her students. She said, "You'll go to Anderson. That's a great school," or, in my daughter's case, "You'll go to Eastside Memorial High School. That's a low-performing school." That's the narrative at her middle school. It's like telling one student, "You get this cool shirt and new Jordans," while you tell another students, "You get this stained shirt!"

Sawyer: How telling that it's such a part of our culture that the teacher felt comfortable saying that in front of all her students, not necessarily knowing where they were from or how it would make students feel. That teacher said it as if that's the way it's always been, and that's the only way it ever will be.

Ramos: There was no sense that she shouldn't say that.

Audience: I'm a school administrator, and I see that in the schools visited by our administration. Central Office will visit a "good school" 22 times during the year, but they'll only visit a high school that's not excelling twice. It's alarming, and it keeps becoming more and more skewed.

Tovar: In the Austin ISD, we see the schools that have fine arts and performing arts centers versus the schools that have career tech and technical education. Now let's see how Alycia's words play into all this.

Castillo: I'm so glad that you guys are so excited about this issue. I wrote a report on reversing the school-to-prison pipeline in Texas. I interviewed administrators, teachers and

students all across Texas, and a lot of folks were fired up about this issue. Many feel really discouraged, as if these institutionalized, systemic problems are insurmountable. They feel like throwing in the towel, but they continue to fight to make a difference. It's really encouraging.

The little ones in our classes are overwhelmingly Black and Brown students, and one particular problem we're seeing is the adultification of Black girls. Nationally, Black girls are six times more likely than White girls to be suspended from school and three times more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system than White girls. Georgetown Law did a study on this. They surveyed thousands of people to find out why this is happening. They heard views that little Black girls are less deserving of nurturing, support and education, and are more likely to be sexualized. There are so many things that people believe are intrinsic to Black girls. Looking at your faces, I can see that you're as shocked about this as I was. It sounds so bogus. We've interviewed Black girls and asked them, "What do you think we need to do to fix this?" They say we need to bring awareness to this problem and educate our teachers and our staff about it. That's what they feel will fix it.

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Audience: It seems we're more aware of the things that have always been happening and are now beginning to have uncomfortable and sometimes really ugly conversations on the resurgence of racism. What's your perspective on that?

Castillo: I agree. These ideas have always been there, but now we have the tools to act on them. In the 1980s, we had the Gun Free Schools Act, which allowed schools to bring more police into our classrooms and schools. Then we had some really tragic incidences, like the Columbine shooting, which resulted in zero tolerance for willful defiance, which was never clearly defined in codes of conduct. It

gave administrators and teachers wiggle room to suspend or expel students for "willful defiance," which could be a simple dress code violation—and we know that dress codes are extremely biased, especially against girls. This has led to the rise of tools for dealing with racism.

Tovar: We have to be watchful of punitive practices, versus supportive practices. To use Eric's example, if a kid is walking in the back of the classroom without being disruptive, why not be supportive, rather than punitive? At Martin, I've noticed a lot of kids wearing hoodies, even when it's hot outside. A lot of traumatized kids wear them over their heads, like a turtle shell, and, for some teachers, that leads to blaming and punishment. These are often the same kids that get worksheet after worksheet while students in other schools participate in fine arts programs and are writing screenplays. Eventually our kids get tired and act out.

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Ramos: It's a problem when you're investing more in student resource officers and in-school suspension, than in programming and options for kids. We're being reactive, rather than proactive. The fact that we invest so much in the punishment of kids is an issue.

Castillo: We're now working on a report to legislators on the implementation of restorative justice in schools. We're making the case for funding restorative justice programs, which is difficult in Texas, since it's seen as a softer approach on crime. When explaining alternatives to the historically-punitive approaches to school discipline, we note that we're *not* going soft on kids. Restorative justice is actually a more rigorous and accountable way to teach kids social and emotional learning. When there's an

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incident, we sit down with those involved and ask, "What happened? What's the story here? Who were the actors? What was the context?" We find out all the parts, and we determine who needs to be held accountable—and we hold those folks accountable to one another. Sometimes it's a conversation between a student and a teacher. Sometimes it's between teachers, or between teachers and administrators. Conversations are happening, and it's restorative and holistic. Context matters, and we're redefining discipline, which doesn't need to be a dirty word. Our children don't come out of the womb knowing how to behave, which is why the social and emotional learning component of the TEKS are so important and shouldn't be thrown out the window.

Sawyer: My oldest student is an eighth-grader, and he attends a school that's majority Black and Brown. I find that I need to have conversations with him, since he may think that Black and Brown kids behave worse. He keeps to himself and generally does what he's supposed to do, so he gets a lot of leeway at school that other kids don't get. So, it could seem natural to him that Black and Brown kids just behave worse. It's imperative for me to explain the context and the history that creates environments like that. As a parent, I try to think about what I'm asking of the school system: of administrators, of the superintendent and of the school board. I try to flip the question back on them: "How can you hold *me* responsible for what I'm asking of you? How can you hold me responsible for the situations that I'm trying to create where my child is being overprivileged, and it's repeatedly allowed to happen?" I ask the same of my fellow overprivileged parents—that we be aware of what we're asking of our educational systems. It's imperative that administrators, superintendents and school boards hold us accountable, because, as parents, we don't always ask, "What's best for *everyone*?" We grasp at privilege and want *our* children enrolled in magnet programs,

As parents, we don't always ask, "What's best for everyone*?" We grasp at privilege and want* our *children enrolled in magnet programs, rather than go to the schools we're assigned to.*

rather than go to the schools we're assigned to, thus denying those opportunities to other students.

Audience: I used to serve as Principal of Travis High School in Austin, and I always wondered why Travis had such a small band. A magnet school, which otherwise would have been a feeder school for Travis, sent its fine arts students to other high schools, leaving us to serve neighborhood kids who came from schools without fine arts programs. We have to ask about the impact of such magnet programs on neighborhood schools.

Tovar: The message is: We're not disrupting racism and poverty; we're disrupting *communities* to create magnet schools with fine arts programs!

Audience: Most administrators have no background in restorative justice, so they dedicate more resources police officers—but it's not the job of the student resource officer to discipline students. They should handle drug issues and protect our campuses, but everything else should be handled by the school. It's difficult: When a kid acts up, some teachers think the police officer should do something. That's not their job!

Tovar: As we conclude, let's think about our own personal accountability. By being here today, we enjoy a certain "conference privilege." We have access to information at this conference, that we need to share with parents and students. If we don't, the gap only grows. Let's all be responsible for informing parents, especially at underprivileged schools. Those who are most impacted should be at the forefront when decisions are being made about them. Any closing messages?

García: When you say that those who are most impacted should have a seat at the table, that's why I believe that students should have a seat at the table. I had a teacher who once said that school boards make decisions about students, parents and teachers—but they leave students out of the decision-making process. He was right. Parents and teachers have to fight for a seat at the table, and students are left out. When students do show up, the adults say, "Good job! You're so cute!" If you're going to have a conversation about

If you're going to have a conversation about students, students need to be there.

students, students need to be there—and don't simply pick the "good" students, or don't go out of your way to pick the "bad" students. Pick the students who care and are interested in having these conversations.

"Assessing CTE Needs and Accessing Perkins' Perks!"

Laura Torres, Statewide CTE Coordinator
Texas Education Agency
Charles Stafford, Denton ISD, Host

As of February 7, Career and Technical Education data are available online for your district! Learn where to find these data and how to use them to complete the comprehensive local needs assessment required by Perkins V, "The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act." This session will tell you what you need to know in order for your district to take advantage of these federal dollars!

Today we're going to talk about the CTE state plan and the Perkins V baseline data for new CTE indicators, and we're going to connect data to the comprehensive local needs assessment, which is required by Perkins IV. These are not the TEA's ideas; these are federal guidelines.

On July 31, 2018, President Trump signed into law the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, otherwise known as Perkins V. Prior to this, we had been operating under Perkins IV for about 16 years. There's a radical shift in thinking between Perkins IV and Perkins V, and it's actually a pretty darn good piece of legislation.

The goals of Perkins V are to:

1. Align systems and program improvement,
2. Improve academic integrity for CTE students,
3. Strengthen the connection between secondary and postsecondary education,
4. Improve accountability.

In Texas, we receive $110 million of Perkins funding and $2.2 billion in state-weighted CTE funding. The TEA is the fiscal agent for Perkins monies, which are split: 70% for public schools and 30% for postsecondary education. 80% of school districts choose to use Perkins monies; 20% do not.

954 districts receive Perkins funding; all other districts choose not to request those monies. The Perkins' definition sets the state

definition for CTE quality, and there's an alignment between federal and state monitoring and accountability.

We need to be sure that we're aligning our CTE programs to high-wage, in-demand and high-skill jobs. The days of doing something because kids think it's cool are gone. Every school district received its local labor market data from us on February 7. Now they should be aligning their programs to that labor market data. Your labor workforce data is a matter of public record and is on our website.

Perkins V will provide funding and opportunities for students to earn credentials and industry-based certifications, level one and level two certificates through early college high school programs and community colleges, and associate and bachelor degrees. To reduce the burden of recording at the district level, we're going to start auto-coding, so this should make your PEIMS coordinator super happy.

We also want to provide opportunities for work-based learning in rural, small,, midsize, suburban and urban settings, constructing support and promoting meaningful and effective CTE cross-sector collaboration, and ensuring equitable access to postsecondary CTE programs and credentials to multiple on and off ramps, especially with a focus on special populations. That's different from Perkins IV.

When you transition from Perkins IV to Perkins V, you have to write a state plan. We had a listening tour and stakeholder engagement. We've been working diligently on the state plan, and we're currently in the middle of the 60-day public comment period for that plan. Hopefully, we'll have the plan approved by April. By May, districts will turn in their comprehensive local needs assessments. Then, the application window will open in June.

On the CTE page of our TEA website, you'll find a subheading with our state plan. It's 78 pages long, with 50 pages of appendices.

In the past, districts had to self-report, and it was a nerve-wracking experience. Now we'll have an auto-calculated system using PEIMS completion records. It'll reduce district workload. It's based on completion, not intent, and it'll be comparable across districts.

A student who takes a single CTE course is considered a "participant." Any student who takes two or more unrelated CTE courses for two credits is an "explorer." If I take a construction trades class and an agriculture class, for instance, I'm an explorer. The two categories that really matter are "concentrators" and "completers." The goal of Perkins V is to get students to completer status, but we

understand that we'll probably see more concentrators than completers, especially in smaller districts. Concentrators will complete two or more credits—that's two years of study—in the same program of study. The completer passes and receives credit in three or more CTE courses, for four or more credits in the same program of study. That's the goal: that: students to earn an industry-based certification, a level one or level two certificate, or an associate degree. For the sake of data collection, participants and explorers are not CTE learners, but concentrators and completers are. These categories are tied to accountability, not funding. Also, the state will reimburse for students to take the tests for their certifications, if they pass, but the state will only pay for one certification per student.

Now that we're auto-coding, we need baseline data. For this, we looked at seven years of course completion records for the graduation cohort of 2017-2018. Now we have an opportunity to use data to improve student outcomes.

The core indicators of preferred performance, as required by Perkins V, are:

1. Four-year graduation rate,
2. Academic proficiency in reading and language arts,
3. Academic proficiency in mathematics,
4. Academic proficiency in science.

We don't look at "approaching standard" for any of these; only "met standard" or "exceeded standard" on STAAR scores.

Our postsecondary placement is not perfect. Here we're only able to track whether a student pays into social security or workers' compensation. If they complete four years of study in a program and then work at McDonald's, they're in the report. We don't have a better way of tracking this at present. It's easier for us to track those who go into college or the military. We're not gathering this data for all kids, but only for those who completed CTE courses.

Our data show that our concentrators and completers in the health sciences did a bang-up job: They get in, they stay in, and many of

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them earn industry-based certifications and degrees. It's been an amazing program of study.

Baseline data for the cohort of 2017-2018 show CTE students graduating at 97%. Students not enrolled in CTE don't graduate at these rates. CTE matters for these kids.

For academic proficiency in reading, which is based on English I and English II end-of-course exams, we find an anomaly: White students did not outperform CTE learners in reading! Students in arts, A/V, information technology, health science and STEM tend to outperform other groups. The students who perform less well in reading, but still better than non-CTE students are in agriculture, human services, law, public safety, manufacturing, education and training. The governor was not happy to see that kids in education and training did not perform well on standardized tests. Then we have another group of CTE students who performed lower than non-CTE students: hospitality and tourism, architecture and construction, energy, and transportation. The powers that be want those numbers to change pretty quickly.

You'll want to look at your district's data and determine what it means. Please don't misinterpret it and say, "We need to kill transportation, since those kids are doing terrible on STAAR." That's not what it means. It means that the kids who are joining transportation need more support. We hope that people aren't shoving students with special needs into certain clusters, like mechanics, which falls under transportation, because it's "easy." Your staff will provide the narrative for why your data look like they do. At the state level, we tell ourselves that this will get better—because these are baseline data.

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When it comes to math, CTE makes a huge difference for males. CTE concentrators met or exceeded the standard for Algebra I on end-of-course exams.

In science, we see that 59.62% of CTE students exceeded the standard in Biology I, compared with 49.82% of non-CTE students. The way that we engage learners makes a difference.

Hispanic CTE students are outperforming Hispanic non-CTE students on all indicators: graduation rate, reading proficiency, mathematics, science, postsecondary placement…. One area for improvement for Hispanic students is postsecondary

Now we turn to the Hispanic/*Latino* data for these Perkins indicators. We'll only compare Hispanic CTE students to Hispanic non-CTE students. All indicators make us happy: Hispanic CTE students are outperforming Hispanic non-CTE students on all indicators: graduation rate, reading proficiency, mathematics, science, postsecondary placement. I'm also pleased to see the non-traditional enrollment among Hispanic CTE students; examples of that might include girls enrolled in construction trades or boys in cosmetology. To see girls engaged in construction trades or energy is especially encouraging, since those are high-skilled, high-wage, high-demand jobs. One area for improvement for Hispanic students is postsecondary credentials.

When you go back to your district, be sure to ask for your district's data from your superintendent or your district's CTE director. In particular, see if Hispanic or African-American students in your district are enrolled in CTE at lower rates than other students. If so, there may be barriers that are keeping out certain groups of students. When Perkins V says that CTE is for *all* kids, it really means it. The FAQs for House Bill 165 just came out three weeks ago, so we can now modify courses for the endorsement of students in Special Ed.

With Perkins V, there's no "gotcha," since this is a baseline year. Your staff will be writing a narrative on how you'll improve your data. And if your data are bad, you can get better!

"Better Board Behavior!"

Dr. Hafedh Azaiez, Superintendent, Donna ISD
Alicia Reyna, Trustee, Donna ISD
Roberto Pérez, Trustee, Donna ISD
Eva C. Watts, Trustee, Donna ISD, Host

Is your board beleaguered by bad board behavior? Or do you have a shared vision and a focus on student outcomes? Learn about Donna ISD's attempt to employ Lone Star Governance in an effort to create systemic change and transform outcomes for students. Hear how they monitor outcome goals at every meeting—and walk away with ideas on how to change the adult behaviors that shape student outcomes in your district!

Pérez: Today we hope to inspire you with ideas—and to do the things that are important to your districts. Today we'll share with you our way, which is not the only way or the only solution. If you're looking for solutions, there are people and resources that can help.

Azaiez: We started Lone Star Governance in March 2018. Much of the Lone Star Governance framework was passed as part of the House Bill 3 in 2019, which mandates that Texas school districts establish goals in literacy, reading, math and college and career readiness. Boards and superintendents must now set goals and monitor their progress or lack of progress toward those goals.

Donna ISD is a district of about 15,000 students in South Texas. 94% of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and 79% are labeled at-risk. 33% of our students are English Language Learners. Due to our focus on student outcomes, our district went from a 77 to an 85, an increase of eight points, in one year. Our financial rating also went up, and last year we scored 100. Today we'll focus on our district's third goal: College, Career and Military Readiness (CCMR). Once our Board decided to focus on this, we started doing a lot of things, including increasing our CTE programs. In one year, we went from 25 industry

certifications, to 34, including some that few school districts offer, like commercial drone pilot. We're trying to offer opportunities to our students that increase CCMR participation. Laser-focused on our board goal of CCMR, we went from 488 students earning a license in one year, to 741. I'd like to share with you a video that we created to promote our CTE programs, since we're an open-enrollment district, and we accept students from outside the district.

Video: You hear a lot, "They don't teach you that in school," that there are lessons you don't learn until you're in the real world, working your way up the ladder, rung by rung, at your first job—but those jobs require experience and skills you don't learn in class. If not in class and not in school, if not *now*, when do you learn what you need to know to get the job you want?

At Donna Independent School District, we're learning now through Career and Technical Education. Our CTE program is growing. We're adding new courses every year, and each course is an opportunity for students to identify their interests, to take the pulse on their passions, and chart their course accordingly, to get hands-on with their education. Our dynamic instructors and award-winning programs are more than just points of pride for the district. They're teachable moments, tools of the trade, a taste of what's to come. a blueprint for future courses of study, a pathway to a higher-paying job right out of high school, a head start on life.

Donna ISD students are learning self-discipline, responsibility and integrity. We're growing as individuals and as teams, and we're earning our choice of more than 40 industry-based certificates, real-world experience, and college partnerships leading straight to the workplace. We're blossoming, discovering our potential in ways we wouldn't have anywhere else. We *did* learn that in school.

Our classrooms are more than just rooms filled with desks. They're pipelines to possibilities. They're bridges to what comes next. They're launchpads.

Our classrooms contain more than a desk, more than a room. They're pipelines to possibilities. They're bridges to what comes next. They're launchpads. Discover your potential at the Donna ISD CTE program.

Azaiez: That video is an example of our laser focus on our board's third goal, and we're doing everything we can to promote it and to make sure we have more students enrolling in CTE and earning industry certifications. With a structured and clear plan, through Lone Star Governance, we're focused on meeting our goals.

Reyna: As school board members, we represent the vision and the values of the community. We then hire someone who can execute and make those things come true. We have to get out of his way, so that he can make those things come true.

Effective boards spend their time doing three things:

1. They set clear student outcome goals.
2. They identify the non-negotiables.
3. They monitor progress toward those goals.

As a result, we totally revamped our board meeting agendas. We had to ask ourselves, "Why are we spending time talking about toilet paper contracts?" We were talking about everything else, other thanexcept for student outcomes! If you look at our board meeting agendas now, we always start with our goals, and we're always talking about students. We're looking at student data. Board members are saying, "What do we see at this campus or that campus? What are we seeing in this grade level or that grade level?" As board members, we have to know where our students are, what they know, and what they're able to do. That's where we spend our time now. This didn't happen overnight. It took some time to change our agenda.

We started with a two-day Lone Star Governance workshop in March 2018. We started looking at district

data and setting goals. We hired our superintendent in July of 2018. We officially adopted our goals in September 2018. Then we had a board election and brought aboard three new board members. In January, we needed another two-day workshop to bring new board members to this mindset, so that we wouldn't be pulling in different directions. Now we're monitoring and tracking those goals, and, in light of House Bill 3, we have to revise and update our goals. This time, though, it won't be as hard, because we've built "muscle" to do it.

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Azaiez: We have a one-pager to monitor and track our goals. All campuses have a copy of these goals, and they're monitoring student progress. They're having conversations with teachers and students. As they take any benchmark test or assessment, they have these goals in mind. This one-pager is our "bible," our goals, our plan, and what we need to do each year. At the bottom is our quarterly monitoring calendar. Next month, for example, we'll discuss our progress toward Goal 3. As superintendent, I present the information to the Board, because I need to know what's going on. Our Goal 3 states that we want our College, Career and Military Readiness to increase, from 43%, to 90% by 2023. Then we have three goal progress measures: We look at TSI success, the number of industry certifications earned, and the percentage of students earning AP, IB or dual credit.

Reyna: As board members, we set the goals, at the top, then our superintendent and administration determine the goal progress measures. They determine the assessments and the timing. We determine what we care about: our vision and values. We say, "We want our students leaving second grade being able to read." The superintendent determines how we get there.

Azaiez: We focus on one goal every month, so we come back to that goal every three months. We always talk about whether we are approaching or meeting our goals. Our

board members ask clarifying questions or share ideas. This takes a big chunk of our board meetings now, and other items go to the consent agenda.

Reyna: There are a million things you can spend time talking about as a board, so we're often tempted to fill time talking about things that aren't directly related to what our students know or are able to do. We value our time in the boardroom together, and we want that time to be about students.

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Azaiez: Because most items are now on consent, the big chunk of our time, when we meet, it's really talking about student outcomes and have a conversation about that. Again, with exception few times where we have to pull an item because maybe a board member needs more clarification, maybe needed input. So that's usually, board members pull items way in advance. And so again, when we post it's over 72 hours right prior is that stays as, so what

Pérez: Alicia talked about timelines. In board settings, we normally spend an hour talking about student outcomes.

Reyna: As a result of Lone Star Governance and our first goal on reading, during our annual "Reader Today, Leader Tomorrow" recognition, principals now tell us the grade levels at which their students are reading and how much they've grown in reading. I turned to our superintendent at that moment and asked, "Did you tell them to tell us about their reading levels and how much they've grown in their reading?" At that moment, it became clear to me how our board goal was trickling down and intentionally or unintentionally influencing adult behaviors!

Pérez: As a board, we need to set those goals and make sure that the folks on the ground understand what we're trying to accomplish. And it's really the superintendent's job to accomplish those goals. That's how we determine whether he's successful or not. He aligns everyone in the district to meet board goals. As secretary of our board, I keep track of the time we spend talking about different things. When our board is not focused, I bring to their attention that we need to adjust our efforts and focus on

student outcomes. I'm proud to share that for the last two quarters, we talked about student outcomes for more than 50% of our time together as a board. We also created a video that tells our community how we're trying to accomplish our goals as a board. It's a way for us to engage with them and to share with them our vision.

Azaiez: That video was done in English and Spanish, since we have a lot of Spanish-speaking parents, and it has led to a shift in mindsets. Everyone now knows that the number one priority of our board is student outcomes, and our board members can go out into the community now and talk about where we are on these goals.

Pérez: We also created flyers in English and Spanish to communicate this. It's a work in progress. We currently have three goals, but we're thinking our magic number may be five goals, based on modifications as a result of House Bill 3.

Azaiez: Because of the new requirements of House Bill 3, we feel we need to go back to the drawing board. We already have a reading goal and a CCMR goal, which are part of House Bill 3. Now we need to add math. Research suggests that, if you have one goal, you'll achieve it, but, as you increase your number of goals, you decrease your chances of achieving them all. Having more goals *doesn't* mean that you achieve more! It's better to stay laser-focused and clearly communicate to everyone what we're focused on.

Pérez: This has obviously been challenging work for our board. We don't all think the same. We have different visions, but this framework has given us a way to measure step-by-step the success we want to have with our students. It has involved some long sessions, but it has been worth it. In essence, we've created a "report card" for the superintendent, telling him what we want as a board. We give him direction, and we can stay away on a day-to-day basis and let him focus on those things. He stays laser-focused on student outcomes, and we hear a report on that work on a

It has allowed us to keep our board meetings short & sweet, which is great: In our experience, the longer we're together, the less we accomplish!

monthly basis. It has allowed us to keep our board meetings short and sweet, which is great: In our experience, the longer we're together, the less we accomplish!

Azaiez: This process requires true leadership. It requires a change in mindsets. The cool thing, though, is that it's almost like an epidemic, where everyone starts thinking the same way, and everyone is talking about it: teachers, parents, students. It has really led to a true transformation!

"Viva la Lucha:
MASBA's 50-year History within the Context of Mexican American Struggles in Texas!"

Dr. Mercedes Lynn de Uriarte, The University of Texas at Austin
Dr. Emilio Zamora, The University of Texas at Austin
Dr. Jayme Mathias, MASBA Executive Director, Host & Moderator

There's a reason that so many organizations—like MASBA, MAYO, MALDEF, NALEO, IDRA and the Raza Unida *Party—were formed during the civil rights movement: Efforts to mobilize have long been directed against inequality and discrimination. Bring your copy of* ¡Viva la Lucha! *and engage in a conversation on the historical struggles of the Mexican American community in Texas—and how those struggles have manifested themselves at various points in the 50-year history of the Mexican American School Boards Association!*

Mathias: When I came to MASBA in 2017, I knew nothing of MASBA's rich history, apart from a brief history that was published online by Teresa Paloma Acosta. That history suggested that the idea for MASBA dated to Dr. José A. Cárdenas, Superintendent of the Edgewood ISD, in 1970. In 2017, I discovered that MASBA's history was largely unknown, even by members of the organization. I began searching for historical documents and interviewing those who have been involved in MASBA throughout the years. I asked Past Presidents, like Amancio Chapa here with us today, what they remembered—and whether they remembered who served as President of MASBA before them. From those interviews and historical documents, we've now created a 350-page book, *¡Viva la Lucha! Personal Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of the Mexican American School Boards Association*—and we know this is merely Volume I. We did this book project in less than three months, and the very day after it was published, I succeeded in finally tracking down Past President Lidia Moreno. When I met

with her last Friday, she opened a box of documents that she safeguarded from her leadership of MASBA in 1986 to 1987. She kept meticulous records, and it was immediately clear to me that we'll need to publish Volume II of MASBA's history in the future!

In this breakout session, we'll talk about Volume I of MASBA's history, and we'll attempt to place the history found in that book within the larger context of the history of the Mexican American community here in Texas and in the United States. First, I'll allow our panelists to introduce themselves and to tell us about their involvement with and advocacy for the Mexican-American community.

Zamora: My name is Emilio Zamora. I live in Austin and teach history at The University of Texas at Austin. I've been writing on Mexican-American history, with a focus on the labor, literary history, and the general social movement of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. I have a personal connection: I'm a tenth-generation descendant of people who arrived here before the United States or Mexico existed, so I don't create my work as an intellectual exercise. I also take my work personally due to my experience in the social justice movement. I feel a very serious sense of social responsibility to do my part to improve things overall.

I'm a tenth-generation descendant of people who arrived here before the United States or Mexico existed, so I don't create my work as an intellectual exercise.

de Uriarte: I'm Mercedes Carolina de Uriarte. Unfortunately, teachers couldn't say all that, so Carolina became Caroline, which was changed to Lynn because there were already several Caroline's in my class.

I'm a backwards Mexican American: I was born in the U.S., because my father came here to finish his education after the Mexican revolution disorganized Mexico's schools. He was the one of the first to take IBM products into Mexico. We then moved to Mexico, where my ancestors were one of the five original families that created the pottery that everybody now imitates. If you

buy a genuine piece of *talavera*, it will contain the name of the house that produced it. Ours was "de Uriarte."

I lived another part of my life backwards: I married as a teenager and had two children, because my mother believed women should marry and not go to college. When my son entered kindergarten, I started college. My two children and I were all in college at the same time! When I studied at Cal State Fullerton, I was encouraged to apply to eight graduate schools. So, I did. Guess which university turned me down, saying that *Latinas* did better if they stayed close to home: The University of Texas at Austin! I swore I would never work there.

I went to Yale and received a grant for dissertation research inside the *Los Angeles Times*, which offered me a job as associate editor of the opinion section—a lucky listing since I tend to have a lot of opinions. I presented a talk at UT, where the dean took me to dinner and asked about my interests. I said, "Resistance and revolution." He eventually convinced me to come to UT.

At that time, UT was still being sued by the Department of Justice for its failure to integrate. I was the only Mexican American in the five departments of the College of Communications. It was not a friendly place. Before I arrived, they had never given tenure to a woman—and the only woman there was 75 years old.

I met Jayme while working on a research project on housing and gentrification. Since I'd been an editor, and since I taught kids writing and editing, Jayme asked me to help with this book. That's why my name—and a much more flattering picture—is on the book.

We had a really good time doing this book. What I liked best was seeing what was in the beginning: A handful of school board members who said, "We have to do something about this! Let's figure out what to do!" This was back in the 1970s. We had barely won civil rights. So they were starting out on this really

A handful of school board members…said, "We have to do something about this! Let's figure out what to do!"

brave journey—and if you've ever dealt with the people who control education, you know what a brave journey that was. They didn't realized the brave journey they were on; they just figured, "We're being overlooked!" It's the same old stuff we're still fixing today.

As you read this book, you see how school board members became more informed about the way in which structures ensure that certain things never change. As more people joined MASBA, school board members with college educations and higher incomes made the organization more sophisticated. It's just the most wonderful story on how individuals can make a difference! These were people who had families and jobs—for some reason, we don't pay school board members in Texas—and they struggled to raise money for the organization. Despite the challenges, they succeeded in getting recognition of *mariachi*, so that students wouldn't be punished or sent to Saturday school for missing classes due to *mariachi*. It's just a great book. If you're ever feeling depressed, sit down and read a part of it: It tells you there's hope and that things can change!

Mathias: Let's begin a question for Dr. Zamora. We're celebrating MASBA's 50th anniversary. This is also the 50th anniversary of various walkouts and of the L.A. war moratorium riots. MAYO and MALDEF were organized around the same time as MASBA. Tell us: How does the history that's shared in this book fit within the larger context of other organizations that were organizing at that time? Help us to situate the history told in this work within its historical context.

Zamora: The process of incorporating people of Mexican origin into American society began in the 1920s and 1930s. At that time, the Mexican-American community witnessed the emergence of a growing number of upwardly-mobile Mexicans and a major cultural shift. Prior to that, Mexicans in the U.S. primarily looked toward Mexico—culturally-speaking and politically-speaking—due to our proximity to Mexico. A small group of upwardly-

mobile Mexicans and skilled workers—veterans, lawyers, grocers and so forth—began to serve a Spanish-speaking, Mexican clientele, while also interacting with the White population. They were demonstrating the American value of loyalty and were being incorporated into society on a conditional basis. The immediate history of MASBA really begins around the 1930s, with the emergence of these people who are now perfectly bilingual, and they're in a very interesting position: They're like the White grocers and the White attorneys—but their clientele was poor.

Classic class analysis says that if you're a member of the middle class, you'll identify with other members of the middle class—regardless of your racial or ethnic background. That wasn't really the case for Mexican Americans, who even now are not far removed from the working class. The business of the professional class depends a lot on the *mexicano* community. Mexican Americans experienced discrimination. We call it "stratification." You have somebody like Alonso Perales, a major civil rights leader who became an attorney. He set up an office with another attorney, José Tomás Canales, from South Texas. As an attorney, Perales had the same status as a White attorney, but his earnings were not as high as his White counterparts.

So there was discrimination among the upwardly-mobile Mexicans. Like many of us, many of them were only one or two generations removed from poverty and the working class. All of us have brothers and sisters and cousins who went to college and graduated, and others who didn't.

So they set up their Mexican Chamber of Commerce and fought on behalf of all Mexicans. Because they had relationships and wrote and spoke English and Spanish, they assumed leadership positions. They had relationships with the conventional chambers of commerce, and they began to think about alternative institutions, another set of organizations.

Those who joined MASBA, MALDEF and TACHE found themselves in a peculiar situation: They weren't Mexicans, and they weren't fully recognized as being from here.

MASBA is the same, but it appeared during another wave of social-political activity. Many early MASBA members came from poor families who counted on their income. Others were university students connected to the Mexican-American community who were quickly becoming professionals, were connected to social movements, and were finding themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their White counterparts. Those who joined MASBA, MALDEF and TACHE found themselves in a peculiar situation: They weren't Mexicans, they weren't fully recognized as being from here; they were somewhere in the middle. They understood they had a social responsibility, and they also understood they had to abide by certain expectations and rules of the game. That's the nature of the professional class. You are from *this* community, but you're also representing *that* community, and there's a bureaucracy and a culture, with rules and understandings that you have to abide by. You become politically bicultural. They believed that no one else but themselves could express their interests as mediators. It's a history that goes back to the 1800s, but now an increasing number of professionals were trying to find their own way. And they weren't necessarily talking to each other: The Mexican American Chamber of Commerce in Austin wasn't talking to people who formed the same organization in Los Angeles.

Mathias: Dr. Zamora, you mention Los Angeles. Let's widen the lens. Various movements were happening in Texas, but in your work, Dr. de Uriarte, and in your movement from Yale to the *L.A. Times*, your perspective was largely shaped outside of Texas. How does the history of MASBA fit within a larger, national context?

de Uriarte: Let me step back to answer that. I was really lucky: Because my father thought this country was racist, I was raised in Mexico. Because my grandfather believed that English was the language of business and that everybody ought to be educated in both languages, I studied in Spanish in the morning and in English in the afternoon. Though I didn't have the words to express it, I realized history is biased and that the relations between the U.S. and Mexico were portrayed in different ways. Being raised in Mexico and loving that country as I do, I really got annoyed with the U.S. and its newspapers. The *L.A. Times* gave me another lens through which to see. When people talk about bilingual education here, it wasn't a bilingual education that armed you against what you were going to face if you were not a blue-eyed, blonde, American. At the *Times*, we didn't publish much that dealt with the Mexican community, even though we could see Mexico from the windows of the *Times*. I was hired to open the pages to Mexico.

Then I came to Texas, where Black and Mexican American students didn't know their histories. Often the Blacks knew more because there were Black colleges and universities. Many kids came to my classes so disadvantaged that I started teaching what many non-minority faculty considered to be "alternative" courses: I taught kids how to cover underserved communities. The dean supported me, thank God, but the fact that there were 37 White males, one White woman, and me on the faculty was a major hurdle. I said, "We're going to look at the community on the other side of IH 35, as if we were foreign correspondents. We're going to go over there, and we're going to learn." For two weeks, we did a field trip to East Austin and interviewed people who had assimilated. We had dinner with radicals at *Las Manitas*. Students learned that class is part of diversity. It's class that keeps us from living in the same neighborhoods and going to the same schools with each other. I said that I would teach that

I said that I would teach that course for only one year, but the faculty was so hostile that I refused to give it up.

course for only one year, but the faculty was so hostile that I refused to give it up.

The next year, I was visited by 15 *Chicano* students—the name they used of themselves—who said they were angry with the racist *Daily Texan*. They wanted me to be the faculty sponsor of their own newspaper. Seven years later, their publication won the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Award for Outstanding Journalism, the highest award that student work can compete for at the national level. They won that award for writing on migrant children who couldn't attend school because of the need to support their families. At the beginning of the semester, I would suggest that they speak with the dean about the problems they were writing about, and, by the end of the semester, they were saying, "I need to talk to the dean!" That's what I love about this book on MASBA's history: These school board members weren't kids anymore, but they had that same spirit of seeing problems and figuring out ways to fix them. It was a learning curve for them. I loved working on this book!

Mathias: Dr. de Uriarte, you not that people organized around issues and said, "We're going to do this!" Dr. Zamora, help us to understand how that spirit fits within other efforts to mobilize people. You have written widely on issues of race and discrimination within the Mexican American community. How do you view MASBA's efforts within the context of other efforts to mobilize people?

Zamora: What really matters in the history of any organization is being able to read the winds of change well and adjust. MASBA read cultural change really well. They moved on the question of *mariachi*. They were involved in the *Chicano* movement and were now fighting for local representation. They demanded representation of the cultural consciousness of what we value. MASBA didn't

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initiate it, but MASBA accommodated it and helped it along.

As José Ángel said during lunch, we need to be reading. A lot has been written about us by us. We are now faced with this important decision regarding ethnic studies. As Mexican Americans, we have been involved in it and are developing a new curriculum, preparing teachers to teach it, and setting up our own after-school programs in our districts. MASBA would do well to investigate this ethnic studies movement and figure out to best place itself within it. We've gone before the Texas Legislature and the State Board of Education. We've proposed a curriculum and new courses. We even went to court in Arizona and won that case. We've been reading the cultural change and moving with it. As an organization of educators that connects administrators, teachers and students, MASBA is well positioned to act on that issue. Education is a central issue in the history of Mexican Americans. It always has been!

Education is a central issue in the history of Mexican Americans. It always has been!

This morning, I heard a presentation by the staff and teachers of La Feria, my high school, and they're doing wonderful things. One young woman said she's inspired at these MASBA conferences and takes ideas back to her district. It's a far cry from when I went to school there. They treated us like idiots. They were cruel with us. The administrators and teachers didn't care. MASBA is in a place now to get into these issues with greater vigor!

Chapa: As a former school board member, I know the power that school boards have. We control multi-million-dollar budgets. We can require our superintendents to read these books and introduce documentaries into our schools, and require their principals to do it, too. A lot of the initial founders of MASBA came out of the *Chicano* movement, and, when we were exposed to other professional organizations, like TASB, we couldn't find our people there or anything on the agenda that was

relevant to us. The speakers didn't speak to us. The workshops didn't address our issues. It was a no-brainer for us to start our own organization and to put pressure on those other organizations. It was our way of saying, "If you're not going to do this, we'll do it ourselves!" I know that Colonel Kickbusch emphasized that we need to raise up younger school board members, but my experience has been that some of the younger Mexican Americans who end up on our school boards are more conservative and don't have that "fire in the belly." They don't have the same sense of being part of a big movement. Many of them come from communities that are predominantly Mexican-American. After 50 years, MASBA has begun to weave itself into the history and the fabric of NALEO and the National School Boards Association. As we evolve, we have infiltrated those organizations.

Zamora: What's so wonderful about MASBA is that it brings us together around our children. We can set aside our differences, knowing that what's at stake is our children! Despite our difference, we can agree on the need to change the curriculum and the teacher preparation programs in our colleges and universities. We can agree on the need to work with the teachers who are already in the classroom and to help them learn about ethnic studies. We can agree on the need to fight for Mexican American Studies. MASBA has been part of that fight. MASBA has been moving forward, and can continue to move forward focused on our children.

What's so wonderful about MASBA is that it brings us together around our children. We can set aside our differences, knowing that what's at stake is our children!

de Uriarte: Mr. Chapa notes how we were once more radical. I have students who think that so much of what we're saying here is radical—and I remind them, "A few years ago, the idea of you sitting in that chair was a radical idea!" Every idea that has brought us progressive change, at one time or another, was labeled as "radical." Our children need to know that it's okay to be "out of step," that they don't

have to fit the latest definition of success, that instead they can ask how they can give back and make the world better, that they can ask, "How do we stop allowing children to be put in cages?" We have to stop telling our children just to "get along." Getting along isn't helpful and undermines oru students' ability to clearly see the injustices around us.

Zamora: Let's collaborate across ideological lines and commit ourselves to doing something for our children! And let's teach them their history! Our children don't know about Alonso Perales. Born in Alice, Texas in 1890, he became an orphan and was adopted by a wonderful family. He became an attorney and served as a diplomat for over 25 years in the Caribbean, Mexico, South America and Central America In the 1930s, he testified before Congress for Mexican immigrants. In 1945, he participated in the inaugural meeting of the United Nations in San Francisco. My point is this: Alonso Perales was one of the leading U.S. civil rights leaders of the 20th century—and he's not in our standard curriculum! There are so many people, events and organizations that our children need to learn about! We're way behind. We need to come together, write the curriculum, prepare the teachers, and give them support.

There are so many people, events and organizations that our children need to learn about! We're way behind. We need to come together, write the curriculum, prepare the teachers, and give them support.

Chapa: MASBA has such great potential in this respect! School board members are elected officials. I have no faith in the TEA or the Texas Legislature. Their heart is not in helping Mexican-American students. Everything in Texas seems to get done through federal lawsuits; every reform in Texas is the result of a lawsuit! Everything is going to be a struggle, but school board members can harness their political might through organizations like MASBA and push for increased funding for education, for ethnic studies, and for our children.

de Uriarte: We need to look at what's happening in our schools—but we also need to look at what's happening with housing. Ten years ago, we could go across IH 35 and speak with people in East Austin. Many of those people are now gone, and Austin has a nationally-recognized problem with displacement. It didn't happen by accident, as *Home Wreckers* makes clear. Our reforms will be for nothing if housing is not secure. We're closing schools in Austin.

Our reforms will be for nothing if housing is not secure.

Mathias: We conclude with a call to action. Looking back at the last 50 years and looking ahead to the next 50 years, what call to action would you each like to leave with the school board members, superintendents and community members in this room?

Zamora: You're "on the ground," and you've been initiating changes. I think our call to action is curriculum writing and ethnic studies.

de Uriarte: We need to teach our students to recognize the difference between being socialized and being freed through education. Education socializes us, so that we'll like one another, work together and fit into society. It's our responsibility to tell them, "It's not bad to stir up trouble! It's not bad to resist those things that go against our value system!" We better learn that fast.

"Community Engagement: Creativity and Courageous Conversations!"

Reyne Christopher Telles
Executive Director of Communications and Engagement
Austin ISD

Ali Ghilarducci
Community Engagement Coordinator
Austin ISD

Leonor P. Vargas
Administrative Supervisor of Parent Programs
Austin ISD

Dr. Jayme Mathias, Austin ISD Trustee
Host & Moderator

There's a reason we advocate for local control: Locally-elected school board members are the "eyes" and "ears" of the community! Come,, learn how trustees, administrators, and districts staffs are tackling the challenges of community engagement – particularly for the families of our English Language Learners. Hear stories of the ways in which one large, urban district recently navigated the turbulent waters of community engagement around school closures and boundary changes – the two most explosive and least popular conversations in any district. Looking to elevate your district's community engagement skills? This session is for you!

Mathias: Today's theme is Community Engagement: Creativity and Courageous Conversations. Why do we love our Texas public schools? Because we elect persons of the public to represent the public's interest in our schools. As school board members, we're on the front lines of community engagement. We know how it is: We're at the supermarket, trying to do our shopping, when someone engages us on a school board issue! We also have staff members in our districts who roll up their sleeves and do the work of community engagement. I'm

proud to brag today on the folks of the Austin ISD. I have served on the Austin ISD Board of Trustees for nearly eight years. I love what I do. We are a district of 80,000 students and 11,000 employees in 130 schools. Austin is a very engaged city, and the task of community engagement in a city like Austin can be consuming! Let's ask our panelists to tell us about the community engagement practices of the Austin ISD in general—and what are some of the best practices of which they're most proud.

Telles: We are a large school district, with a large staff. Folks from smaller districts are sometimes surprised by the size of our staff. I oversee a number of divisions, some of which are only two or three people deep: special projects, those who staff the front desk at our administrative office, media relations, our TV station, our website, our parent support specialist program, translation and interpretation, community engagement, marketing, and our Communities in Schools initiative. Our strongest communication and engagement efforts involve the blending of these divisions. I'm proud that we have translators and interpreters on standby, who provide simultaneous translation in real time at all district meetings. We always have Spanish, but we can also provide interpreters for other languages and foster true interaction at our meetings.

Vargas: I'd like to model a strategy that we use: Stand up, find someone you don't know, and introduce yourself for a moment. What did you notice? We were pulled out of our comfort zone, we met someone we didn't know, we "broke the ice," and we began to learn something about that person. It's a simple strategy, but we like to begin our meetings by having people stand up and introduce themselves. We have a natural human instinct to meet and talk to others. We'll often spur conversation with a question like, "What are your hopes and dreams for your kids at this school?" Thank you for participating in that exercise. Now, tell your partner, "Thank you for

We help build relationships of trust. We help people find common ground. And we affirm one another.

being here. You're amazing!" It's a really simple relational strategy that we use.

I'm always proud to see the relationships that we build in our community. We help build relationships of trust. We help people find common ground. And we affirm one another. Doesn't it feel good to be told that you're amazing?

Ghilarducci: Prior to working for the school district, I worked for a non-profit that supported the district in community engagement. What drew me to this work five years ago is the belief that parents are truly the experts in their children's education and that, when we involve them in decision-making, we're going to do a better job of educating kids. I've enjoyed seeing the AISD adopt a lot of strategies from non-profits and other partners. We've begun to host intimate dialogues with our communities. We've realized we don't need others doing it for us. People now say that coming to district meetings is a different experience. They used to come to meetings to hear people "stand and deliver." They received information and filled out forms. Now we've really gotten creative with making our engagement opportunities much more relational and engaging. When we walk in, we honestly don't know exactly what to expect. Each engagement opportunity is tailored to the type of information that we're trying to gather, to help our decision makers, but it's also tailored to the community and its members. We recognize that people come from different "places" on issues. You saw in the conference that we're closing schools this year. Talking about that topic is very different from talking about building new schools!

Mathias: In 2017, the Austin ISD passed a $1.1 billion bond in a single ballot proposition. How do you cultivate the necessary goodwill in your community for such efforts?

Telles: It was an upward-hill battle. The previous bond initiative had four propositions: two that passed, and two that failed. So we put everything into a single proposition. We really wanted to have an approach where we could be strategic with the time that we were spending in engagement. Part of the plan was not to spend a lot of time and effort with the naysayers. You are not going to change their mind. You can get into fights with them on social media, but our public schools have far more advocates for them than against them. We focused on creating advocates, both inside and outside the organization, locking in those who would vote for it and working on those who were "on the fence." We created a toolkit with messaging, and all 130 principals were required to share it with their staff, their campus advisory council and their PTA. We also gave them the same PowerPoint, so that we were all "on message"—with staff and with outside groups and organizations.

Part of the plan was not to spend a lot of time and effort with the naysayers. You are not going to change their mind.

Mathias: You mention naysayers. When you close schools, you're going to have naysayers. You're going to have people trolling you on social media. What do you do with them? How do you not listen to them?

Telles: There's a tipping point where you need to address it. Staff would come to me, saying, "Look what they're saying." I had to set a rule: Let's talk about it when it has 20 "likes" or 20 comments. If they're slamming us, and only two people are "liking" it, it's not worth our time and effort to address it.

Mathias: Other thoughts on cultivating good will?

Vargas: I work in the Parent Engagement and Support Office, and, as a district, we have invested in 70 parent support specialists for our Title I Schools. Their primary charge is to cultivate relationships and partnerships with our families. They inform us of concerns and unique happenings in their schools. We host parent coffees with

the principal on a monthly basis. It's a forum where conversations happen. It's not just about informing parents. In fact, if I had set up this room, I would have put the chairs in a circle, so that we could have a conversation and practice the art of listening and *platicando* [talking], just like our indigenous cultures used to do. We have food, and we allow families to bring their own food as well. We have a meal and a conversation—just like we do at home—and our families feel very comfortable with that.

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Mathias: You say that you have 70 parent support specialists in the district. How do you pay for them, and are these a district position?

Vargas: We use Title I funds from our local budget, and the City of Austin matches that. We're very fortunate that the City sees the value of our parent support specialists, not only in the education of our students, but their social well-being. For the City, it's a public health issue and an investment, since we're a referral source to other city programs.

Mathias: What does a parent support specialist do, and what does his or her day look like?

Vargas: Each school is different, but our parent support specialists are often in the front of the school, welcoming students and parents, and creating a welcoming environment. They look at the learning opportunities that parents are asking for, and how they can support our campus improvement plans. Their day is structured around their support of academic achievement on their campus.

Mathias: Tremendous. Additional thoughts on cultivating good will?

Ghilarducci: When we began the process of determining which schools would close, we came into the meeting with the list of schools that were proposed for closure. We always say there's the meeting that you plan, and the meeting that you have—they're not always the same. We had some 150 parents in a very small elementary school gymnasium. We had our PowerPoint ready. We had our experts from academics and facilities—but there was zero interest in hearing our rationale. They didn't want to listen to us. They wanted to speak to us. They wanted to tell us what they thought. It was such a learning experience for our leadership.

Telles: We pivoted on the fly. We created a circle, we let people have the microphone, and we created an emotional space for them, where they could talk and say what they needed to.

Ghilarducci: We led with vulnerability. We couldn't say, "We have great information to share. If you let us explain this, you might understand!" Instead, we had to create a space and listen. Every one of those meetings lasted two-and-a-half to three hours.

Mathias: Why was that? Did you say, "This meeting will last for a certain time?" Or, "We're going to be here until everyone is heard?"

Ghilarducci: It didn't feel appropriate to end the meeting until people were finished speaking. We felt we had an obligation to listen. When you propose closing a school, we all felt committed to sitting and listening to every voice.

Mathias: Tell us about the process. It sounds like these were listening sessions.

Ghilarducci: After it was clear that our format for the meeting was not going to work, we sat everyone in a giant circle of 150 chairs. If the space was too small, we did two layers of chairs. We had an outside consultant to facilitate. Our community engagement staff is

Our community engagement staff is trusted and well-received in the community, but we were perceived as "the district"—that we were doing this to *them.*

trusted and well-received in the community, but we were perceived as "the district"—that we were doing this *to* them. So, we had a consultant who was not a staff member and who was wildly talented at what she did. They were organic meetings. She would have five people speak, then she would check in and ask them if they wanted a response from leadership, or whether they wanted to continue talking. Some groups said, "We want answers!" Others responded, "We're not done!" We realized that we could not try to control it. We had to let it play out. It was their school and their meeting. We were there to listen and facilitate.

Mathias: I have a question about your outreach. Here at MASBA, our focus is on closing gaps in our Texas public schools, particularly for the *Latino* students who comprise the majority in our Texas public schools, but also for English Language Learners who are now 20% of our Texas public schools. How do you engage diverse families, especially the families of English Language Learners?

Vargas: We use different strategies. We provide interpretation services at meetings and workshops where the presenters don't speak the languages of parents. We hold many meetings in Spanish, and we switch the roles, so that English speakers wear the headsets. It's a way of honoring and respecting our Spanish-speaking families. We have a Spanish radio and television station called *Educa*. This year, we were very intentional in creating "welcome centers" in all our schools, with materials and information for parents. It's like a little *casita*, where families can find a kitchen with food, magazines and toys, and the parent support specialist is there. We ask our families to take ownership of that space. They tell us how we should design it. We are co-planning, co-creating with them. We also have conversations about their hopes and dreams. We closely partner with our multilingual department, and we do outreach and different events together.

Telles: Because 90+ languages are spoken in the homes of our students, we have contracted with a company called

Language Line to create a welcoming environment for the families of our English Language Learners. When those parents show up at the front desks of our schools and cannot communicate a very basic need, the company has translators on standby for that. The front desk staffs at all our schools are trained to take out a list of languages and have parents point to the language they need. They then call an 800 number and are connected to a translator that can immediately assist, at least in helping to identify the immediate need.

Mathias: What are other strategies, resources and tools that you use to foster increased community engagement and family engagement?

Telles: Another strategy that we use is to have gallery walks at our meetings, where attendees can write questions or concerns on the placards that speak to the pros and cons of various issues. Some of our meetings aren't sit-down meetings at all; they're simply gallery walks to accommodate parents' busy schedules. They can drop by, read about the issues, and share their concerns.

Ghilarducci: We recognize that it's sometimes hard for families to see how learning about budgets impacts them, so we try to be creative and schedule information sharing at large or popular events, like family nights, when parents are coming to school anyway. That way, they don't have to go out of their way. Sometimes we'll invite a local TV personality, so that the event is not just about closing a school or learning about what's coming down the pipeline, but can also be an event that people could enjoy.

Vargas: As a district, we adopted the dual capacity framework for family engagement, by Dr. Karen Mapp of Harvard. It outlines various roles that families play, and it has an equity lens. It also holds us accountable, reminding us that our parents are experts on their environment and their children, and to look at them as equal partners. We're not coming in and saying, "We know everything," or "We know what's best for you." Our parents

Parents are experts on their environment and their children.

are co-creators, supporters, encouragers monitors, advocates and models within our district. We don't just "pigeonhole" our parents. Informing is not the same as engaging. Historically, the parents of our English Language Learners were treated that way. Authentic engagement requires a shift in thinking. I encourage you to check out the dual capacity framework.

Telles: Another tool that we use is instant polling. We purchased a program that allows all meeting participants to have a device, and we can ask a question of the large group, and people can anonymously respond, giving us the pulse of the room.

Another tool we use is Thought Exchange, where we can propose a question, and parents respond—and they're asked to rate other responses. On the back end, we can see what rises to the top. We can see the responses by gender, school, and area of town, so that we can see whether it's an isolated concern or something we need to address. It also translates the questions and comments very well between English and Spanish.

Ghilarducci: Another strategy is to host meetings outside our schools. A vast majority of our meetings are hosted at schools, but we recently made a connection with the Baptist Ministers Union in Austin, and one of the ministers invited us to his church. It was a way for us to go to the community, rather than making the community come to us. It was a way for us to connect with those who don't necessary have a strong connection to our schools. We're thinking about other spaces and communities that we might reach, and how we might host meetings there.

Telles: Soccer is big in Austin, particularly among the Hispanic community. So, as we prepared for our bond, we hosted a soccer tournament. The fathers played in teams of ten, the families came, and, before they received their T-shirts, they had to do their walk-about and learn about our bond. Many people didn't realize the impact that the bond could have, and events like that likely helped us

pass that bond at a 72% rate. That was another example of going where our families were.

Mathias: Tell us more about how you create welcoming communities. One of my favorite AISD lapel pins says "AISD Cares." It ties to Reyne's earlier comments about the people at the front desks of our schools being the face of our district. They are community engagement folks. What does it take to ensure that our schools are welcoming spaces?

Vargas: I always ask my staff: "Is what we're doing cultivating relationships?" We began this session with a little exercise to connect with each other and build relationships. We're mindful that we start with that in anything we do. Before we get into the class or whatever we're going to discuss, let's cultivate an atmosphere of relationships. We also try to be interactive. Our families like to move around and do things. I love attending our cooking classes. Our parents support specialists work with the public health department, and we hold nutrition classes. We cook, with music and conversation. It's also not unusual for us to go where our families are: to host block parties or swim parties during the summer, where families can hang out and have conversations. We identify the "mayors" of various communities, the spokespeople, and we solicit their feedback about their communities. We gather people at local restaurants and bakeries. We have enrollment efforts at laundromats. We try to go to our families and be in "their space."

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Telles: We also performed a poll, with qualitative and quantitative research on the reasons that parents choose our district—or choose to leave our district. We paid families to share their opinions with us, and we had about 900 "leavers" and "stayers" participate in this effort. What we found was a difficult "pill" for those who are in the education industry and have dedicated

their lives to helping kids learn to read and write. We learned that the number one reason that families choose our schools or not is the way our schools make them feel when they enter. Number two was how we communicated with parents. As a result, we created a customer service department in our district, which works with frontline staff to create a welcoming environment. Interestingly, academic programming was fourth on the list in that poll!

Vargas: When parents walk into our schools, they ask, "Am I able to see *me* here?" We try to make sure that what they see represents them and their families. We try to be sure that our schools reflect our student populations and their neighborhoods.

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Mathias: How many of us in this room are school board members? And how many of us want to race back to our districts to close schools or change boundaries? Those are the two least popular conversations to have! We are happy to avoid those issues and "kick the can down the road." In the Austin ISD, we recently closed four schools. Tell us about the community engagement process around those "School Changes," as we called them. How did you facilitate that process, what worked well, and what did you learn?

Ghilarducci: It was a nine-month process, and summer smell smack in the middle of it, which was not ideal. In our branding, we emphasized three words: Reimagine, Reinvest and Reinvent. People thought we were being cute with our three R's, but each of those words represented a stage in the process. Anytime you face a large decision, you want to communicate to the community the steps of the process, what will be decided, and where we are now.

During the first phase, interest was lower. We hadn't announced a list of schools yet. We hosted panel discussions to talk about possible closures. We

emphasized the opportunities, particularly of freeing up resources to better invest in our schools. It was an envisioning of where we'd like to be at the end of this process.

The reinvest phase asked, "If we free up dollars from closing schools, how will we reinvest them to better support our families?" It was a way of asking, "If your school were to close, is there anything that you could get in return that would make it feel like 'a good deal'?" How could the district reinvest, so that you'd feel like you are getting something?"

The reinventing phase included the closure of schools. We wanted them to focus on academics and the reinvestment and the possibilities that this process would unlock for us, but many felt it was a sort of "bait and switch." At the end, the bitter pill was hard for many folks to swallow.

Telles: The more direct impact that you have on people, the more they become involved. If we could have put more energy at the front end into helping people understand that this was coming down the pipeline, it's something that we could have better prepared the community for. The majority of parents aren't going to become involved until you come up with a list of possible school closures. When we held the visioning meetings, people showed up wanting to see such a list. It's as if they felt their time was wasted on community engagement.

Vargas: As a district, we promoted courageous conversations. We told families, "We need to make some hard decisions. Let's have a courageous conversation about it." We were always mindful about keeping the focus on our students. We did this training with all our parent support specialists. They're on the front lines of answering our families' questions. We were also aware of the spectrum of individuals: Some process information in their heads; others come from the heart. I always say that I like the loudest person in the room, because they tell us what they're feeling. The person I worry about is the one who is quiet, because you don't

know what they're thinking or feeling. *El más calladito es el peligroso* [The quietist one is the most dangerous one]. So, we said, "Let's have a courageous conversation. Let's talk about this. What are you thinking? What are you feeling?" We sought input and tried to find common ground.

Telles: Sometimes our icebreaker in the beginning was to have everyone identify where they are on that spectrum. We also do that at our administrator meetings: We share where we're at.

Mathias: I'm happy to share my perspective as a trustee. I said early on that, when we talk about school closures—or "school changes," if you prefer—we'll be leading people through the stages of grief. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross shared a model for this, for those facing terminal illness. Those who face imminent death go through stages, beginning with denial, anger and bargaining. I noted that we, as a district, would be leading people through dark emotions of grief and anger. It's an unpopular thing to say that you need to close schools—but I've been saying it for years. During my first seven years on our board, our district has lost over 6,000 students, largely due to the increasing lack of affordability in Austin. In a traditionally-*Latino* neighborhood, my neighbors just put their 1930s home on the market for $600 per square foot. A family of five is not going to move into that home. One block over, a house is on the market for $900 per square foot. This lack of affordability is decimating our public schools in Austin. We *need* to close schools. In fact, I've long said that, in the Austin ISD, we could close 37 schools today and still not have made up for the attrition of these past seven years. The four schools that we closed were only "the first bite at the apple." Many more difficult decisions will be needed. What I

In a traditionally-Latino neighborhood, my neighbors just put their 1930s home on the market for $600 per square foot. A family of five is not going to move into that home…. This lack of affordability is decimating our public schools in Austin.

underestimated is what it is that angry people say and do.

When we engage our communities as trustees and administrators, many times our communities have this idea that we already have our minds made up. They say, "Why should I go to that meeting? I'll just be wasting my time. They're going to do what they're going to do!" How do we confront this?

Ghilarducci: That's one of the greatest challenges of being a community engagement practitioner. We're asking for your feedback, but this isn't a referendum. As a district, we can do a better job of establishing the parameters for conversations. We are trying to help the community to understand the problem, and we're trying to help them process the various solutions we're proposing. If you have the time and resources, you can spend a lot of time educating around the problem and then brainstorm potential solutions. When you come to a community saying, "We have this problem, and here's the solution we're proposing," there is the sense that "you've already decided that this is what you're going to do!" People will say to us, "We don't want you to close our school! We want a modern school, like you're building over there!" We listen and record their comments, but we also acknowledge that it doesn't address the problem we have: that we don't have enough resources to modernize all of our schools, and that we're spreading limited resources too thinly over too many schools. Part of the challenge is helping the public to understand that we are accepting feedback, but that we can only use feedback that presents a viable option. Many times their feedback is not going to change our decisions or make us reverse course, but it does provide valuable information for us and help us to understand their concerns. We hear their challenges with transportation and getting their children to school, for instance, so that once we've implemented the decision, we can support our families through the change and make it more smooth.

Telles: One of the things that I learned from a training by the International Association of Public Participation is the importance of closing the feedback loop: of sharing the cumulative results of their feedback and letting people know how we utilized it in our recommendations for implementation.

Vargas: We always have to be transparent. If we've made the decision, we need to start with that point. We find that our families want to be engaged when they feel we're telling them the truth. They want the facts. As we engaged people for our School Changes, I saw us becoming more humble, more human. We acknowledged, "We are AISD employees, but this is a hard decision! We don't take it lightly. We know there will be an impact." We didn't walk in like we were "high and mighty." We acknowledged the impact on them, and we said, "We need your help. We want you to be our partners." We had to humble ourselves.

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Mathias: We come to our lightning round. We have two questions left, and I'll ask you to keep your answers to 30 seconds. Apart from the closure of schools, what was the most difficult challenge your district has faced with respect to community engagement, and what did you learn from that experience?

Telles: A challenge arises when the team that will be doing the engagement and communication is not invited to the room when the "menu" is being created, or to the "kitchen" when the "food is being prepared." Too often, we're invited to the table after the food is served.

Vargas: The political messaging that comes from higher levels impacts our students, their families and our engagement with them. That impacts engagement and participation. As an example, many of our families don't come to our community engagement meetings because

they're afraid of being stopped by law enforcement—and Texas is not extremely friendly to immigrant families.

Ghilarducci: A great challenge is the lack of predictability. We try to help people understand that our superintendent has nine "bosses"—and they don't always agree with each other. When people ask what we are going to do as a district, we really don't know, because, at the end of the day, we're trying to come up with something that will garner nine votes. If we had a single decisionmaker, we could say what that person wants to do. With a board of nine trustees, you don't have that clarity.

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Mathias: Finally, as school board members, we talk about the invisible line between governance and management. As trustees, we know that we're supposed to be "nose in, but hands off," but sometimes we like to "roll up our sleeves" and help staff. Fill in the blank of this sentence: "As school board members, you might be meddling in the work of your administration and staff, particularly with respect to community engagement, if you ___."

Ghilarducci: You might be meddling if you ask, "Why aren't you doing it this way?" We are using our expertise and our very best judgment, based on our knowledge of people and the community, to decide what kind of engagement would be appropriate. Sometimes we expend a lot of thought and energy planning engagement opportunities only to have someone say, "This trustee doesn't want you doing that."

Mathias: It's well known in the military that "there are no 'suggestions' from above."

Ghilarducci: By all means, give us your "suggestions" *before* we begin to plan!

Vargas: We create an agenda for our meetings, so when a trustee comes in and changes the agenda, we look at each other

and say, "What?" When a trustee says, "This is the format now," that makes it hard on staff.

Telles: As policymakers, when you set unrealistic timelines for decision-making, we don't have adequate time to conduct authentic engagement. The community sees through that.

Mathias: Tremendous. We thank our panelists—and we challenge you to go back to your districts more aware of the importance of engaging your community in authentic ways!

"The Deleterious Effects of Dual Public Education Systems in Texas!"

Edna Ramón Butts, Austin ISD
Patti Everitt, State Education Policy Consultant
Holly María Flynn Vilaseca, Houston ISD, Host

Charter school expansion is unlimited in Texas, and charter operators are taking advantage. Few legislators or districts fully understand the impact of charters on schools, students, and the state budget. What are the consequences of this—for our Latinx *community, for our Texas public schools, and for our democracy? Come, listen to research and stories on the harmful and costly effects on students and taxpayers of the dual public education system that's being pushed on Texas and on our communities. Learn how your district can help inform the public and our elected officials about the impact of charter schools on public education in Texas, and arm yourself to be an advocate for equitable, fair and transparent public education for all students!*

Everitt: Here in Texas, we're familiar with charter schools. Charter schools receive 100% of their funding from the state. They don't receive local funds; they receive state funds. In contrast, with HB 3, public school district will likely receive 36% of their funding from the state—far lower than in 2011, when we were at 46%.

Charter schools receive 100% of their funding from the state. They don't receive local funds; they receive state funds.

The seven largest charter schools in Texas account for 55% of all charter school students. It's often difficult to get up-to-date information on charters. Idea Public Schools is nearing 50,000 students and will be the fifth largest school district in Texas within a year or two. If you don't have a charter school in your area, you will have one. Idea, for instance, is applying to open 26 new campuses in 2021. Many of those are going to small communities, like Del Valle, which is where the Austin airport is located: Idea wants to open a school for 1,500 students in the middle of a

public school district of 10,000 students! They also want to open a school in Lake Worth, a district of 9,000 students just west of Fort Worth. They're coming into smaller cities and suburban areas.

This increase in charter school students increases the state budget—which will be over a billion dollars for charter schools this biennium. To double the enrollment of a charter school triples the cost of education for those students for the state.

We often talk about who gets more money: charters or districts. When you look at M&O [maintenance and operations], the operational money to run your district and pay teachers, charters have a distinct funding advantage. In almost every case, they get more money than the public school districts where they're located. In Austin, for instance, when a student walks out of a public school and goes to a charter school, that student receives $1,182 more per year than as an AISD student. This is because charter schools receive the allotment for small to midsize school districts, a funding mechanism to account for economies of scale in districts under 5,000 students—which makes sense, since even a school district of 200 students needs to hire a superintendent. Charters receive this no matter how many students they have. Idea Public Schools, with 50,000 students, receives $49 million from the small to midsize allotment, which certainly is not the intent of that.

Charters have a distinct funding advantage. In almost every case, they get more money than the public school districts where they're located.

I've pulled numbers for the Austin area: In Del Valle, then, Idea will receive $1,700 more than the Devl Valle ISD, which creates an advantage for Idea to move there. Raise Your Hand Texas has done a great service in running the school finance formulas for every district in the state, so that we can see how much more charter schools receive than the public school districts in which they're located. I then looked at what this means for an elementary classroom of 22 students. Idea will receive $38,000 more per year for a classroom of students than the Del Valle ISD. In a school of 500 students,

that's $857,000 more for that school. That's a lot of money and advantage.

The charter process is filled with question marks, and the way I started learning about it was when the superintendent of the Austin Independent School District contracted with Idea to take over an elementary school. It was very controversial. The board voted for it, then the board turned over based on that issue, and the new board voted to not renew that contract with Idea. Idea said, "We don't care," and they opened another school in Austin. I asked a friend, "How can they do that?" Charter schools do it in one of two ways. They form a non-profit and file a charter application—or the real way they expand is through charter amendments. Charters file for an amendment to open a new campus or to serve more students than their charter allows. They file these amendments to add grade levels or to expand their geographic boundaries. Once you get a charter and meet minimum criteria, you can expand anywhere in Texas with an unlimited number of schools, which is what Idea is doing. So, charter applications are important. I wish we had more time to talk about them: There's a charter that opened in San Antonio two years ago and now has 354 students. They haven't even met their enrollment projection, and they're trying to open three new schools—two in Austin and one in San Antonio—through this insane amendment process.

Obtaining a charter is actually a fairly rigorous process. There's a long application, and you have to have a public meeting. The TEA eventually posts the charter application on its website and has an external review. If the proposed charter meets the scoring threshold, there's an interview and the elected State Board of Education members can ask questions. If you have questions that you wanted your elected SBOE member to ask, let them know!

In 2020, 28 applications were submitted. Likely eight to ten will qualify for interviews. They're subject to Commissioner approval, but, importantly, SBOE members can veto that approval. It's a pretty public process, and the public can speak out, though many districts don't know about this process. In a moment, we'll talk about what Austin did last

year, which was absolutely incredible. It was the first in the state to do this, and it worked, but when I called the superintendent of another district, they didn't even know that this charter application was moving forward. The TEA doesn't call you, so, if you're not "in the know," it can slip by you.

There are about 175 charter holders in Texas, which is always changing. A charter was just closed this week, for example. The cap on charter holders is 305, so we're far from the cap. Every charter holder can have multiple campuses. Idea, for example, has 91 campuses. A single charter holder could have 200 campuses, which is where Idea is headed. Once a charter is approved, that charter can have an unlimited number of campuses.

The approval rate of charter amendments is 70%. During the last five years, Idea has had every amendment approved. Last year, they had amendments to open 20 campuses. All were approved. This year, they're hoping to get an amendment for 26 new campuses—unless districts do something about it, which is what we want to talk about today.

Let's talk about the amendment process, the secretive, stealth process by which charters expand. Unlike the charter application, where the public has an opportunity to contact elected officials, charter amendments don't have the same scrutiny. There's a two-month window, from February 1 to April 1. The application is just a few pages. The TEA Commissioner has 60 days to decide. There is an opportunity for districts to state the impact of the amendment. Not all districts respond. There's no public notice. In Del Valle, we found out about Idea's intend because residents of Del Valle were interested in having an H-E-B, which they need, and they found a site plan for…an Idea school! Parents organized and are writing letters to the Commissioner and Governor. They'll be in a story that's coming out in the *Austin American-Statesman*.

The secretive, stealth process by which charters expand… No one knows about these charter amendments; they're not on the TEA website.

They're saying, "We wanted a grocery store, and we're getting…a charter school?" No one knows about these charter amendments; they're not on the TEA website. You have to file a public information request to know who has filed for an amendment. I file a public information request every two weeks now, just to get the darned list from the TEA, to let districts know! The amendment application doesn't state where they hope to locate. In the Rio Grande Valley, for instance, Idea simply says on one of its 26 charter amendments that it wants to open a campus "in Cameron or Hidalgo County." Charters don't have to be specific on their charter amendment applications, which is a big problem, so districts don't even know if a charter is coming into their district! There's no opportunity for public input. The Commissioner—a single appointed person—provides the sole approval, and there's no appeal. The process is a problem. It's not democratic.

There's no opportunity for public input. The Commissioner—a single appointed person—provides the sole approval, and there's no appeal. The process is a problem. It's not democratic.

As a result of the charter amendment process, a charter can open a school anywhere. In the example of Del Valle, they want to open a school a half-mile from an existing public school and a mile from a new $20 million public school that was opened in 2018. The district is still paying for that school—and Idea might be allowed to open a school in the middle of those two schools! It's insane, it's inefficient, and charters can file for an amendment in March and open a campus in August, so districts don't have any time to adapt their budgets or staffing patterns. There's also no consideration of the fiscal impact on the district—which is why statements of impact are so important.

It's important that districts become aware of this situation, identify what they can do, and be actively involved. I talk to a lot of superintendents and board members. I understand their reluctance to act on charter schools because they have

to deal with the Commissioner. Some superintendents say, "We can do a better job, so we'll just compete with them." That train has left the station: Charter schools do *not* play on a level playing field! They enjoy many advantages: They have a fiscal advantage, many laws don't apply to them, and there are several issues that are outside the scope of this presentation. I say to superintendents: "You don't have to be "anti-charter, but you do have a responsibility to talk about the impact of a new charter school on your parents and students!" We all have a responsibility to talk about the impact of charter expansion on our districts.

First, calculate how much you'll lose per student. I've worked with state education organizations, and we have developed a calculation form. You have to look at your adjusted allotment of $6,160, plus all the other allotments as well. When the average student walks out of the Del Valle ISD, the district loses $9,608. This number will vary by district.

Then project that revenue loss over ten years. Show the TEA that you're thinking about the long-term impact on your district.

Then calculate the additional loss of revenue to the state. Many legislators are not aware of this. Austin ISD loses $1,182 per student, so you multiply that by the enrollment of the proposed charter. When you multiply that by, say, 1,000 students, that's a lot of lost revenue by the state!

District have stranded costs, too. If a charter takes three kids from a classroom, you can't take away a teacher. You still have to pay that teacher. You still have to pay utilities, maintenance and transportation. Those are stranded costs, and you have to pay for them despite having less revenue. Many people don't understand this. I was speaking with an SBOE member who suggested that the money simply goes from the public school to the charter school, and it's even. That's not the way it works in our districts! Please know that your legislator *doesn't* know this.

Your CFO can help you find the information on the TEA website of how much money your district lost to charter

schools in SY18/19. During that year, for instance, TEA data state that the Austin ISD lost 15,348 students to charters. One district alone is losing $129 million per year! Del Valle ISD loses $20 million per year. Pflugerville ISD loses nearly $23 million per year. Ask your superintendent or CFO for this information for your district, so that you'll have a baseline. It's important to know where you are.

Let's talk about statements of impact. You may not be familiar with the statement of impact form. Applicants for charter school applications and amendments must send these to impacted districts. It's a one-page form that asks the impact of the charter application or amendment on your district. Please don't simply reply with your adjusted allotment! I've spoken with superintendents who've said that they've stop responding to these because the TEA ignores them, and they don't make a difference.

Butts: We just filed one today. The form reads, "A school district may submit this form to provide the Commissioner information relating to any financial difficulty that loss of enrollment may have on the district and any other information that a district wishes to share with the Commissioner." I have one here for Basis Charter School. It lists the districts that will possibly be impacted. These are sent to the district.

Everitt: I suggest that you take advantage of the opportunity to provide more information. Present the fiscal impact, but don't just say you're losing $6,100 per student. Look at your full per-student loss and project it ten years into the future. Give the Commissioner and the TEA a truer, more comprehensive picture of the impact on your district.

Butts: If you contact me, I'll forward to you our statements of impact, so that you're not starting from scratch.

Everitt: Charters are expanding. I was speaking with the superintendent of Lake Worth ISD the other day: A charter school is expanding there from Grand Prairie, 40 miles away! Much of this

Much of this expansion is stealth – like charter school board meetings. You've all heard the story now of Idea's $15 million lease for a private jet.

expansion is stealth—like charter school board meetings. You've all heard the story now of Idea's $15 million lease for a private jet. Their board meets four times a year, and their meetings aren't open to the public. We have to file a public information request to know what they're up to. They had an item on their agenda for a "lease agreement." In the recording of the meeting, which we acquired through a public information request, a board member asked whether the lease was with Idea Public Schools or Idea Public Schools Enterprises. We wondered what this lease was. That was the only question that was asked by board members. Then another board member said, and I'm paraphrasing, "We really need this. My corporation has six private jets, and I don't understand how Idea can do without this. We're spending way too much time in the Houston airport. We need a jet." We shared the recording with the *Houston Chronicle*, and, within 24 hours of the story being published, Idea had pulled the lease for its private jet! The same thing happened with its luxury box at the Spurs. Someone told us, "Everyone knows Idea has a luxury box at the Spurs." The same thing happened: The story went out on social media, and they no longer have the box.

Butts: Or how much did they pay for that Super Bowl ad?

Everitt: Things are changing. During the last legislative session, we filed a bill to make the Commissioner consider proximity and the fiscal impact on districts before any decisions are made. We're trying to get these statements of impact into legislators' hands. I guarantee you your legislator knows nothing about these. The TEA probably doesn't care that we write these statements of impact, but they do care about the legislation regarding charter schools.

I've been at SBOE meetings before where the SBOE is considering charter applications. At one meeting, an SBOE member asked about the impact on the district, and the TEA staff member responded, "It doesn't seem there's an impact. We didn't hear from the district." The world is changing, though, and, unless they hear from us, they'll say there's no impact!

Here's some more interesting data on Idea: During SY17/18, they spent $14 million on travel. During the past two years, they spent $8 million on advertising and fundraising. These numbers are mind-blowing.

As a result, 16 groups have come together, including MASBA, and we're working on a joint legislative agenda, and we're moving toward bills in the next session. What we've found is that when we push back against the TEA, something changes.

How many of you know your SBOE member and speak with them regularly? They are your elected representative, and they have power over charter applications. Hold your SBOE member accountable!

Butts: Charters also serve fewer children with special needs. 6.9% of their students have special needs, compared with 9.2% of students in public schools. In the Austin ISD, we spend twice the money we receive from the state per special education student, which has a considerable fiscal impact on the district.

To draw students from charter schools, we expanded our programming to PK3 and we expanded our dual language programs. We are extending the day, for early arrival and late pick-up, which a lot of charters do. We're also focusing on customer service, so that our parents feel welcome in our schools.

Thanks to Patti, we were tipped off about Royal Charter School, which was seeking a charter. Our CFO testified that we would lose $85 million over a ten-year period. Our Director of Social and Emotional Learning also testified, since Royal claimed that it was going to embed SEL into its STEM curriculum. We've been doing SEL for ten years, and we're one of the leading districts in the United States in SEL, and we know how difficult it is to embed SEL into a STEM curriculum! In their application, they only had a budget for one counselor. They also claimed that AISD had six failing schools when, in fact, all our schools have met standards. The SBOE committee voted three to two to recommend the veto, then the full SBOE vetoed it eight to five.

If existing charters were to enroll as many students as they are approved for, this will cost the state of Texas $11 billion. That compares to the $11.5 billion that schools receive from HB 3, and nearly half of which is from property tax relief. We talk about sustainable funding for HB 3, while charters are receiving all this money!

Our advocacy on this issue matters. One of our colleagues calculated that if existing charters were to enroll as many students as they are approved for, this will cost the state of Texas $11 billion. That compares to the $11.5 billion that schools receive from HB 3, and nearly half of which is from property tax relief. We talk about sustainable funding for HB 3, while charters are receiving all this money!

Everitt: I want to emphasize that this was the first time a district had ever gone to the state board with an organized effort to show the impact of a charter school. The district didn't say, "We hate this charter!" It simply refuted the application point by point, and the SBOE was blown away. There was even a student who talked about the incredible college readiness services of the district. That SBOE committee meeting will never be the same again: Austin just rolled them over!

Butts: We just filed six statements of impact today. I mention not only the impact to the Austin ISD, but also the impact to the state of Texas. Here's one application for ABC Charter School, which requests adding 1,000 students. I do the math, and I write in bold that the fiscal impact to the state alone will be $1.1 million. Then I proceed to the per-pupil loss. We passed a $1.1 billion bond in 2017, so I include that on the statement of impact: I look up which schools will be affected by the charter expansion, then I include the bond monies that we're investing in those schools. I include the monies from our 2004 and 2008 bond as well. In terms of programming, I point out that we have very robust programming for our students, as well as family supports, and that those could be at risk if we lose money. We offer SEL in all our schools. I tell them the number of impacted schools that offer dual language. I talk about our rating with TEA and our TEA distinctions, any special programs we have, like CTE or early

college high schools. I let them know that we don't need another school to come in and compete with all the great things we're doing. Then I talk about the impact on student and family supports. I'll say, for example, "eight of the ten campuses that are impacted by this charter have a Communities in Schools program," and I briefly describe what CIS does. I state the number of schools with parent support specialists, family resource centers, and school-based mental health centers. We already have great programs in place to serve the economically-disadvantaged kids that they say they'll serve. We are clear in our statements of impact that there is no need for this charter school. We also brag about the experience and low turnover rates of our teachers, compared to charter school teachers, as well as the way in which we pay our teachers better. I draw on TEA data to show that we have higher SAT/ACT scores. I also talk about how students who aren't accepted into four-year colleges and universities—which is a graduation requirement of Idea—come back to our schools. As districts, we need to get better at knowing which charter school students are coming back to us!

**"Creating Safer School Environments:
Enhancing Access to Mental Well-being Care"**

Melissa Tijerina, Center for Health Care Services
Mary Ann Pérez, Director of Clinical Operations, Aetna
Ashley Karpinski, Behavioral Health Strategy and Innovation, Aetna
Louis Q. Reyes, III, MASBA Ambassador, Host

One in four children has been exposed to early childhood trauma. Teen depression has increased by 60% during the past 10 years. Toxic stress lowers academic performance and increases the risk of dropping out of school. Join us for an informative, frank, judgment-free discussion on adolescent mental health, and culturally-relevant responses and resources for our Latinx *students and their families!*

Karpinski: I'm Ashley Karpinski. I'm a licensed psychotherapist. I've been in the behavioral health field for 25 years, and I've spent my whole life trying to figure out how to serve people and deal with the mental illnesses that surround all of us. For seven years, I worked at the sites of school shootings, trying to figure out how to help communities rebuild after tragedy. As important as that seems, it's the everyday well-being of our students and teachers that I'm most passionate about, and I hope we can have a frank discussion with you today on mental health.

Mental health is a really interesting challenge for many of us. I've been on the provider side, where I provided the care. I've been on the insurance side, where I oversaw the care. Now I have the honor of going in and trying to develop programs that make a difference for broader populations around mental health.

As mental health professionals, we can't solve this challenge alone. It takes communities of people engaging and working together to solve these challenges.

Let's talk about the real challenges of adolescents and their mental health. For adolescents, there are many stressors: from sleep, stimulation, and testing

requirements, to the adolescent fear of missing out. Every day, there's a new challenge.

On a scale of one to ten, with ten being better than you've ever been, and one being worse than you can imagine, how are *you* personally doing today?

Next, think about your close personal relationships. On a scale of one to ten, how are you doing today?

How are you functioning outside your home—when you go out for work or school or church or wherever you go?

Now, overall, when you think about how you're doing personally, in your relationships and in your functioning outside the home, what overall score would you give yourself?

Believe it or not, that's called a global assessment of functioning. It's a predictor of people in clinical distress and non-clinical distress. It seems crazy: I didn't ask you, "In the past 20 days, have you felt downhearted or blue?" or, "Have you thought of taking your life?" I asked you, "How are you functioning?" We recognize that all of us are different and that our mental health a continuum. When we show up, as adults or students, we have all that going on in the background.

We've seen an increase in depression and anxiety in young adults. Suicide is the second leading cause of deaths for ages 10 to 24. Add bullying, social media and learning disabilities, and you can understand why the number of psychotropics taken by our kids is on the rise.

Suicide is the second leading cause of deaths for ages 10 to 24. Add bullying, social media and learning disabilities, and you can understand why the number of psychotropics taken by our kids is on the rise.

We know there's stigma around mental health. Adolescents struggle with whether to tell someone or keep it in the family. And often we don't know how to get help when we need it.

As we were driving here, Mary Ann was sharing the story of her cousin here in San Antonio who is thinking about dropping out of teaching because she's dealing with kids'

personal struggles all day long—and she wasn't trained for that.

Every day we fluctuate on the continuum. We don't always fluctuate between severe disruption, suicidal and healthy. All of us today may be better or worse than yesterday. If I fought with my husband or child today, it may influence how I'm feeling today, compared with yesterday. It's important to think of mental health and mental well-being or mental illness as a continuum. We know that some people have been diagnosed and are being treated. Others are showing symptoms. In the case of adolescents, their bodies are going crazy, and they're figuring things out and testing boundaries. Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish this from signs of illness.

In the case of adolescents, their bodies are going crazy, and they're figuring things out and testing boundaries. Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish this from signs of illness.

Audience: Children tend to use the word "crazy." Are there other words that we might use with children?

Pérez: One of the challenges is that we tend to talk about physical health and mental health, instead of just health. If someone were in front of you with a physical illness, or weren't feeling well physically, we would say "you're not feeling well today." There's no reason we can't say the same thing if someone's mental health is compromised. It's as easy as saying, "You're not feeling well today. You need some help, some assistance. You might need to see a doctor." If you're getting caught up on what to say because it's mental health, just substitute in the words you would use if this was a physical illness—because we're talking about health.

Karpinski: There's so much stigma about mental health, which impacts the whole issue.

Pérez: Stigma is seeing someone in a negative light for any reason. Perhaps they look different. Perhaps they're not wearing the right clothes. Perhaps you think they're "crazy." Adolescent already have enough pressure related to school, friends and family. There are a lot of

pressures. My son is a senior and is applying for colleges, and he recently said, "There's so much pressure!," which His wordsmade me take a step back and consider how much pressure I was putting on him. It changed our conversation. Some kids have a parent who's been in a terrible accident, where mom's not mom anymore. Some kids have a grandparent in hospice, where grandma's not grandma anymore. Then they have to come to school and concentrate on all sorts of things.

Ashley brought up the example of my cousin, who had been incredibly passionate about becoming a teacher here in San Antonio. She was super-excited and has always been incredibly passionate, but two weeks ago she said, "I don't think I can do this anymore. I don't know how to support these kids. I can't even focus on the curriculum, because these children are dealing with things, expressing it, and behaving in different ways." Some are being very aggressive, and she's trying to manage that. Some are incredibly sad and are reaching out to her because she's someone they trust. And she's asking herself, "What do I do?"

Karpinski: There's a stigma around mental health in the Hispanic community. We need to ask ourselves what we can do about that and how we can reduce it.

There's a stigma around mental health in the Hispanic community. We need to ask ourselves what we can do about that and how we can reduce it.

Tijerina: We need to increase our literacy around talking about mental health and mental wellness. We tend to go to the to the worst side of it and talk about it as all the wrong things. We need to help people appreciate that mental health is part of overall health and that there's a continuum of wellness in general. Sometimes we feel less well than other times, and sometimes we are not well and we need additional support.

Children are not notorious for asking for help. When they do, they don't typically go to adults for help. Unfortunately, a lot of our children don't feel comfortable

going to their own families for help. So we have to create a community and environments where children are surrounded by people who are willing to listen and hear them. One of the things we do is to we teach people how to talk about things. We teach children how to talk about things.

During typical development, adolescents start to pull away from family and establish their own identity. They try to figure things out. The disadvantage is that our brains don't fully develop until we're 25—and the last part of that development is executive functioning, the part that helps us make good choices. So kids, in general, are not wired to make good choices. They don't—and we didn't either when we were their age! We survived. We made it, but not all kids do make it and so that's the challenge: We want to make sure every adolescent is resilient enough to make it through adolescence.

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Another challenges is that mood swings and being withdrawn are typical among adolescents and children, so it gets cloudy for the those around them to tell when something's typical or not. As adults, we need to be a little more in tune and looking for changes. When kids who are engaged in activities suddenly stop those activities and don't substitute something else, it's a huge red flag. If you're in band in middle school, then decide to do athletics in high school, that's fine; you're substituting something for something else. But to totally withdraw from anything that gives you pleasure is not what we expect. Those are red flags. For people to change friends, and to move from this group of friends to another is typical, but to not be with anyone is a subtle red flag to watch for.

Schools spend more time every day with our students than their own families do, so we see what is normal for

that student at school, and what isn't. It's a real gift that we have: that ability to see the same students in the same environment day after day.

Karpinski: When I get calls, it's usually about bullying. It's a tough topic. We know what black-and-white bullying is: if someone is being aggressive or shaming you in public. There are many cases where it's not so clear. I was recently working on the case of a student who did a "cup tap" in the locker room. Things like that have gone on for years in any sport—but he was labeled as a bully and was expelled for sexual assault. Sometimes, as adults, we overreact or overcorrect. It's difficult to define how to respond to bullying at different ages. You might say of your aggressive granddaughter, "I'm raising an independent woman who stands up for herself!" We have to ask ourselves how far that behavior can go before it becomes problematic. I struggle with it as a parent: I tell my daughter, "Don't take anything from anyone," and my son responds, "She's going to start something in the locker room!"

Tijerina: The thing about bullying is that we say, "It's always been around. Why is it such a big deal now?" We're living in an age where bullying is on steroids and is magnified through social media and the mechanisms that most kids are carrying. Kids know students from other campuses and districts, so bullying is no longer isolated to the room where it happened. It's magnified. And we have adults in society who don't always model the best behaviors or who don't a stand and say, "This is unacceptable."

We're living in an age where bullying is on steroids and is magnified through social media and the mechanisms that most kids are carrying.

From the mental health perspective, the issue with bullying is this: Many people are bullied, some people are resilient and have the resiliency factors to manage that, but there are children and adolescents who do not have strong support systems, coping skills and mechanisms. When they are bullied, they're already vulnerable. They may have an undiagnosed, untreated or undertreated

issue with depression or anxiety, which increases their vulnerability. When we hear that a young person died by suicide as a result of bullying, the bullying was just one of many factors that played a role in the student's death—and the cause *wasn't* the bullying so much as it was their vulnerability.

We want kids to be healthy, and part of being healthy is having good coping skills and strong support systems. There's a lot of evidence and research out there that says that if a child has one strong adult presence in their life, that makes a huge difference in their outcomes. This doesn't have to be a person they live with, which is why our schools are so important. Ideally, our schools provide environments where adults care for students, and where students feel cared for and feel a connection with those role models.

We also need to understand that most people who bully have been bullied and probably have things going on for which they need some assistance. We need to build resiliency and protective factors in our young people.

Karpinski: We often hear that "bullies are bad" or about "poor victims." I have a reaction to that. In both cases, both of them are protecting something. I'm not condoning bullying, but there's usually a reason that someone wants to put someone down and hold them down. So, while we take a stand and punish, we also need to engage and understand what's driving that behavior. What are they afraid of? Typically, believe it or not, bullies don't feel safe either.

Talking about social media, my son, who goes to school in Austin, recently told me about the suicide of a high school student here in San Antonio. He literally knew about it 30 minutes after it occurred, and he was texting me, "Did you know a student committed suicide in San Antonio?" He didn't know the student or anyone in that school, but he learned about it through Instagram. With social media, information spreads so quickly, before we even have the facts.

Pérez: It's so easy to bully through social media. You don't have to look the person in the face; you can just do something over Snapchat.

Karpinski: Bullying is very similar to sexual harassment: Something is sexual harassment when one person decides it's not okay. You can have sex jokes in the E.R. where my husband works all day long until one person says, "That made me uncomfortable"—and then it's wrong. Bullying is similar. There is no science of bullying; it's all in the perception of those experiencing it. There are norms in our culture that allow us to joke about certain things—like the "your momma" jokes that somehow still exist—but we draw the line where someone is really hurt by it. We have to build resiliency and relationships and teach people how to communicate, but we also have to learn tolerance for differences. When we began with our wellness scale, it could be the case that someone in here is not doing well today.

Bullying is very similar to sexual harassment: Something is sexual harassment when one person decides it's not okay.

Tijerina: There's a great opportunity in Texas with an eight-hour training called Mental Health First Aid, for anybody who wants it. School personnel can access that training at absolutely no cost. We have an adult curriculum and a youth curriculum. Our counselors have received similar trainings—but our librarians, cafeteria workers, paraprofessionals and bus drivers probably haven't. They may be the one that a child in distress reaches out to first, or they may see things happening. There's an opportunity for school professionals to provide that training at no cost to them. It's really helpful. It helps identify what's typical development, what is a concern, and what to do about it.

I brought a few handouts on suicide preventions. We need to make sure that we get in front of kids before a crisis episode happens.

We also have to think about how we respond to crisis episodes. There's a large array of options. The first choice when a kid makes a statement should not be an

emergency detention to an E.R. for assessment, though there are times and places where that would absolutely be recommended. If a child is found in the course of making a gesture, if they're erratic, if they have lacerations or ligature marks, or if they're clearly disoriented or having auditory hallucinations, they need to go to the E.R.

Another option is to reach out to your local mental health authorities and to their crisis teams. Some people say, "But if the crisis team comes to our campus, who's going to pay for that?" I always respond, "If a kid breaks his arm on the playground, you call an ambulance. It's the same thing here. They're both crisis situations requiring emergency care." The advantage to using your crisis teams, especially if they come to your campus, is that 80% of kids who have suicidal or homicidal ideation can be stabilized, and you'll never know who should be hospitalized unless you have an assessment. Students need to be assessed, and the vast majority are going to be back in their seats tomorrow. The lower response is always good because we don't want to teach kids that reaching out for help ends with them being handcuffed in a school police car, taken to an E.R., stripped of their clothes, and sitting there for nine hours.

If a child has the courage to come forward and tell an adult, "I feel like hurting myself" or "I've been thinking about killing myself," we need to respond in an effective way, and not in a way that discourages them from ever telling us that again.

When young people are assessed for crisis episodes, there are four themes that tend to present: bullying, relationship difficulties, loss (which includes grief, the loss of a pet, moving to a new city, parents divorcing, their own sexual identity, or a broken relationship), or trauma exposure. A lot of kids live in homes with domestic violence,

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abuse and neglect. They live in neighborhoods that are more violent than others. They live in poverty. They live in a world of school shootings. Some of these are in front of students all the time and can push a vulnerable student into an episode.

Karpinski: Thank you for coming and having a conversation on mental health. It's something we need to open our minds and hearts to, and the more we normalize conversation about it, the more likely we'll be able to deal with it!

"How Districts of Innovation Are Kissing TRS Goodbye!"

Carey Malek, Hotchkiss Insurance
Shana Robinson, Barrett Insurance
Kevin O'Hanlon, O'Hanlon Demerath & Castillo
Alfonso V. Velarde, El Paso ISD, Host & Moderator

For years, our districts were mandated to pay into the Teacher Retirement System. Districts of Innovation are now able to offer alternatives to this program, thus providing their employees better health care coverage and directing more dollars to students and their needs. Come, learn how your District of Innovation can take advantage of this opportunity…before it's too late!

Velarde: From the minute I was elected to my board, I kept hearing from teachers, from the unions, from our own staff: "Get us out of TRS! It's too expensive!" Of course, our district was locked in and couldn't get out of the Teacher Retirement System. A previous board made the decision several years back, when it was tempting, and once our district was locked into TRS, we had no choice. So, for several years, I responded, "We're stuck with it."

At a recent meeting of our MASBA Board, our legal counsel, Mr. O'Hanlon, said, "I know how to get out of it." I told our superintendent, "This guy says he can get us out of TRS." As a result, we're finally able to come up with a plan to give our employees an option to get out of TRS. When people ask me in the future about my "claim to fame" on our board, our ability to offer our employees something different, which amounted to a 15% raise, with will certain be at the top of my list.

When people ask me in the future about my "claim to fame" on our board, our ability to offer our employees something different, which amounted to a 15% raise, will certain be at the top of my list.

Robinson: Obviously, we're all here to see how we can exit TRS. Districts that opted years ago to pay into TRS don't have the same flexibility as their counterparts around the state, and this affects recruitment and retention.

O'Hanlon: This is an issue we need to pay attention to because it will come up during the next legislative session, and the Empire will strike back: The TRS will try to defend its territory.

There's a fairly-complex regulatory maze dealing with TRS. The original statute for the TRS is not found in the Education Code; it's found in the Insurance Code. It was passed at the end of the last century, and it hasn't changed. If you had fewer than 500 employees in 2001, you have to pay into this program. You're stuck—unless you're in a co-op.

It's now possible to get out. We've helped Raymondville ISD and El Paso ISD to get out. The provision says that once you elect to get into TRS, you have to continue to offer the TRS program, but it doesn't say that that's the only thing you can offer. There's also a provision in Chapter 22 of the Education Code that says that you can only offer one program—so if you offer TRS, that's the only program you can offer. Here's the catch: The provisions of Chapter 22 can be waived under a District of Innovation plan, despite the fact that Chapter 22 is not on a list of things that can be done away with under a District of Innovation plan. So, we're creating District of Innovation plans that delete the requirement that there only be one insurance plan.

We thought we might get some blowback, but the TEA Commissioner hasn't said anything to date. We've submitted our District of Innovation plans and haven't heard back from TEA, so we're implementing them. If you're already a District of Innovation, you simply submit an amendment.

Now remember that there's a provision in the Insurance Code that you have to offer the TRS policy. In the districts we've done, we offer the TRS policy, so that we're in compliance with the statute, and alongside it, we offer an alternative. There are some advantages to TRS, even though the prices keep marching higher and coverage keeps becoming more difficult. Insurance is a large part of your annual budget, and it has to be actively managed. There are a million options: You can go with an insurance product, or you can go with reference-based pricing, etc. If you go in this direction, there are a huge number of decisions that you'll have to make as a board—but it is possible, if you're interested. During the next legislative session, the TRS will try to take their hostages back because they need public school employees to sustain their program, so it's going to be an interesting legislative session.

During the next legislative session, the TRS will try to take their hostages back because they need public school employees to sustain their program.

Malek: We now have two more districts under contract: Southside ISD just approved theirs last night, and we'll go to market for them. And we're waiting for board action in Floresville ISD, which is in its 30-day waiting period. On that one, we did get some pushback from the TEA, which is asking us about the innovations in the district.

There are a couple of issues, like getting the claims information, that will help us go to market. We find that everyone wants to get out because the TRS doesn't offer a very good insurance plan for its employees. The market has changed since 2001, and there are better options, there are different players in the market, and there are a lot different ways to manage your health insurance plans. That's really our role in this: We help you navigate the DOI process as best we can, and we put you in a better insurance program. We'll continue to offer TRS, and there's actually an actuarial reason why we don't want to terminate TRS, so that they pay the claims that are still out there.

We have modeled several areas in Texas and the advantages to exiting TRS are primarily in lower-cost areas, like San Antonio, El Paso and the Valley. Houston and Dallas dominate the population and are higher-cost areas, so the rates are homogeneous.

If you've done a DOI already, it's the same process: you put a DOI Committee together. It's usually a 60- to 90-day process before we can go to market, then it's another 60 to 90 days after that. The goal is to get out of TRS by September 1, when TRS renews. By April, we'll know what the rates are for the coming year, and you're almost guaranteed to have a higher deductible and higher premiums from TRS. Anything we come up with will be way more competitive than what the TRS is going to be able to offer. Then comes implementation. September 1 is the implementation date, so we need to act quickly. You can't get out midyear, and next year the legislature will meet and there could be changes to the DOI process or exemptions.

I don't think the legislature will do anything: They're politicians, and they have a hard time agreeing on anything. Something this controversial will be very difficult for them. I can't imagine them telling a district that just got out of TRS, that they have to go back in. How do you tell the registered voters working at that school district that they have to give up their insurance and to back to TRS? I foresee it stalling for a couple of years. It's just a matter of who wants to get out and take local control over how their health insurance is obtained.

I've gotten information from a few districts and I've found that districts in the San Antonio area can save 20 to 25% with alternative plans. In El Paso, it's closer to 30%, and in the Valley and Corpus Christi, it's from 15 to 20%.

There are two phases to the process: You start with the DOI process, then you go out to the market to see what's out there and whether you'd like to offer an option to TRS.

"How English Language Learners Can Master Reading Comprehension!"

Raymundo Rodríguez, South Central Vice President
Amplify

Anne Lucas, Senior Product Manager
Amplify

Melissa Ulan, Senior VP and General Manager for Supplementals
Amplify

Holly María Flynn Vilaseca
Houston ISD, Host

How familiar are you with the underlying processes that are critical to mastering reading comprehension—particularly for English Language Learners? Come, learn about the key components of reading: What they are, why they're important, and how to teach these important new skills to our students! Participate in small-group work and think-pair-share activities, and leave with concrete strategies to help your district's students improve their reading comprehension!

Lucas: I'm Anne Lucas, and I'm really excited today to talk about one of my favorite topics, reading comprehension, what makes it so challenging for English Language Learners, and what we can do about it. We'll kick off by taking a look at the different components of reading comprehension and how they fit together in a really complex, difficult puzzle.

The Scarborough Braid is often used as an image of the different facets of reading comprehension, of all the things students—English Language Learners or not—simultaneously do to reach the ultimate goal of comprehension. It includes decoding, vocabulary, understanding the sounds that letters make, understanding word meanings, and being able to monitor your own comprehension. We learn each of

these individually, and then we eventually wrap them all together and do all of them automatically when we are comprehending a text. Even native English speakers have to do all these things, which makes it much more challenging for English Language Learners. As teachers, we teach students all these skills and remove the barriers that might impede students' comprehension, and, when a student isn't able to read and comprehend, we have to assess what broke down.

Now I'm going to ask you to read a sentence and draw a picture or a diagram to summarize what you've read: "Carla forgot her umbrella, so she got very wet on the walk to school." We no doubt have pictures that look very similar: We show a sad Carla in the rain, on her way to school. But anyone looking at our pictures has to infer that Carla forget her umbrella. We have to help students make connections like that!

There is a growing body of research that suggests that there is actually a lot more at play that happens while students are reading—beyond just decoding, vocabulary and fluency. There's a lot more comprehension work that's happening at the sentence or paragraph level that helps us build a picture, a mental model in our minds and affects our overall comprehension of what we read. Beginning readers and struggling readers whose native language is not English are going to be confused by some of the nuances of language and will have a completely different picture in their mind of what they just read. As many as 17 comprehension processes are at play.

What exactly are these comprehension processes? They're all facets of different skills that need to become automatic for fluent readers of English. Of those 17 processes found in the literature, we've narrowed it down to the six most critical processes.

These are important because, when teachers can isolate these, they can practice that one skill alone with students, yielding greater results in their overall reading comprehension. For the sake of time today, I'm going to

focus on three, and you can read the rest in our white paper.

We start with gap-filling. This is an example similar to the one that we pointed out about the rain and the umbrella. It's the idea that authors intentionally or unintentionally leave out important information, and it's the job of the reader to be able to pick out what the author is actually saying.

Look at this sentence: "Lawrence wanted to swim with friends, but he didn't bring his bathing suit." What's missing in that sentence? Where is Lawrence? Is he at a birthday party, or at a pool or beach? There's a clue in the words "bathing suit." He's wearing his clothes, so he didn't assume that he'd be swimming. This wasn't a swim party. We're making gap-filling inferences now. They require us to activate background knowledge about what we're reading. We don't even realize we're doing it half the time. Now think about our English Language Learners. They're already trying to do so much as they're reading: They're trying to decode, they're trying to remember the vocabulary, they're trying to read fluently, and they might miss some of those details that we automatically pick up. It's up to teachers to help students notice and resolve these gaps when they appear. The advice I give is to help students visualize what they're reading.

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The next one is connective words, which are often known as marker words. Let's look at an example: "Sally was thirsty, so she drank some water. Sally ate a cookie after she ate a hotdog." Now my question is: Why did Sally drink water, and when did she eat the cookie? The two words in those sentences that give us those answers are "so" and "after." These connective words are extremely

challenging for English Language Learners. They show that two parts of the sentence are related in some way. These connective words are really abstract and difficult to understand. If you don't understand what the word "so" means or what the word "after" signifies, even an extremely simple sentence can seem very confusing. It's extremely beneficial for English Language Learners to know these categories. I'll walk through some instructional techniques that will help with that as well.

The last one we'll discuss today is anaphora, a fancy research term that I didn't know until I started researching it. Here's an example: "Astronauts wear jetpacks to stay safe in space. Astronauts wear them like backpacks. Each pack has a jet thruster. Gas shoots from the thruster and moves the astronauts around." My question: What does "them" refer to in the second sentence? To jetpacks! When we use one word to refer to an earlier word, that's anaphora. They're basically pronouns and their antecedents. You can see how it can get really confusing, especially if you're not familiar with those words, or if you're trying to do a lot of decoding and vocabulary recognition as you're reading.

Here's another one: "Steven lent his car to Olivia because she missed the train." It's pretty simple for all of us. Who is "she"? Olivia! We know this is the case: Olivia is a girl, and Steven is not. But now let's look at this one: "David lent his car to Peter because he missed the train." Who is "he" referring to? Peter! But imagine that you're a struggling reader or an English Language Learner. You're wondering which "he" it is, and you engage in inference. Suddenly, it becomes more complex. With anaphoras, we have to keep track of what various words refer to, and that can really affect a student's reading comprehension.

So, how do we help students with the skills to aid their comprehension? I'll walk through a few examples for each of those different skills.

For gap-filling inference, we need to recognize that students don't always recognize the need to fill in a gap.

They don't notice that there's missing information. Research shows that pointing that out to students helps them to begin recognizing this—and it gradually becomes more automatic. Doing this with individuals as much as possible is extremely beneficial. Once students start to see that their pictures are incomplete, they're going to be much more able to start filling in some of those gaps. This is a really great opportunity to build discussion among kids. Show them a picture, talk about it, and ask what makes sense and, more importantly, what doesn't make sense.

You'll now get a chance to play the role of the student. You'll have two picture and two sentences. Think about what's missing, and add to the picture yourself. As you're doing this, ask yourself how it feels for you as a student. Is it easy or challenging?

This is probably not a kindergarten activity; this is more first or second grade. We start by teaching students what these words mean, then showing them how they fit together into different sentences and how the meaning changes depends on other words.

Then you move on to sentence-combining activities. Give students two sentences, "The girl scraped her knee she fell off her bike," and ask them to connect them with the word "because." They have to use syntax to determine where it makes sense to insert that word. They play around with different places for the word, and they see what doesn't make sense. Eventually they understand that the girl scraped her knee *because* she fell off her bike. The more comfortable students are with these words, the more they can manipulate them. They might even say, "Because the girl scraped her knee, she fell off her bike." And we can point out the way to understand sentences in different ways.

Then you can try multiple choice. Ask which words makes sense in that sentence: because, after or so. Soon you can remove all the scaffolds and tell students to combine the two sentences in any way, with any word. Research shows that students understand that

sometimes we don't even need connective words—but it's through explicit practice of all these words that they get there.

Then you make it more complex. You tell them to combine these sentences in as many ways as possible: "The apple fell. The apple was green. It fell from a branch. It did not hit anyone." Then students begin to be creative! This exercise familiarizes them with different syntax and aids their reading comprehension and writing.

At Amplify, we engage students in these activities in a digital way, so that they can practice these skills at individualized and developmentally-appropriate levels, and we've seen a 35% reduction in the performance gap between English Language Learners and non-English Language Learners!

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Rodríguez: The science of reading is a really hot topic. It's included in House Bill 3. Your elementary teachers will be hearing all about it at their reading academies. We've been doing webinars and podcasts, and we've had 30,000 people subscribe to them. We notice that students can read in early levels, but then their scores tank in the fifth grade because they didn't receive those fundamental skills at lower grade levels to apply to increasingly complex readings. Hence, the importance of the three comprehension processes that we discussed today!

"The Lies Our Children Have Been Taught About Mexican Americans!"

Dr. José Ángel Gutiérrez, The University of Texas at Arlington
Dr. Ángela Valenzuela, The University of Texas at Austin
Dan Arellano, Bexar County Historical Commission
Jacinto Ramos, Jr., Fort Worth ISD, Host & Moderator

Now that Mexican American Studies is an approved part of our students' curriculum, we're able to speak more openly about Tejano and Mexican American history—and also about the lies they were previously taught in our Texas public schools. Come, hear enlightened perspectives on the most egregious offenses committed against our community and our Mexican-American students, and walk away with ideas on how you might better respond to the lies our children have been taught!

Ramos: We've got a power panel today. I'm going to ask our panelists to introduce themselves and give a little insight into themselves through the lens of the title of this workshop, which is "The Lies Our Children Have Been Taught about Mexican Americans."

Arellano: I'm Dan Arellano. I serve as a commissioner on the Bexar County Historical Commission. There's a book you all need to check out, called *The Lies My Teacher Taught Me*, by Dr. James Loewen. He writes about how our State Boards of Education have attempted to "whitewash" history and to wipe out the history of everybody else, as if we didn't exist. Do you think our State Boards of Education care about our ancestors? Absolutely not! They've proven it time after time by removing as much of our history as they can get away with. If you're looking for another book, read Former Ambassador and Senator J. William Fulbright's *The Price of Empire*, which speaks of the Anglo-

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American superiority that has gotten us into so much trouble around the world. And—shameless self-promotion—the rest of the story is in my book, *Tejano Roots: The Real Republic of Texas and the First and Seventh Flag over Texas*.

Gutiérrez: I'm José Ángel Gutiérrez. I was your lunch keynote. You can read more about me in the conference program!

Valenzuela: I'm Ángela Valenzuela. I'm on the faculty at The University of Texas at Austin. I'm in the Department of Education, Leadership and Policy, as well as in Cultural Studies in Education. I direct the Texas Center for Education Policy. We do a lot of policy work at different levels, including the State Board of Education and the Texas State Legislature. I want to get y'all excited about policy and what we can do together as a community to really push the agenda for inclusion in a way that's truly inclusive of our histories, our languages, our cultures and our identities.

Ramos: The Mexican American School Boards Association was conceived in 1970 and is very specific about advocating for Mexican-American issues and Mexican American Studies. As José Ángel Gutiérrez suggested during his lunch keynote, there's been a statewide and nationwide conversation about how we self-identify. My first question: What term should we be using? Are we Hispanic, *Latino*, *Latinx, Chicano, Mestizo* or Mexican American? Which term do you use, and what's your perspective on the terms that are out there?

Arrellano: Dr. Adán Benavides, the former archivist at The University of Texas, says that by the 1800s the people who lived here in Texas had forged a regional identity. The letters in the archives say, "*Nosotros, los tejanos*" [We, Texans]. If that was good enough for my ancestors, it's good enough for me! I recognize myself as a *Tejano*, because that's what my ancestors called themselves.

Gutiérrez: I was raised Mexican and, in respect to my parents and my heritage, I'm still a Mexican, but in public, I'm a *Chicano* in your face!

Valenzuela: I'm all of these. I teach race and ethnicity, and a concept that's important is the idea of situational ethnicity. When I'm with my *boriqua* friends and colleagues from Puerto Rico, we're *Latinos*. When we're on the dance floor, I'm *Tejana*. In the *movimiento* [movement], I'm *Chicana*. It depends, and I like the fluidity. I like being all of these and being confusing to outsiders. There's a lot of history embedded in these terms, and, rather than be defined by others, people need to come to an awareness of who they are.

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Ramos: The title of this session is "The Lies Our Children Have Been Taught about Mexican Americans." I'm the father of three boys, and this has become part of their passion: to learn their history and the narrative and counter-narrative that have historically been put out there. They've gone through—and are still going through—their racial-identity crisis of asking, "Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I not being taught my history from a perspective of liberation? Why is my history always taught from the perspective of conquest or from a deficit mentality?" What I witness in young people is that when they learn about who they are and where they come from, it goes back to the saying: "You can't love the fruit if you don't love the root."

What are some examples of the lies that have been told about Mexican Americans in our history books, and, from an asset perspective, what are some examples of the perspectives that we should cling to that speak to the beauty in us?

Arrellano: Have you seen the movie, "Lonesome Dove"? The man who portrayed the Mexican was *not* Mexican! He was Puerto Rican. He says, "Man, it's going to take ten of us to take on one of them!" And I'm thinking: Who in the hell wrote this script, and why wasn't a Mexican

American given the role of the Mexican? Here in Texas, we have a passion for who we are and what we do. Our history has been ignored, concealed and, in some places, outright distorted, and the State Board of Education continuously tried to remove as much of our history as they can get away with.

Gutiérrez: What's a lie? What you don't say? What you say partially? What you distort? What you erase? There are all kinds of lies! You who are in relationships know exactly what I'm talking about: Sometimes you can't tell the truth because it hurts, it's dangerous to others, and it's terrible for you, too.

I want to talk about two kinds of lies. I refer to the first kind as "hidden histories," instead of lies, because it sounds better. My last two books are on "hidden stories." Think of the FBI file on César Chávez and the FBI file on Reies López Tijerina. We criticize our leaders a lot: They have this fault and that fault, they were wrong here and there, and they didn't do certain things for our organizations. That criticism is valid. Their FBI files contain "hidden secrets," hidden histories of how the government destroyed our leaders and our organizations. I have the records, and I'm putting out the book!

FBI files contain "hidden secrets," hidden histories of how the government destroyed our leaders & our organizations. I have records, and I'm putting out the book!

There's also another type of lie. We talk about Abraham Lincoln as one of the big icons in American history. While giving credit where credit is due, we recognize that he did other things—like taking land without just compensation! We're all familiar with the Fifth Amendment, of "pleading the fifth," which deals with self-incrimination. It also deals with taking property without just compensation. When Lincoln built the transcontinental railroad, he sold 640-acre square plots along the 1,900 miles of the railroad to California. Mexican and Chinese labor did the work. Do we even think about whose land it was? That was in 1865, and

there hasn't been an apology to this day! I'm not mistaken, I'm not misspeaking, I'm not drunk: This homesteading continued through 1996, when the last land grants were sold in Alaska. Whose land was that, and how can you have a clear title to something that's stolen? Where they built the transcontinental railroad was our homeland. That was Aztlán.

Valenzuela: I wrote a book called *Subtractive Schooling,* about how our schools take away from us more than they give. They take away our cultures, languages and identities. Then they wonder why our kids are feeling disaffected and alienated from the schooling process. Nothing about the schooling process is about them, their communities, their histories or identities. At best, our kids get a heroes-and-holidays approach, where they learn a little, which is very superficial. It doesn't impact kids' consciousness and it might even reinscribe stereotypes and ideologies. For example, we have this idea that Native Americans don't exist anymore—but *we* are Native Americans! We are native peoples. Get your DNA results. We are of this land, and it's important for us to reclaim that identity. It's a journey and a process.

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Our knowledge and history are very intentionally oppressed and subjugated—and it's not just the State Board of Education. It's the culture and values of the dominant culture. It's how people think and talk. I work very closely with teachers in the Austin Independent School District, and we have an *escuelita*, a little school, *Academia Cuauhtli*, with a co-constructed curriculum with the university, with Dr. Zamora, myself and other faculty. We work with certified bilingual teachers, and we teach fourth-grade children in Spanish, with the idea that we, as English-dominant speakers, need to recover

the Spanish language. The curriculum teaches heritage and culture through the arts and field trips. Many of our communities are marginal and very directly under attack, even before Trump, by such forces as ICE and gentrifiers—the homesteaders of today who are gentrifying our communities. It's a new form of dispossession. Ours is a long history of dispossession. We're taught to believe that we're not native, that we're not part of the Southwest or even part of this continent—but we have ancient *Mexica* knowledge. We're even teaching the Mayan abacus. It's a beautiful curriculum that should be done everywhere. Our ancestors had an extensive educational system, with "universities." If you go to Mexico City, you can see what Tenochtitlán looked like before Cortez arrived. The ways in which we're miseducated are so systemic. Why? Because the dominant group wants to remain in power—so we see a ferociousness of that agenda. They fear a loss of centrality and of the mechanisms of power and control. Social studies did not exist as a curriculum until a social studies "mafia" perceived a need to pedagogically erase the history of Native Americans in a horrible system that separated children from their parents—like what we see along the U.S./Mexico border. Like those Native American and Mexican children, many things are "out of sight, out of mind." It's engineered. It's intentional, so that we don't become more like him [pointing to Arrellano] or him [pointing to Gutiérrez] or me!

Homesteaders of today who are gentrifying our communities [are] a new form of dispossession. Ours is a long history of dispossession. We're taught to believe that we're not native, that we're not part of the Southwest or even part of this continent.

The greatest missed opportunity is what we all have to offer in our collective histories. My husband and I belong to the National Association for *Chicana* and *Chicano* Studies. In June 2018, we advocated not only for Mexican American Studies, but also for African

American Studies, and we won that four-year battle on top of the battle that goes back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was the colonial matrix of power, with its values, its discourses, its ideologies, its people who represents us. It was how things were done, the rules of the game. We need an updated *Gringo Manual*. It's really stunning to me that it took us 65 years since the founding of the State Board of Education, to have ethnic studies proposed and now in existence. It's a testament to just how jealous the agenda of White supremacy is and what it takes to overcome the colonial matrix of power.

It took us 65 years since the founding of the State Board of Education, to have ethnic studies proposed and now in existence. It's a testament to just how jealous the agenda of White supremacy is, and what it takes to overcome the colonial matrix of power.

Ramos: We have *familia* from Arizona in the room, and I've watched and witnessed the ugliness of how laws were being passed there. Here in Texas, our Mexican American Studies were born out of the 2010 Arizona law, House Bill 2281, which forbade Mexican American Studies in the Tucson Unified School District, which was said to promote racial solidarity and the overthrow of our government! That same year, Senate Bill 1070 allowed local law enforcement officers to ask a person's immigration status. These laws subverted our community in two ways: allowing racial profiling of people and eliminating any *Chicano* cultural emphasis from public schools. Then it happened here in Texas, with SB 4. In Fort Wort, our mayor was the only mayor of a major city in the state who chose not to join the lawsuit to challenge it. That woke up Fort Worth, and there's now a huge movement in Fort Worth as a result of that. So, having seen that in Arizona, and then in Texas, and knowing that it has taken our State Board of Education 65 years to pass Mexican American Studies, give us your perspective on our history and our journey.

What have been our successes, and what do we still have left to do?

Arrellano: If we continue on the path we're on right now, we're doomed to fail. We need to change our tactics. We need to work within the system. For example, we approached our state legislators, and we demanded House Resolution 709 be passed, which recognized the founding of the First Republic of Texas. If it hadn't been for my state representative, Eddie Rodríguez, we wouldn't know half the history of our people! We need to approach our Mexican-Americans legislators and say, "We're tired of this B.S.!"

I testified before the State Board of Education six years ago, and, if looks could kill, I'd be dead. Cynthia Dunbar was sitting immediately to my right, and I said, "Texas history does not begin with the arrival of Stephen F. Austin!" You should have seen the hatred in her eyes. She had the audacity to write a book about *our* history. She never consulted a *Tejano* historian, and Emilio Zamora was right across the street! They never asked, "Dr. Zamora, what do you think of Cynthia Dunbar's book?" He later told us: It's a pile of crap! It was told from an Anglo perspective. Shouldn't we at least give both sides of the story? When Bexar County Commissioner Paul Elizondo appointed me to the Bexar County Historical Commission, he said, "Dan, when you go places, make sure you tell the truth!" Telling the truth is dangerous. I debunk the myths of the Alamo and of the Texas revolution. Most people don't want to hear it—but *Tejanos* do. The only way people will know the truth is if we tell it ourselves!

I said, "Texas history does not begin with the arrival of Stephen F. Austin!" You should have seen the hatred in her eyes.

Gutiérrez: It's one thing to blame others for what they do. Cynthia Dunbar was doing what she needs to do. The real question is: "What are *we* doing?" Back in the day, LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens, had a president who was an undocumented immigrant. He was confronted with the problem that our kids were

being pushed out of school because they couldn't speak English. Listen to this: He commissioned some people to come up with 400 basic words in English. They reduced the English language to 400 basic words. He instructed LULAC chapters to open little schools focused on those 400 words. I went to one of those. There were two in *Cristal*: One was run by Susan Salazar, and the other by Virginia Sifuentes. Everyone who went to those schools became professionals. When we went to first grade, we knew how to speak English—even though they put us in the "Mexican school." We know what people were saying. We could read and write. Those words are now a historical record. Are we picking this up in early childhood, in Head Start, and in pre-kinder? The formula is there The solution was there, but we didn't follow through.

We talked about the transcontinental railroad and the Homestead Act. Now let's talk about our national parks. Two-thirds of the land west of the Mississippi belonged to our people in the past. Whose land are those state and national parks west of the Mississippi, where you now have to pay to get into? Now, this guy—who some of you call your President—wants to sell this land to private contractors! For two centuries before English America, there was a Spanish America! If I take your bag, your phone or your jewels, I may have them, but I don't own them. They're not rightfully mine. We need to raise our voices and ask, "Where did you steal this from? Are you a Constitutionalist? Do you believe in the Fifth Amendment?"

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Valenzuela: There's the issue of knowledge, and there's the issue of lies. We need to think about something still deeper: our ways of knowing and our ways of being in the world. There are ways of knowing that come through our genes

and ancestors. We don't surrender those ways of knowing. We are communitarian, yet we live in a very individualistic and competitive system.

I'm reading a lot now on pre-contact America. In 1492, a certain group from a certain place on the planet came and wreaked havoc. It was an invasion. They invaded this continent, not only physically and materially, but also symbolically. They burned our books and much of our ancient cultural knowledgewasn't preserv. When we started our *danza mexica* curriculum, we learned about the power of the circle. It's specific to Native peoples. When the Europeans first came, they outlawed the circle as a form of governance, as a way of coming together, and they replaced it with their value of hierarchy.

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Before 1492, Europe was coming out of feudalism. Women were chattel—slaves! They questioned whether Indians had souls. In the Spanish court, they debated whether it was worth saving these Native people. Their thinking was hierarchical, linear and objectifying. The objectification was so severe that we don't even think about it. Our kids in schools take tests, and we don't think about how those test objectify them! All the industry that surrounds the testing system is very much about reducing children and their identities to a number and to a place in the hierarchy. Now the objectification extends to our teachers and our schools.

As people who are reclaiming our Native identities, we need to understand and accept this very complicated history. When we take our students of *Academia Cuauhtli* to the Alamo, we help them understand that we have a long history before the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. We are not foreigners. We are not strangers. Our ancestors have

We are not foreigners. We are not strangers. Our ancestors have always been here, long before any of the great migrations.

always been here, long before any of the great migrations.

We've come to know land as "property." How disrespectful for us to allow corporations through fracking to destroy what it took Mother Earth eons to create! In Kermit, Texas, you have salt beds where there should be roads. The land is collapsing. It's useless. It's an objectification of the land. It troubles me that there's such a disconnect between the environmental movement and the civil rights movement. Our young people see the writing on the wall. They see how terrifying it is—but it takes time for them to see how this knowledge has been subjugated and how they've been subjugated. If your cultures is in jail, if your language is in jail, if your identity is in jail, then you're in jail! Let's liberate ourselves by really building strength and solidarity around these agendas.

Gutiérrez: I didn't get to finish my lunch keynote, but maybe that was for the best: I would have embarrassed school board members. Instead, I'll just embarrass the ones in this room! How many of you are fluent in English? We all speak English! How many of you are fluent in Spanish? We have some *bilingües* [bilinguals] here. That's two languages. How many of you speak Arabic? Let's go over it: *algodón* [cotton], *alfombra* [rug], *almohada* [pillow]. Now you're becoming truthful: So, you do speak Arabic! Why? Because for 800 years before those invaders came, Muslim Arabs from North African were in what we now call Spain. Maybe some Spaniards needs to stop calling themselves "White"!

When we prepare to leave people, why do we say "*adios*" [goodbye]? Why do we say "to God"? Because the Christians and Muslims of Spain were fighting over that! Who's the real god? Who's the real prophet? Was it Mohammed? Was it Chuy? That's where "*adios*" comes from: You fill in the blank; we're not going to fight about it anymore.

When we leave this conference and talk about seeing one another in 2021, why do we say "*ojalá*" [I hope so]?

Don't tell Homeland Security that we use that word here: "Allah-willing." That's what you're saying!

Just imagine if our teachers told our kids how much more intellectual and proficient and learned they are because of their heritage! …Let's tell our kids they're pentalingual! Let's be proud of what we are and what we know!

Just imagine if our teachers told our kids how much more intellectual and proficient and learned they are because of their heritage! About 23% of our English words come from Spanish: Let's tell our kids they're pentalingual! Let's be proud of what we are and what we know!

Ramos: At least two of us here—David Espinosa and I—were students of Dr. José Ángel Gutiérrez at UT Arlington. David and I have a name: They call us radicals and militants, even in our own backyard. We are unapologetically so. In Fort Worth, we passed a racial and ethnic equity policy. I called Dr. Valenzuela when we were doing it, and she gave me some truth. She was concerned. She said, "It will be good, but if you don't build the systems, you're going to fail." I was "wet behind the ears." I thought that the policy would push the system to do right. That was an important lesson for me. We're now rewriting our curriculum in the Fort Worth ISD, especially for Black children. We're going to teach them their history from a viewpoint of liberation. We like to say, "Slavery is not Black history. Slavery was an interruption of Black history." It's a different mindset.

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We have middle schools students who are learning their history. They're learning the symbolism of the colors of the Mexican flag, and now, when they score a touchdown, they fly the Mexican flag. It pisses off people, and even the radio stations beat up on me and on our superintendent. The young people chose to do

that themselves, and we, as a district—including the principal at the school—said, "Please continue to do so!" This work isn't easy, and yet we have a responsibility.

What words of wisdom would the three of you share with us as school board members, superintendents, administrators and community leaders?

Arrellano: We need to expand on what we're doing. We need to do more of it. When I speak at the Carver Center, our Black museum in Austin, they wonder, "What do *you* know about African history? I tell them, "The first free colony of persons of African descent in America was not in the United States. It was San Lorenzo de los Negros in Veracruz. Gaspar Yanga founded the first free African colony! Mexican President Vicente Guerrero was of African descent: We have African history in Mexico! Mexico is finally acknowledging its mixed-race people. If you look at the *Porfiriato*, they pulled the first "Michael Jackson." *Eran de sangre de indio* [they had Indian blood], but they were ashamed, so they tried to whiten their skin. Look at the photos of the *Porfiriato*: They were dark-skinned, but then their skin mysteriously became white. Covarrubias, an historian, says that Africans were brought to Mexico by force in the 1630s due to the number of deaths in Mexico due to the diseases brought by strangers. Many of our ancestors died, and the population of Central Mexico went from 20 million when the Spaniards arrived, to two million people 100 years later. Diseases wiped them out, while we developed an immunity and survived. Teachers don't know our history, so how can they teach it? We had our first Black president in Mexico 200 years ago—and we're proud of Vicente Guerrero!

Teachers don't know our history, so how can they teach it? We had our first Black president in Mexico 200 years ago—and we're proud of Vicente Guerrero!

Gutiérrez: A quickie on our African-American/Mexican-American history: Do you know where Harriet Tubman got the idea for the Underground Railroad? From what Vicente Guerrero did in outlawing slavery in Mexico! The first

"Underground Railroad" ran south to Mexico! Our students don't learn this. When you go to Fort Worth, they start the map going north at Fort Worth—but the *vaqueros* came from farther south. In fact, the first people in Oregon were the *vaqueros* who brought their cattle from Mexico!

You ask, "What should we do?" I said it earlier, but I'll repeat it again, because I know a lot of people got uncomfortable—and you need to be uncomfortable. That's when you wiggle and make change: if you change nothing else, you'll change your *nalgas* [butt]! As board members, you're required to attend continuing education, but there's no teeth in it—so what happens if you don't? I suggest you put teeth in it, so that you will. Punish districts with school board members who don't attend continuing education! We can't have ignorant school board members approving ignorant teachers to teach our kids to be ignorant! Have compulsory education for school board members, and punish those who don't attend.

This year, 2020, marks the first year in which there are more White people over age 55 than White people under 15. What does that mean to them? It's the beginning of the end. There's going to be a vacuum. Are we building capacity? How are we going to paint the White House Brown if nobody knows how to do it? All of this needs to happen by 2060, when our cousins from Asia take over. Our window of opportunity, to paint the White House Brown, will close in 2060.

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You have to mandate your superintendents, principals and teachers to teach our history. I guarantee you they're not doing it. Yes, we have ethnic studies. It's mandated in Arizona. It's an alternate and is optional in California. It's mandated as a high school requirement in Oregon. Believe it or not, even Governor Pence signed

off on Black history in Indiana. That's it. Ethnic studies are here—but they're not here. They're not really here yet. There's not a county in the United States that doesn't have one of us or one of our cultural "cousins." We need to build capacity. Until you get the legislation passed, make sure you have at this conference next year the ten best books and the ten best documentaries about us.

Valenzuela: We need to really focus on policy and on organizing around the policy. Everything we do every day needs to build constituencies for change. There's no magic button. There's no silver bullet. It's *us*. It's all of us doing things big and small. We don't always know our power—and that's probably intentional. If we don't come into an awareness of ourselves, the system wins. All of us pay taxes, and the tax code is against us. And some of those taxes should be coming back to us, for the projects and programming that we need in our community. These monies come to our schools through Title I, for low-income schools, and Title III, for teacher preparation for English Language Learners. All of these monies go to vendors. What's your district's vision for how these monies will be spent? What vision has your board articulated for this in policy?

Legislators throw "bombs," like the Bathroom Bill and immigration bills, that leave us scrambling to put out fires and that distract us from our vision. We aren't able to address the way in which the Railroad Commission allows companies to destroy our land and contaminate our water supply. We don't pay attention to issues in Health and Human Services. We get so exhausted with issues like testing and assessment, accountability, English Language Learners, school finance, charter schools and privatization, that we forfeit our vision. We lose our sense of the future because we're busy with so many

Legislators throw "bombs," like the Bathroom Bill and immigration bills, that leave us scrambling to put out fires and that distract us from our vision.

things, including the fighting and killing of bad bills. We have to fix the plane while the plane is in the air. It's our destiny. What a privilege and honor to be able to work in the service of our communities. Our *Mexica* ancestors taught that you cannot be a full human being unless you know how to be with children. Let's spend time in our communities and see what's killing our kids.

Psychiatrist Madeline Levine just published a book where she asserts that of all the many stressors our children face, the biggest stressor for children is…school. What an indictment of public education! We have to rescue our kids from this thing called "school," which is really punishment. We need to rescues their identities, which have been subjugated and denied them.

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"Personalized Learning for Every Student!"

Dr. Nathan Balasubramanian, 7Cs Academy
Ana Cortez, Manor ISD Trustee, Host & Presenter

Have you wondered how to make learning compelling and relevant for all students? Practitioners will share their perspectives and the tools that they use to personalize learning for each student. Come, learn how to identify student needs, set goals in collaboration with families, incorporate student interests and preferences, and deliver instruction to address the unique needs and goals of every student!

Cortez: I'm Ana Cortez, a trustee in Manor ISD, and I met Dr. B at our district. In my role as a parent, we went through my son's case, and I wanted to help him grow. I was so taken with the personalized learning that I could share with my son. When I went to school, my first language was Spanish, so I'm an English Language Learner, and I understandably had problems with literacy. A teacher saw my potential and gave me a book, *Rain of Gold*, by Víctor Villaseñor. I really connected with the stories in that book, and I started understanding literacy. It was my own personalized learning. Dr. B's data and information really personalized learning for our students and helped them to really grow.

Balasubramanian: I've been speaking with parents about personalized learning since I relocated to Texas two years ago, and we developed stuff that we can now share with kids two years old and older. By the time they're two or three years old, we should be personalizing learning for every kid. I've heard such tragic stories throughout the state of people like our keynote speaker, Carlos, who received his diagnosis at age 23. That's a travesty! We

By the time they're two or three years old, we should be personalizing learning for every kid.

came into this business to make a difference for every kid, and we usually get them at four or five years old. We need to engage them from that time forward with the tricks and tools that we'll learn today. We have kids like Carlos who are labeled "too noisy" or "disruptive" or "bad." Eventually we say, "Let's send them to special education. When it comes to kids, the first word out of my mouth is growth. Every kid needs to be growing, and testing allows us to see if a child has shown adequate growth and has met the state's performance levels. We focus on test scores, and not on the child! We need to identify our children's needs, then, as our luncheon keynote, Judge Rodríguez, suggested, we need to set goals—but our goals need to be tied to the child's interests. Don't make them do something they're not interested in, and don't guess their interests! Then we can make a playlist and a customized list of books for them to read and math problems to solve.

Cortez: And the students actually go through and pick the resources themselves.

Balasubramanian: Exactly. I'd was hoping to have Superintendent Cardona from the San Marcos CISD speak about this at the kid level, but he's at a wrestling match in Houston. We need to think about our schools not just as concrete buildings and walls, but as places where our kids are learning and growing.

We get our data and resources from TexasAssessment.com and quantiles.com. The state reports its performance with the domains of "did not meet," "approaches," "meets" and "masters." As board members, you typically construct your superintendent's goals around such measures, then you let your superintendent do his or her work.

Cortez: Talk about closing gaps: We went from 60% to over 85%!

Balasubramanian: That's doable. The state now gives us assessment reports, and you can look at a student's performance of the last two years, and you can see what that student got correct or wrong. But looking back over a test is not going to motivate a kid. Now we can show a student, "This is where you were in the fourth grade, this is where you were in the fifth grade, and then you went backward in the sixth grade. What happened? Is this why I'm sending you to school?" When a child starts to see and internalize these things, it makes a big difference.

STAAR is the last thing we should be worried about—but it's where schools spend most of their time. What student is excited to come to school for STAAR test prep? We're kidding ourselves if we think that, after graduating, someone will ask our kids how they did on the STAAR!

STAAR is the last thing we should be worried about—but it's where schools spend most of their time. What student is excited to come to school for STAAR test prep?

Then we start talking about the data—like attendance and behavior. Attendance matters. And why did Carlos behave the way he did? He couldn't hear or understand the "talking head" in his classroom—so, of course, he was going to be disruptive! His needs weren't diagnosed.

So, let's start thinking of schools not as buildings, but as individual kids who need to be completing a year's growth in a year's time.

Let's look at the four domains used by the state. Students "master" content when they think critically, solve problems in familiar and unfamiliar situations, and do not need intervention before going to the next grade level. We can monitor this every year. For "meets," students can solve some problems, but only for familiar situations. Do you want your student "meeting" or "mastering" content? I encourage you to set your superintendent's goals at the

"masters" level. The only time I use "meets" is to fulfill the college- and career-readiness requirements of HB 3, where I encourage combining reading and math. When we lower our goals to "meets," they're more reasonable and include more kids. Remember, though, that interventions are still required for students who "meet" standards. "Approaches" is what the state used to consider as passing. We promote these students to the next grade, but they require many interventions. The holes of knowledge that a kindergarten student has only grow as he or she advances to the first, second and third grades.

If you only remember two things today, remember the G-word—growth—and remember you should never let your superintendent get away with students who "approach" standards! That's the lowest bar you can set. You're setting your students up to fail and to not get gainful employment because they lack necessary skills. And "did not meet"—we don't even have to discuss that domain.

If you only remember two things today, remember the G-word—growth—and remember you should never let your superintendent get away with students who "approach" standards!

If we had more time, we could talk about the best practices of individual schools and school districts, goal setting and how to really start closing the achievement gap.

I strongly recommend goalsetting. If we don't set strong goals, as recommended by the Donna ISD breakout session this morning, we're just kidding ourselves. As school board members, you're now required to set goals. We often talk about "SMART goals"; I believe in SMARTER goals, SMART goals but with an "E" for engaging—make your goals compelling!—and an "R" for resources. We need to put our money where our mouth is.

We have the 60x30 Texas plan, which says that we want 60% of our young people, ages 25 to 35, to

have at least a two-year degree by 2030. In Texas, many of our school districts are in the single digits. Even the best school districts are only a third of the way there. This is our "moon shot"; it's like getting a person on the moon by the 1960s!

When your district shows you data, be sure they're providing you demographic data on subgroups. That's where you'll see the gaps—then you're challenged to put your money where your mouth is and to give students the resources they need.

Before I turn it back to Ms. Cortez, let's visit quantiles.com and choose the Lexile and Quantile Hub. This is the first step toward personalized learning. Go to the "Find a Book" tab and enter your child's quantile, and you'll be able to generate a custom list of books just for your child! It will even show you if any book will be easy, difficult, or just right for a child of any given quantile.

Cortez: When I used this with my son, he was at 1600, and we set the goal that he would be reading at 1900 by the end of that school year. So we used this program to allow him to select the books that interested him and that would allow him to achieve our goal of reading at 1900.

Balasubramanian: And we use this program for math as well.

Cortez: As we went through this process in our district, one of our parents was very excited to see how she and her child could set goals and pick her son's interests—and his growth was amazing. She described it as her personalized learning suitcase. When Dr. B. talked about this in our district, I wondered how we might share this information with our board, our superintendent, our teachers and parents. It's very simple and it promotes personalized growth. When they start this program, they're bored and not engaged, but then, as they pick up the books, you start seeing the sparkle in their eyes—and it's a way for parents to have a better relationship with their students!

Balasubramanian: When I was in the Manor ISD, I led the training for 36 assistant principals. Assistant principals are typically slammed with discipline, which keeps them from being real academic leaders at their schools. I tell them that when little Nathan comes to your office, rather than ask him, "Nathan, why are you such a jerk?", with personalized learning, you can look up Nathan's STAAR data through TexasAssessment.com, you can start to see what's happening—as our keynote, Carlos, suggested this morning—and you can celebrate the opportunity of now being able to help a ninth-grader who's reading at the fourth-grade level! There's no wonder that Nathan is acting out: Either he has seeing or hearing issues, or he doesn't have the necessary skills for the class. Everything now ties back to the personal relationship you have with little Nathan, and the conversation changes!

When little Nathan comes to your office, rather than ask him, "Nathan, why are you such a jerk?", with personalized learning, …you can start to see what's happening.

We have great superintendents in this state. As board members, you need to hold them accountable for the results your district and your students need!

"Promising Practices and Positive Relationships with Your Community!"

Juan Briones, Board President, La Feria ISD
Katie Johnson, Board Vice President, La Feria ISD
Cathy Hernández, Superintendent, La Feria ISD
Ida Prado, Family and Community Engagement, La Feria ISD
Verónica Torres, Technology Director, La Feria ISD
Ricardo Gutiérrez, Region 1 Education Service Center, Host

Come, learn the strategies and tools used by the La Feria ISD to foster increased family and community engagement! Presenters will share ways to examine perspectives, establish welcoming environments, create public relations, build community collaborations, provide concrete ways families can contribute, and utilize free resources and tools to increase student achievement and success!

Briones: I'm Juan Briones, President of the La Feria ISD Board of Trustees. I'm here with our Board's Vice President, Katie Johnson. All board members bring their own skills and knowledge to the board, and all have something to contribute to our district. Community and parent involvement are crucial for success, both in the short term, for test scores and graduation, but also in the long term.

I'm a first-generation college graduate. My dad went through eighth grade, but, like many people, he had to work to support his younger brothers and sisters. My mom graduated from high school, then held several clerical jobs and was a secretary for La Feria ISD for many years. They always pushed me to get an education. I got my bachelor's degree from St. Mary's University here in San Antonio. I went on to Baylor College of Medicine and got my master's degree, and I'm a physician assistant now. I did this because they kept pushing me. I feel lucky that I had parents who knew the importance of education. Fast-forward to

2008: I was married, had my first child, and somebody said, "Why don't you run for the school board?" I was elected to the school board in 2008. As a board member, I can do things with the community and with our board to reach kids who maybe don't have parents who push them to the next level. It takes a village to raise a child, and the strategic plan that we just approved this year has a community view. Many community members, business owners, and even our police chief were involved in our strategic plan, which came from the community.

It takes a village to raise a child, and the strategic plan that we just approved this year has a community view.

Many of us, as board members, have children or grandchildren in our schools. We're very involved in our campuses. We attend school events and career days. On World Smile Day, we serve lunch to our children. We participate in Fist Bump Wednesdays, where we give fist bump to students as they arrive, and we say, "Thank you for being here!" We also volunteer—but parental involvement and community engagement are more than simply volunteering. We continually ask what we can do for the parents of the district. We attend events, like technology night, literacy night and open houses, and we communicate to parents the importance of showing up and modeling good attendance for their kids. We offer financial literacy and nutrition classes for parents. We get the community involved, and we get parents involved. We provide Lexi's Closet and Leon's Pantry. Now I'd like to ask Katie to share of the talents she brings to our district.

Johnson: I lived in Mexico for ten years, which made me very fluent in Spanish and taught me a lot about the culture. I love the Hispanic culture. I lived in Acapulco for five years, then I moved to Guadalajara for five years. Two of my four children were born in Guadalajara. I also have three stepchildren who live in Playa del Carmen, one of my favorite vacation spots, where my husband and I hope to retire. I love my Hispanic family. I also love community service, which is a big topic in La Feria

ISD. It helps children learn leadership, problem-solving, working with others, time management, communication, and it gets them involved in the community. It makes our kids feel that they're part of something big. All my children graduated from La Feria ISD and have learned to help others. I've seen my son give his only coat away to a friend at school, give away his lunch, and sit with new students. My daughter Michaela has helped so many people without expecting anything in return. I have been very blessed, and La Feria ISD has helped impact them along the way.

Our school district hosts many community events. This year, we set up Lexi's Closet, which helps the community with clothing, household items, and even prom dresses. We have Leon's Pantry, with toys and blankets. We have volunteer income tax assistance. We provide meals at Thanksgiving and Christmas for needy families. Our students are learning the importance of giving back. We adopt families at Christmas. We host annual Zumba events. We raise money for our seniors, and we give them $500 scholarships. We talk about wellness and health. We assist the La Feria Police Department with many activities: Police Night Out, our Easter egg hunt, and face painting. We just love our children. Several of our churches get together and help with things like tennis shoes. My church, First Baptist La Feria, donates 20 pairs of shoes, and other churches do the same. We have a ladies' tea the first Saturday in December, and H-E-B sponsors the food for 100 ladies. We also have Valentine's Day banquets and Thanksgiving dinners.

I thank God every day for allowing me to be his servant, because that's what I feel I am: a servant. As leaders of our community, we must possess empathy, strong communication skills, the ability to inspire, and pride in what we do. We put children first, and we do what's best for the community.

We put children first, and we do what's best for the community.

I'm the Children's Director at First Baptist Church. I have about 80 children from low-income families who come to our Vacation Bible School. They all need a hug and love.

Hernández: I'm going to talk about the role of a superintendent and how I'm able to do the job that I do. I can't do my job without having the best school board, and I believe I have the best school board in the whole universe! They truly care about our children.

As superintendent of La Feria ISD, I'm very lucky. I have the best board and the best team, and we're able to do things together that I can't do alone. It's a family effort, a team effort.

In my role, I make sure I have the right people to do the job. I'm lucky and humble to have these two great, young ladies here, Ms. Prado and Ms. Torres. They carry through with maximum intent.

This year, we wanted our students to have a nice sit-down dinner with their parents. In two or three days, we pulled it together. We had a beautiful meal prepared by our own students!

We are a community. We're a family, and we're all responsible for our children.

Relationship is key. In the La Feria ISD, we are a community. We're a family, and we're all responsible for our children.

Prado: They call me the FACE of our district: our Family And Community Engagement. My focus this year has been on increasing parental attendance at our meetings. Parental involvement leads to higher test scores, better student attendance, better social skills, and a higher chance for students to attend college. Relationships are important, and our parents need to trust us.

At registration, Ms. Torres and I hand out cards with our faces on them. My trademark is that I'm a hugger, and that changes the whole relationship. I give parents my cell number and tell them to text or call me, even on weekends. We attend all the events we can, and we try to be very visible. We help parents set up email addresses.

This summer, we had a terrible storm, where many families lost their homes and now live with friends. We have 153 homeless students who qualify for McKinney-Vento. We turned a testing room into Lexi's Closet, a boutique that we named after the school's mascot. We don't want people to feel embarrassed to come, so it's nice and beautiful and smells good, so people are excited to come. We accept donations of clothing, coats, shoes and blankets. We also offer cookware now. One mom was crying because she lost everything in the flood, and she said, "My little girl wanted eggs, and I couldn't make her eggs because I didn't have a spatula!" So we started getting more items. We increased our volunteers, and we're now able to be open in the morning and afternoon of the first and third Mondays of the month. We had another mother who said her son wouldn't come to school because he was embarrassed by his clothes, so we got him some outfits, and now he comes to school. This week, we had 39 families come to Lexi's Closet, and before the holidays, we had 62 families come.

Next, knowing that our families also need food, we set up Leon's Pantry. Our students receive free breakfast and lunch, but what about when they go home in the evening? It started with a mother of four children coming to us and asking, "Can you help us? I'm hungry, and my children are hungry." We knew we needed to start a pantry, so we named it after our male mascot. We told our high schools students that they could wear pajamas to school if they brought a can of food to share. We had so much food, so we created Christmas boxes for the two weeks in which our students wouldn't come to school. In some of our elementary schools, they decorated these boxes really cute.

We also had our holiday giving feast, which our superintendent mentioned. Ms. Torres and I were running around to H-E-Bs, to get the turkeys, and the students of our culinary department prepared a meal for 40 families—about 160 individuals. It was an amazing, heartwarming event.

We then decided to have a toy drive. Our elementary and high school students had toy drives that benefited people outside the district, so we asked them to donate to us. Santa Claus came. We had tons of gifts, so each child chose a gift. We gave away almost 60 toys, and we made free Christmas cards for families, with their photos with Santa.

Torres: The tax assistance program is something that we've had for several years now at our high school, and it's run by our finance teacher. United Way trains our students to do taxes and certifies them, then for five or six Mondays during January and February, anyone can come in, and our students will do their taxes. La Feria is one of the only districts in the Valley that has this program. It's been a huge success, and it continues to grow. It's a win-win: our students get hands-on experience doing taxes, and the community gets its taxes done.

Johnson: A lot of this started as a result of the storm and with the great superintendent we have. She brings ideas from conferences and gatherings, board members bring their ideas, and Dr. Hernández has done an amazing job in recruiting these beautiful people!

"Special Education 101: What Board Members Need to Know!"

Kelly Janes, Walsh Gallegos Treviño Russo & Kyle
Denise Carter, Texas Association of School Boards
Charles Stafford, Denton ISD, Host

Special education can be a costly and stressful component of school district governance. What do your board members need to know before meeting with administration and attorneys regarding disputes in the highly-contested legal arena of special education? Come, glean "insider" information from a special education attorney and a former special education director, and learn how to more effectively resolve special education matters!

Carter: I'm Denise Carter, and I've worked for the Texas Association of School Boards since April. Before that, I was a special education director for the past ten years. That's where I met Kelly Janes, our district's legal counsel. If you had the pleasure of hearing our keynote, Mr. Ojeda, many of the students we'll be talking about today are in similar situations. A student being diagnosed in his or her 20s shouldn't be happening anymore, and we'll tell you why.

Janes: I'm Kelly Janes. I'm an attorney with Walsh Gallegos. I've been practicing for 12 years, and my entire legal experience has been special education. My mom is a speech pathologist who has worked in school districts for 40 years now. You will note I have perfect articulation and no discernible accent of any kind. We were a family that grew up in Houston, and somehow my mom managed to beat the accent out of my dad, who was from El Paso. We understand "get," not "git," and there is no "fixin' to": You will or you will not; there is no "try." I've been thrilled to work in special education for the past 12 years. This is my passion. This will be the way that I end my career, and working with directors and staff like Denise makes it all worthwhile.

Carter: The first thing that's really important to know about special education is that it really is upside down from anything else you're accustomed to in schools. School districts are typically run by school boards that oversee policy, etc. The superintendent then makes sure that everything is taken care of by campus administrators, teachers and other support personnel. School districts are top-down. That's not the case in special education. We still absolutely have federal and state laws and local policy—we can't go rogue—but decisions regarding the ways in which students are served are made by ARD committees. Any top-down decisions of a district that ignore decisions made by ARD committees lead your district to need the services of Kelly and her colleagues.

School districts are top-down. That's not the case in special education.

What is an ARD committee? The three letters stand for Admission, Review and Dismissal. When a student is evaluated for special education, whether he or she is found to be eligible or not, this committee comes together once the evaluation is completed, to review the information and determine if the student is eligible. If so, this committee meets at least annually. This committee is tasked with taking all of the information about a student and creating a plan for that student. Then, that plan has to be adhered to. The committee is made up of a parent or the adult student, a representative from the school—typically a campus administrator or someone able to make decisions on behalf of the district. You also have a general education and special education representative, as well as someone who's familiar with the assessment performed. There may be other people involved, depending on the individual situation of the student. This committee is tasked with making decisions for that student.

Despite the number of people on the committee, there are two entities represented: the district and the student. Federal law lays out the very specific pieces that have to be addressed within a meeting. The goal is to come to an agreement on the program. If the parent disagrees with

any part of the program, there is a legal process to address that. A parent can also deny services.

Janes: From a legal perspective, if a parent says, "I really want my child to be in the general education environment, no matter what," but the school district believes it's better for the student to be in another setting, the parent has the legal right to recess the meeting. Both parties then think about ways to collaborate, meet in the middle, and develop a plan that works for everyone. If, at the next meeting, the parent is still in disagreement, the district can push forward the programming and services that it thinks are appropriate to meet its legal obligations. If the parent disagrees at that second meeting, we send the parent a prior written notice that outlines all the changes we're planning to make to the student's placement. Then we have to wait five school days before we can implement a plan that a parent disagrees with—because the parent's next recourse is to sue the school district, and that enacts a new series of legal processes. In that case, the child stays in the last agreed-upon placement, pending the outcome or resolution of a due process. Ultimately, the district has the ability to override a parent decision, but we are very conscious of the legal ramifications.

I'm notified when there's disagreement at the first-level ARD. When parents are upset, I provide counsel to districts on what the district can give on and where the district might legally be making a mistake. We try as hard as we can to avoid that. If a special education issue comes to your board, please know that people at the campus level have done everything they know how to do to come to a consensus on the appropriate services for that child.

There are a million rules that go into special education. Unlike most other things in the school system, federal law, state regulations and an administrative code govern special education. There is a specific process that needs to be followed, and it takes time. Your principal and special education director didn't make these laws; they are just trying to implement them. It can be

There are a million rules that go into special education.

overwhelming. As a lawyer, it took me three years of full-time legal practice to feel fully competent in this area of law. Even now, people call me on a weekly basis with the most entertaining or confusing questions. Special education is frustrating and fascinating at the same time, with new scenarios that present themselves every day.

Carter: Let's move to the IEP, the Individualized Education Program. This is what the ARD committee creates when it meets. Here in Texas, we're unique: Some people refer to this plan as the ARD—but technically the ARD is the committee. The IEP states the manner in which the student receives the individual services based upon need.

Another acronym is the LRE, the Least Restrictive Environment. For non-disabled students, we want to use the least-restrictive environment to provide a continuum of services to a student. The LRE makes the top ten list of most litigated special education cases in Texas over the past four years.

FAPE is the most litigated category in special education during the past four years. It stand for Free Appropriate Public Education. It's free: Special Education is to be provided to a student whom the ARD committee has deemed eligible at no cost to the parents. Appropriate means it's designed to meet the individual needs of that student, to ensure the best opportunity to progress in the general education curriculum.

Now let's look at the 13 disability categories. The top five in Texas are: speech impairment, other health impairment (most frequently for students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD, but also including such health impairments as cerebral palsy), intellectual disability (what we used to call mental retardation, a term we no longer use), and emotional disturbance.

Janes: Let's talk about IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Public education began in 1777, when Thomas Jefferson in essence told the colonies, "Choose one male student from each county, and we will pull that ruffian out from the rubbish and give him an education at

the public's expense. It started with 20 male students in 1777. Fast-forward to 1950 and the issue of equality in education: *Brown v. Board of Education* speaks about providing all students with equal access to public education. By the 1970s, parents were filing lawsuits for students with disabilities, wanting them to have access to education, too. Those cases successfully asserted that the Equal Protection Clause in the U.S. Constitution requires public schooling for all students. Following that litigation, we enacted what is today called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA.

In 1976, President Ford enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act—probably the greatest underfunded mandate ever in the history of our education system. In his presidential papers, President Ford wrote quite prophetically, "Unfortunately, this bill promises more than the federal government can deliver, and its good intentions could be thwarted by the many unwise provisions it contains. Everyone can agree with the objective stated in the title of this bill—educating all handicapped children in our nation. The key question is whether the bill will really accomplish that objective. Even the strongest supporters of this measure know as well as I that they are falsely raising the expectations of the groups affected by claiming authorization levels which are excessive and unrealistic. Despite my strong support for full educational opportunities for our handicapped children, the funding levels proposed in this bill will simply not be possible if federal expenditures are to be brought under control and a balanced budget achieved over the next few years. There are other features in the bill which I believe to be objectionable and which should be changed. It contains a vast array of detailed, complex, and costly administrative requirements which would unnecessarily assert federal control over traditional state and local government functions. It establishes complex requirements under which tax dollars would be used to support administrative paperwork and not educational programs. Unfortunately, these requirements will remain in effect even though the

Congress appropriates far less than the amounts contemplated in Section 6."

This was signed into law in 1976, and, even then, they were approximating that students with disabilities should receive 40% more funding per student than the average student receiving a public education. Currently, we receive barely 16% more, and the requirements and the case law under the IDEA have grown exponentially. I tell everyone: Talk to your legislators about how important it is to provide funding for students with disabilities, because this is a huge, underfunded mandate. We do not have the money to support the programming and provide the services that we know we want to provide every student. The money isn't there. When this law was enacted, all states were offered the opportunity to receive a level of funding in exchange for compliance with the federal law. New Mexico was the final holdout, and all 50 states have now accepted the funding and are bound by this federal law.

"All" really does mean all. We serve all *students in our public education system.*

Denise and I both believe that "all" really does mean *all.* We serve *all* students in our public education system, no matter the severity of their disability, and we provide them with services in their least restrictive environment.

Carter: I hope you're understanding the importance of the ARD committee, which creates the plan to help each student, so that his or her disability is less a burden or deterrent. What happens in each of those meetings impacts compliance for your district.

Once a parent signs a consent for testing, your district has 45 school days to get it done. If you don't meet that, you're out of compliance. Your district is part of a cyclical monitoring process by the state. Back in 2016, the *Houston Chronicle* alleged that the TEA caused Texas school districts to not identify students who potentially needed special education services by setting a target of 8.5% and dinging all districts with higher percentages of special education students. According to the article, districts were setting caps for the number of kids who could be tested.

Federal law, however, says that if we suspect that a child has a disability, we have to address it. Texas is now under a corrective action plan by the Department of Education, and districts have been told that they will be monitored at least once every six years. The schedule of these visits is published online two years in advance.

Janes: Let's talk about legal recourse, remedies and attorney's fees. At some point, you'll see your district's legal counsel come before your boards with a special education issue. The overarching reason for this is because the federal law that governs special education students allows students to functionally sue their school district for what a layperson might call educational malpractice. In the SPED world, we call it a denial of a Free and Appropriate Public Education. It's the most litigated issue, and it has been on the rise for the past 25 years.

The ARD committee is ground zero for resolving disputes with parents and reaching a consensus. If that doesn't work, the next big, heavy hitter is mediation. Sometimes when you see your school law attorneys, it has to do with a settlement agreement that we're trying to negotiate with the parents, to resolve a case through mediation instead of going forward to a due process hearing. Parents have legal rights with monetary implications for school districts. If parents moves forward to a special education due process hearing, and if they are successful in demonstrating that the school district did not provide some aspect of a Free Appropriate Public Education, they are entitled to recover at least some percentage of the attorney's fees that they incur in taking the case forward to a hearing. Even if a school district wins, which is always my goal, the school district still has to pay the cost of its own legal representation.

When I started practicing 12 years ago, due process hearings costed about $35,000. Now due process hearings cost $60,000 to $70,000. If students are looking at residential placement as a component of their IEP, that usually costs school districts over $100,000 a year. Those hearings require expert witness testimony and the cost of

school personnel to travel to the residential treatment facility, which can be out of state. $100,000 is a lot of money to divert from the education of *all* students, to focus on the education of one student. Parents' attorneys remain involved in this because there is a financial incentive to them. If they win, the attorneys receive money not only from the parents, but also from the school district. So, it's a very costly process for districts to engage in. From a business perspective, it is almost always cheaper to settle. When your school district attorneys come to you as a board, that is always the message we provide.

$100,000 is a lot of money to divert from the education of all students, to focus on the education of one student.

A special education due process hearing is trial court, but in a different location. It usually is located at the school district and is predominantly done in the boardroom. We sequester your board room, and we set up our own court. The cost is more than monetary: Our precious teachers did not go into education to be witnesses in due process hearings! They didn't go into education to be put on the witness stand and questioned by parents' attorneys. That's phenomenally stressful. I don't know that I've been through a due process hearing in the past several years where I have not had an employee quit or go on blood pressure or anxiety medication as a result. This is not their wheelhouse. It's not their jam. If the parents or the district are upset about the outcome of that hearing, the first level of review is federal district court, then the Fifth Circuit, then the U.S. Supreme Court. It escalates from a hearing at your school district, to big-boy court real fast—with big implications. You also want to be cautious about going through the due process hearing because the hearing officers don't necessarily have expertise in special education.

Carter: I'd like to share some statements that will likely *not* be defensible. "We don't do that for any of our other students." What did I tell you that the "I" in IEP stands for? Individualized! Each child is unique, and each

situation is unique. “We can’t afford it” is not a defense. We need to do whatever the ARD committee has ascertained for this unique child. “We’ve never done that before.” As school districts, we’re dealing with a lot of things we’ve never dealt with before. IDEA is a classic case of an underfunded mandate, and you can’t use federal funds to pay for your defense; those are going to come from local funds. Special education is tough, and it’s complicated!

"Strengthening School Safety and Security!"

Alfonso V. Velarde, El Paso ISD Trustee
Dr. George Willey, Taylor ISD Chief Academic Officer
Rodney Fausett, Taylor ISD Deputy Superintendent
Curtis Clay, Clay & Associates
Julio Núñez, Honeywell
Daniel Roundtree, Honeywell
Marco R. Ortiz, Taylor ISD Trustee, Host & Moderator

How can we best protect our students in an era of school shootings and racially-motivated violence? Come, hear one trustee's perspective on how a racially-motivated mass shooting in his community has affected his students and district, and learn about an array of safety and security initiatives from educational leaders and experts!

Ortiz: We'll begin with Trustee Velarde. Since our last MASBA conference, there was a racially-motivated mass shooting in El Paso. Tell us about the impact of that shooting on your community.

Velarde: August 3, 2019 is a date that we'll never forget in El Paso. We're hearing about mass shootings all the time now, in places like Las Vegas, Nevada and at Santa Fe High School here in Texas. We normalize it, and it becomes just another shooting—until it happens in your backyard. When it happens in your backyard, your entire community is impacted. For the past 25 years, El Paso has been among the top three safest cities in the nation with more than 500,000 people. We felt immune, like it could never happen in our city. Then, on August 3, it did, at a fairly-busy Walmart at 9:00 in the morning. It was a racially-motivated shooting at my neighborhood Walmart, the busiest Walmart in the country, which is also the

We felt immune, like it could never happen in our city. Then, on August 3, it did, at a fairly-busy Walmart at 9:00 in the morning. It was a racially-motivated shooting at my neighborhood Walmart.

busiest international Walmart, with many Mexican citizens coming across the border to shop in El Paso. Half the license plates in that parking lot are from Mexico. The shooter clearly stated his intentions in a manifesto; I encourage you to read it, to truly understand the hatred that exists within some people of our society. El Paso was the victim, but every one of us in this room is also the victim: The shooter, a White guy, said that no other color can exist. The impact on our community was huge. 100,000 people visited the memorial behind the Walmart. The national news ran stories there for a month. How did it impact us in the schools? Our schools have drilled for active shooter situations for years. Mass shootings are a fact of life. When this shooting happened in one of the safest cities in the country, we felt vulnerable and began to fear for the first time. Our students are now traumatized by our active shooter drills. They are scared and crying, not knowing that it's a drill. I hope something like this never happens in your community. It's difficult for me to even talk about it. We know the people. This is our neighborhood, and my wife will never go to that Walmart again. She was on the way to that Walmart when the shooting occurred, but she decided to do her nails first. Mass shootings are real, and we have to prepare for them—but in ways that don't traumatize our kids.

Mass shootings are real, and we have to prepare for them—but in ways that don't traumatize our kids.

Ortiz: Dr. Willey and Mr. Fausett, what has your district done to ensure safety and security during this era of mass shootings?

Fausett: We performed a basic needs assessment to identify deficiencies, with the assistance of Mr. Curtis Clay, and we had discussions with our campus administrators. We have invested in handheld and walk-through metal detectors. We use Social Sentinel to monitor social media for threats. We utilize CrisisGov, an electronic application for emergency situations. With that app, you push a button that alerts county officials and local law enforcement. Through that app, emergency operations

are at your fingertips, and you can text message the emergency team of the campus. We have a great relationship with our law enforcement within our county and our city. We have "Blues in School," which offers free breakfast and lunch to law enforcement any time our schools are in session. But with that same relationship, we offer our video surveillance of our school district to law enforcement of Williamson County and the City of Taylor, so that they can monitor our facilities at any time. We also make digital mapping available to our law enforcement, so that they can view the facilities and see an event happening.

Willey: We want our teachers to feel safe, so we provide them a safety plan and training. With school safety in the news, teachers have legitimate concerns about where they work and whether they can be potentially subject to some type of violent situation. We provide the CRASE training: Citizen Response to Active Shooter Events. Police come in and spend 90 minutes with our teachers, teaching them a progression of things to do when their survival instincts kick in. We have online modules for our teachers, from our regional service center, which talk about school safety and mental health. We focus on working with our elementary school students. Many of them experience domestic violence and other trauma in their homes, and we recognize the need to address their mental health needs before they get into secondary school and are tempted to engage in a violent event at school. We work with our counselors. We use restorative practices to help students understand the impact of their behaviors on other people.

Ortiz: The next question is for our security professionals: What do the superintendents and trustees in this room need to know about the safety and security of our schools?

Clay: Our superintendents are involved in their districts' Safety and Security Committees, but they wear a lot of hats. We provide trainings for active shooter response, and we emphasize traditional procedures versus enhanced procedures. The traditional responses to active shooter

situations that we've taught throughout the years caused us to be sitting ducks. Our enhanced procedures involve talking about such things as whether we place kids along one wall, or in one corner, versus putting them in two or three corners. With Senate Bill 11, there's a new law that mandates that we put a threat assessment team in place, with training from the Texas School Safety Center. We assess what's most likely to happen on our campuses. One of the things we're looking at is domestic violence and dating violence prevention awareness. We're also now required to have safety and security audits. They're due by August 2020, so most schools are doing them before the end of the school year. Make sure your audit is comprehensive and looks at the climate and culture on your campuses. We pull data on the suicidal tendencies of students. We also need to make sure that substitute teachers get information on what to do in emergency situations.

The traditional responses to active shooter situations that we've taught throughout the years caused us to be sitting ducks.

Roundtree: It's great to hear how ISDs are planning to protect kids. Honeywell has done a ton of research and consultative meetings with the FBI and with ALICE run-hide-fight to understand how schools are being trained. Within our security division, we implemented a role for K-12 and for universities. The average response time for police to arrive at a school is two minutes and 34 seconds. That sounds really good—until you think about the damage that a semi-automatic rifle or pistol can do in that time. At Honeywell, we automate solutions to help eliminate human error. During tragic incidents, people freak out, and they forget their training. I was at a school recently where they were doing their ALICE run-hide-fight training. The police were on site, the lockdown commenced, and the training was running smoothly—until a student walked out of the restroom. That student would have been done bodily harm in a real situation.

During tragic incidents, people freak out, and they forget their training.

From a product standpoint, Honeywell focuses on automating the three D's: deter, defend and diffuse. Our gunshot detection is wireless and cheap, and, if a gunshot is heard, lockdown immediately commences, and the police are notified. All doors lock, strobes and lights confuse the shooter, cameras pinpoint the person, and the gunshot detection device tells first responders what type of weapon is being used so that they know what equipment to bring. We eliminate human error.

Núñez: Texas is a big state, and a lot of rural school districts have challenges from finance to technology. Not having the technological "backbone" for connecting building components is a big challenge. We assist in integrating gunshot detection, fire systems, HVAC components and mass notification. We bring a knowledge base with 130 years in the controls business, we help with systems, and we work with preferred vendors.

Roundtree: Even better, Honeywell has hired 70 grant writers to help districts pay for these projects. We can get you money, which is music to many school districts' ears. It sounds very "salesy," but the reality is many school may be vulnerable and lack the resources to protect their students.

Ortiz: Let's come back to El Paso. What do you think of as you're hearing all this, and what have you guys done in El Paso?

Velarde: My thought is: Things have changed dramatically in a short period of time. We've gone from being good with having campus police, to now needing to implement digital systems for facial recognition and locking doors. Technology is moving faster than districts can keep up. Parents demand that we provide a safe environment in our schools. We have to address the mandates coming down from the state, and hopefully the money is going to follow. It's a huge challenge for school districts, especially for large school districts with several, old facilities that lack digital infrastructure and systems. Even the security systems that we placed in our newest schools three years ago are now outdated. As board members, we are

We've got to make our school safe, despite competing priorities!

challenged to find ways to implement safety measures, measures in some very unique schools. Our safety committees will be a great opportunity to bring together stakeholders, from our police force to our parents and teachers, to protect our children. We've got to make our school safe, despite competing priorities!

"Truth in Taxation!"

Blair Riley, Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson
Lilia Gibson, Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson
Xavier Herrera, Stafford MSD, Host

What is "Truth in Taxation"? Why is it important to you and your district? What can you do to ensure compliance? With its new legislation on "Truth in Taxation," Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 3 have provided new opportunities and challenges for Texas school districts. Come, hear an overview of this legislation and learn ways to make your process of setting a tax rate this summer stress-free!

Gibson: My name is Lilia Gibson, and I'm an attorney at Linebarger. I've been representing governmental entities in South Texas since 1998, and with Linebarger since 2003. We represent school districts, collecting their delinquent property taxes, and we offer a lot of other value-add services. When MASBA asked us to present today, we really wanted to get down to the nitty gritty of truth in taxation. I'm a tax nerd, and I like to talk about taxes, and I know that people approach you as trustees to speak about their taxes!

Riley: We're so happy to be here. I'm a proud mama: I have a son who is three years old, and I have identical twin girls who are two years old, so my hands are a little full. My husband is an elementary school teacher. I'm the Director for Truth in Taxation for Appraisal and Collection Technologies, which is owned by Linebarger. I develop the software that your districts use to calculate your tax rates.

Let's begin with an introduction to truth in taxation. The Texas Constitution and the Property Tax Code have two purposes: to make taxpayers aware of the proposed tax rate, and to allow taxpayers to limit the increase on taxes. Truth in taxation is based on four guiding principles. The first is the taxpayer's right to know of property value

increases and their estimated taxes. Second, as a taxing unit, you have an obligation to calculate the tax rate and publish notices of tax adoption. The third is to hold public hearings regarding any increase in taxes. And the fourth is the voter's right to a voter-approved election.

On April 30, chief appraisers certify the estimated taxable values for their districts. They send their appraisal notices by May 1. By July 20, the ARB approves the final records, and, on July 20, the chief appraiser certifies the appraisal. This year, there's a slight difference: If the chief appraiser has not certified tax rolls by July 25, he or she is required to provide an estimate. If any of you have a school district in Harris County, you know that Harris County normally provides their certified appraisal a little late, and we have to move out our deadlines for tax rate adoption. They're the only county in Texas that has ever not been able to meet the July 25 deadline. September 29 is the final day to adopt a tax rate, and the assessor mails out tax bills on October 1. All our work must be done during that two-month period.

There's new language this year: The effective tax rate is now going to be called the no-new-revenue tax rate, and the rollback tax rate is now going to be called the voter approval tax rate.

By law, each school district has to calculate its effective rate and its rollback rate every year, its no-new-revenue rate and its voter approval tax rate. The no-new-revenue rate is the rate that raises the same amount of total revenue on properties taxed during both years. If it was on the tax rolls in 2019 and 2020, that's what we're looking at. We calculate it by taking five years' taxes, subtracting out the taxes on property value lost, then divide by the adjusted 2020 taxable value. Things not counted in the no-new-revenue rate include new improvements, new buildings in your district. Any new building built in the past year doesn't count toward your effective rate. That's free money for you, which is always exciting. We also have our voter approval rate, which is broken into two components: your maintenance and operations (M&O)

rate, which is the largest part of your budget, and your interest and sinking (I&S) rate. Your maintenance and operations is used for utilities, salaries, and day-to-day operations. Your debt rate is only used to repay bonds that have been secured by property taxes. You can't combine your I&S money with your M&O money.

As a reminder, school districts have a 50-cent debt test, and they must prove to the comptroller that, even with a bond election, they'll stay under 50 cents for the I&S rate. This 50-cent debt test has been in place for decades; it hasn't gone up, and they haven't changed it with inflation.

Failure to adopt your tax rate by September 29 leads to the adoption of either the no-new-revenue rate or last year's rate, whichever is lower. School districts must hold one public hearing before adopting their tax rates. You must publish in the local newspaper your notice of public meeting to discuss the budget and proposed tax rate no later than ten days and no earlier than 30 days before the day of your public hearing. The public input has to be on a weekday and within the school district's boundaries. It can never be on a holiday. If you fail to follow these requirements, any taxpayer can obtain an injunction prohibiting you from collecting taxes.

That was our introduction to truth in taxation. If you've been a school board member for a while, that was a refresher. Now, let's talk about what's new this year as a result of HB 3 and SB 2.

You are entitled to a certain amount of money to educate the children in your district, so, if your local property tax collections don't provide enough money to meet your entitlement, the state gives you extra money. If you have more money than your entitlement, the state comes in and "recaptures" that money, redistributing it to districts that cannot make enough money.

School districts are entitled to a certain amount of funding based upon the students who are enrolled, with some exceptions. You are entitled to a certain amount of money to educate the children in your district, so, if your local property tax collections don't provide enough money to

meet your entitlement, the state gives you extra money. If you have more money than your entitlement, the state comes in and "recaptures" that money, redistributing it to districts that cannot make enough money. Now, for a history lesson: Was anybody on the school board back in 2005? In 2005, the majority of Texas school districts were capped at $1.50, and most had reached that cap. The 2006 legislature created a new system, dropping the cap to $1.17, classifying the first six cents over $1.00 as "golden pennies" not subject to recapture, and the next 11 pennies as "copper pennies" subject to recapture. The "golden pennies" obviously gave you a much bigger yield, since they were not subject to recapture. The next 11 "copper pennies" were subject to recapture—which is where HB 3 comes in. In 2019, both the Tier 1 and Tier 2 rates were compressed again, dropping the rate from $1.17. The Tier 1 rate—that $1—was compressed 7%, to 93 cents. Districts that did not have a previous TRE now have a maximum of 97 cents, with voter approval. If you previously had a TRE and were already at your $1.17 maximum, you were dropped to just under $1.07. So, in 2019, everyone was compressed, and no TREs were allowed, with few exceptions. Now, in 2020, we're getting compressed again, but only Tier 1. From this year forward, we are going to have both a state and a local compression. If the state property values or your local district property values grow at more than 2.5% in a year, you are going to have to compress your tax rates again. Anytime your values or the state values grow by more than 2.5%, you're going to have another compression every year. Now, each school district's tax rate is going to be based on its individual property value growth, and, for the first time, every district across the state is going to have a different tax rate. Moving forward, HB 3 will automatically lower the Tier 1 rate that the state or local property values grow. In 2020, we already know that the state grew at 4.01%, so you will have a compression. It doesn't matter how much your local property values changed; you will be compressed because the state values grew. The statewide maximum compressed rate is now 91.64%, down from 93%, and, if

your property values last year grew by greater than 4%, you're going to be dropped below that 91.64%. The good news is that no district can be below 90% of that maximum, which is 80.247%. For the coming year, every school district in Texas will have an MCR, a maximum compressed rate, somewhere between 80.247% and 91.64%. If the state values growth is 4% or 5% next year, it's going to drop down again. We're going to see more and more compressions. The TEA will provide each district with its MCR in July, based on the information that the district gives the TEA in the spring.

How do you go above your MCR? If your tax rate was at $1.04 and you haven't had a TRE yet, the board can add up to four cents with a majority vote this year, or five cents with a unanimous vote. Speak with your board and see if you can get those five cents—because they're "golden pennies" not subject to recapture. If you're a district that won't get $100 of wealth per penny for WADA from your tax collection, that is a very large number. Honestly, the reason I came here was to make sure you know about those five "golden pennies." Next year, the fifth penny is available with a majority vote. These state figures work if your growth was below the state growth of 4% this year. Also, if you're at $1.04, which means that you did not previously have a TRE for 13 cents, you can have a TRE starting this year.

If you have a disaster except a drought—like a tornado, hurricane, flood, wildfire or other calamity—you can go above your voter approval rate without having a voter approval election for one year.

And that's the bulk of the changes from HB 3!

"What We're Learning About *Latinx* Leaders!"

Dr. José Leyba
Association of *Latino* Administrators and Superintendents

Luis Versalles
Pacific Educational Group

B. Abigail Tarango
Director of Special Projects and Strategic Initiatives, Ysleta ISD

Dr. Dorene Benavídez
Executive Director of Equity and Professional Learning
Fort Worth ISD

Jacinto Ramos, Jr., Trustee
Fort Worth ISD
Host & Moderator

Ready for a powerhouse panel? Hear how Latinx *educational leaders lead differently from non-*Latinx *leaders. Learn how we can achieve systemic equity transformation. Discover a framework for training the next generation of* Latinx *leaders. Explore the implications of effective board leadership for racial equity transformation. This is one panel you won't want to miss!*

Ramos: Our topic today is "What We're Leaning About *Latinx* Leaders." We've got amazing panelists today. After you hear them speak their truth and use their voice, you'll get a really good sense of why they are here with us today. So, as you introduce yourself, I'll just ask you which term you use to describe yourself. The word *Latinx* is received differently in different environments. What word or words do you use to build power and community when referencing who we are, and what are some of the most interesting topics to you right now, particularly with respect to *Latinx* leaders and *Latinx* leadership?

Tarango: My name is Abigail Tarango. I'm from El Paso, Texas, and I work at Ysleta ISD. I'm the Director of Special

Projects and Strategic Initiatives—a long title to say that we serve students, we serve our community, we build capacity, and we move mountains for people. I self-identify differently in different spaces. We all navigate the spaces in which we find ourselves, and some people don't understand us or the words we use. In the academic space, I'm a *Mexica*, absolutely indigenous and Spanish, with a *mezcla* [mixture] of blood running through me and with darker skin in the summer and lighter skin in the winter. I can never match up my makeup, so I don't wear any! As an executive, I'm a *Latina*. I own that I'm Mexican-American. In this amazing space of MASBA, I'm definitely *Latinx*. There are a lot of things trending now. As a PK-12 practitioner, I'm a huge advocate for pipeline awareness—which means that early childhood matters, K through 12 matters, and postsecondary matters: certificate programs, industry, and all the way to doctorates. I'm ABD [all but dissertation] right now, so I'm representing less than 1% of *Latinos*. I hope to make it through, and prayers are appreciated.

What are we doing to help build our students, so that they understand & navigate our systems of education, and what are we doing to break down the barriers?

Benavídez:

I'm Dorene Benavídez with Fort Worth ISD. I have newly transitioned into the role of Executive Director for the Department of Equity and Professional Learning. I identify as a *Latina*. A lot of my doctoral studies were in learning about what it means to be *Latina* and understanding the role of women in leadership positions, what it means to have a voice, and the transition of principals into executive roles,, like superintendent. I'm very much interested in learning more about how we can continue to grow our *Latino* population in top-level positions. A big focus for me is the work of equity. What are we doing to build our student voice and help them transition beyond our PK-12 system? Only 11% of our students are graduating from

college, 6% at the graduate level, and .3% at the doctoral level. What are we doing to help build our students, so that they understand and navigate our systems of education, and what are we doing to break down the barriers? I'm also interested in dual language and in providing equitable services for all of our students, to ensure they're getting a balanced education and being taught in their first language to be successful.

Versalles: I'm Luis Versalles. I partner with school districts around the country to take a systemic approach to creating racially-equitable school systems, where our young people and particularly our historically least-served young people can point to our adult behaviors and say, "I feel seen, I feel honored, my ancestry belongs here, and I have a voice." We help students to be literate on the issue of race, so that they can make positive change in the world. The whole issue of identity has been the journey of my life. My family came from Havana to Minneapolis in the early 1960s. My father grew up in Marianao, and my mother grew up in Playa, 20 minutes from each other, but they didn't meet until they were in Minneapolis. I have one uncle by blood and one uncle by marriage playing for the Twins, so I'm still in Minneapolis today. Growing up, looking the way I do, being *Latino* and Cuban-American, there was always the question of "Who am I, and what language do I use?" At this point in my journey, I identify as Black/*Latino*. Our community has beautiful racial and gender diversity—diversity in so many different aspects of who we are as *Latinx*. These words cause me to deal with some of my own conditioning around issues of race, gender and sexual orientation. I believe *Latinx* is the most inclusive term.

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Leyba: José Leyba, *su servidor* [your servant]. As the youngest person on this panel, it's a great honor to be with some great brains here. Think about the last time you felt marginalized: as a person, as a *Latino*, as an African American, as a female, as a White male or female. Those experiences shape our discussion today. I've been called every name in the book: Spick, Greaser, Beaner. I've been called the N-word. I've been told to go back to Iraq. I've been called an Indian. So when I'm asked what I call myself, it becomes fun.

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I've started a research project I call *Testimonios*: [Testimonials] The *Latinx* Leadership Way—but I'm changing the name to the *Latinaeioux* way, and you decide what you want to call yourself. That's the power in the diversity of who we are as a people. We're so diverse that you can't pigeonhole us. My 92-year-old mother with dementia asks me, "*Mi hijo* [my son], what is this *Latinx cochinada* [filth]?" I say, "*Mamá*, it's a long story." We have great power in how we choose to describe ourselves. We're so diverse, yet we're unified in this description: *Latinx*. That's the strength that will carry us to do really good things for kids who are being marginalized in classrooms as we speak. The conversation we're having about *Latinx* leadership is urgent, because that marginalization is affecting the success of our students and the future of this country.

Ramos: Dr. Leyba, you mention your oral history project, *Testimonios*, where you've interviewed over 30 *Latinx* community colleges administrators to see how *Latinx* leaders lead differently from non-*Latinx* leaders. Tell us what you've concluded. I've enjoyed reading about the seven constructs that you described in that study, since they encompass what the journey might look like for a Brown person—and I always say "Brown" in the context of the Courageous Conversations protocol, which

teaches me that race is color in this country, and that, as much as I may not want to have that courageous conversation about it, the reality is that I get "raced" every day by the way that I look. Some days, I may be considered "*Chicano*." Some days, I may be considered "Asian." Some days I may be considered "Indigenous." It's so complex. Describe your constructs for us.

Leyba: Let me backtrack and give you the historical background. I'm a former superintendent and retired college president, and I assist with college president and superintendent searches, so I attend a lot of board retreats, both for K-12 and at the college and university level. My main function now is as program director for the ALAS Superintendent's Leadership Academy, which is going on its tenth year. We have with us today Superintendent Juan Cabrera of Cohort 1 and Superintendent Verónica Vijil of Cohort 6. We have leaders spread throughout the country, and our goal is to prepare the next generation of *Latinx* leaders. I've been a faculty member since Cohort 2 and program director now for the past five years. I study leadership, and I serve as a mentor and distinguished faculty member for a comparable program for community college presidents, called the National Community College Hispanic Council, which was started here in Texas. I'm also the only *Latinx* faculty member for an African-American program that's designed to develop the next generation of African-American community college presidents.

I've been studying leadership for many years, and I was interested in knowing whether *Latinx* leaders lead differently than non-*Latinx* leaders I interviewed more than 30 superintendents, chancellors and college presidents whom I've identified as successful according to certain criteria. The seven constructs arise out of that research. As we know, constructs are tools we use to facilitate the understanding of human behavior.

The first construct that really hit me was prompted by Dr. Kenneth Magdaleno of Fresno State University, who writes that education administration is androcentric—it's built on White, male values, much like academia is. As a result, women and people of color think they have to aspire to the leadership models and criteria established by the White, male, androcentric view of administration. However, the successful *Latinx* leaders that I've interviewed successfully navigate *entre dos mundos* [between two worlds], and successful Afro-*Latino* leaders successfully navigate *entre tres mundos* [between three worlds]. The first construct is the ability to successfully navigate within different worlds.

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For the second construct, think about the last time you were marginalized and what impact that had on you. There's nothing like sitting with a superintendent, chancellor or community college president and crying over the fact that we are still marginalized as a community. One *Latina* superintendent said, "I've been marginalized so many times, I don't even know where to begin!" Rather than allow this to negatively impact them, these successful leaders use it as motivation. One Afro-*Latino* leader said to me, "I've been marginalized since kindergarten, but that's why I work so hard. That's why I'm so passionate about helping students—because I don't want them to suffer what I suffered in school."

Construct 3: Bilingual/bicultural connections. We have a natural way of connecting with all marginalized peoples. Juana Bordas has written one of the top books on multicultural leadership. She studied African-American, *Latino* and Native American leaders, and she talks about that marginalization and ability to connect with communities. I interviewed a *Latina* president who's *Chicana*, not bilingual, and she called me to say, "I did my first presentation to the parents *en español* [in Spanish]!" She began her presentation, saying, "*No hablo muy bien el*

español, pero… [I don't speak Spanish well, but]" She called me crying: Afterward, the parents were hugging her. She really connected with them!

Fourth construct: Intentionality or intentional equity and diversity. As superintendents and college presidents, we walk into a room and ask, "Why doesn't this room or my administration reflect the students that I serve?" We're intentional about changing that, with LGBTQ persons, women, people of color—and even White males, since we want their perspective, too.

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Fifth: Our *Latinx* lenses. Our cultural identity and experiences shape how we see children. Instead of viewing them pejoratively, we see their skills. They're bilingual: That's a skill!

Sixth: *Personalismo*. Juana Bordas coined this term. It's more than charisma. Successful leaders are not only charismatic; they care about people. They value others. Neurosciences teaches that our brains are wired to hear stories. That's how we learn! We tell stories, and we're good at it? Where did we learn this? From our *abuelitas* [grandmothers]!

Finally, I coined the last construct, based on the title of a book written by a friend who passed away, called *Drink Cultura*. Successful *Latinx* leaders recognize that, as Peter Senge says, real leadership comes from deep within. They are comfortable with *Latinidad* [their Latino nature]. They "drink" their *cultura* [culture].

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Those are the seven constructs. They're very proud of their culture, even though they may not be bilingual or bicultural.

Ramos: We'll move on to Luis. I'm biased: Luis has taught me so much. He introduced me to the concept of levels of consciousness and how we're on a journey of consciousness. This is also the gentleman who told me in a workshop to stop using the word "minority." Luis, help us understand your work on courageous conversations about race in our society and the ways in which we might more effectively and authentically achieve courageous conversations on race.

Versalles: Glenn Singleton, the founder and president of Courageous Conversations, had a vision 29 years ago to create an organization that could actually move systems beyond what we call "random acts of equity and diversity," and to organize for systemic equity transformation. Part of my learning in supporting systems and *Latinx* leaders is how to communicate to the community about racial equity in a way that they can hold onto that isn't unproductive, and how to communicate it internally in a way that's energizing.

There's a moment when we stop being just another person in the world, when some situation, person or event says, "This is race. This is who you *are. This is who* they *are." In that moment, we lose our "innocence" on race, & our racial consciousness begins to form.*

Going back to Dr. Leyba's point about stories, the strongest idea of Courageous Conversations is that we all have a racial narrative, a racial autobiography. There's a moment when we stop being just another person in the world, when some situation, person or event says, "This is race. This is who *you* are. This is who *they* are." In that moment, we lose our "innocence" on race, and our racial consciousness begins to form. Each day, we can impact our racial consciousness, regardless of whether we were raised as a White person or a person of color. When we think about Courageous Conversations at the systems level, it's one thing to have a conversation, but we have to ask ourselves: Is there an ongoing focus on racial consciousness at the highest level of our organization? Part of our work is grounded in a framework. We don't

have too much evidence in this country of institutions that have historically not served people who look like us, that authentically move toward equity transformation without public accountability, without true partnership, and true power-sharing, and with racially-conscious community members.

We ask school board members: What would it look like to *not* have an adversarial, reactionary relationship with these conscious voices in our community? What would it be like to sit side-by-side and really share this work? How does your work influence the work of your cabinet as it works to become more racially-conscious? How do your principals and site equity teams develop their consciousness and recognize that we can't educate children in a culturally-relevant way without stories and without understanding the truth and beauty that our families have in a very empowering and culturally-relevant way? How does this idea of the Courageous Conversations live in all of those places? Most importantly, how are we interrupting this idea that our kids can be college- and career-ready in 2020 and *not* be racially literate? How are our high school graduates developing power in this conversation around their own racial experience in a wider worldview of compassion and true solidarity-building versus internalizing inferiority or superiority?

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Benavídez: In the Fort Worth ISD, out students are having courageous conversations about race. We recently had a showcase where students presented how they were extending their conversations about race. One group of students, for example, said, "We don't want there to be any kind of racial slurs on our campus." They presented that to their peers and shared what that would look like. As a result, our students grappled with who they are, the importance of voice, and what they can do to make a difference. At the campus level, we're pushing teachers to feel uncomfortable and be more reflective about their teaching practices, so that when they approach their instructional practices, it's with a cultural awareness of where their kids are coming from. They're better understanding themselves and their students. It makes a significant difference in the classroom.

Ramos: Fort Worth ISD recently hosted its SOAR Summit—Student Organized for Anti-Racism. Trustees Quinton Phillips, Ann Darr and I attended, and some young *Latinas* wanted to let the trustees know that they recently learned that a number of Fort Worth ISD campuses were named for Confederate leaders and slave owners—and they organized very quickly to say, "We're not okay with this! We want to work with the board and administration, and we want to get this done. We don't want to wait a year!" Those *Latinas* had organized students from different high schools in that room. You share a passion of lifting voices, specifically women's voices, and help others acknowledge and recognize that men tend to dominate these spaces.

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Benavídez: As students learn more about history, they feel empowered and find their voice. It was really great to see our students feel empowered and approach their school

board members for a conversation. Of course, our board members do a great job of empowering students as well.

In terms of giving voice to women, in our culture we are raised to believe without questioning, to accept things the way they are. As a principal as well, I noticed there was no space or room to question things. We had to accept how things were—and specific men told us, "This is how things are." I started to question, "Why does it have to be this way?" I also sought to empower my teachers and allow them to discover their voice. As I mentor and develop other leaders, I encourage them to ask questions and find their voice. There's such a small percentage of *Latinas* in top leadership positions, so we have to help them find their voice. By helping them, we help other young *Latinas* to see themselves in those same roles. I want my own daughter to feel empowered to ask questions and to push in areas where she doesn't think she can. It's not an easy thing to develop that voice, because there are so many barriers along the way. We need to build the space for women to grow in this respect.

Ramos: Abigail, I met you through Project MALES. You've been very active with the Texas Males of Color Consortium, doing unapologetic work for systemic change for boys of color in educational systems. You're the mother of three, and you believe in solidarity and building briges.

Tarango: I'll never forget the stories of my *abuela's* [grandma's] experiences. I'm a visual learner, so I vividly remember her story of a sign that read, "No Mexicans, no women, no dogs." She internalized such things. She wasn't mad or angry in a way that was paralyzing, but she was passionate and upset, and those

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experiences drove her to make change. What I see happening in Fort Worth is generational. Superintendent Scribner had a father who was educated and who educated others. He was beloved, and he trained many people to be "woke." Scribner went to Arizona, where all kinds of things were going on, and where he was perceived as threatening and was told to be quiet. Then somehow, by the universe's great divine intervention, our ancestors brought him to Fort Worth, where he was positioned at the right time and with the right leaders—with the right board and board president. It wasn't the work of one night or one day or one month. It was predestined by people who were making change in society. César Chávez said, and I'm paraphrasing, "Talk is cheap, but those who organize and do things on a daily basis—that's what matters." I can't help but be amazed at the generations it took for us to sit here and have these conversations.

I don't fit into a neat "box." Our young men need to know that they don't have to fit into the "boxes" of statistical standards. I'm a single mother of two boys and one girl, and being a single mother has made me who I am. I use that experience to empower my children and to help young men. I expose them to Courageous Conversations. I tell them the things I learn from people like Dr. Leyba. I tell stories and try to leave them "on fire." Some of us are learning these things in our 40s, but there's no time stamp on this. Let's talk to our kids who are twelve and eight about these issues that are so important!

Ramos: I had an opportunity to sit down with our panelists after lunch, and we listened to each other. Listening to our past MASBA presidents at lunch made me think of how important it is to talk about who we are and where we come from. I want to open it up, so that any of our panelists can speak their truth in a way that wasn't expressed in their answers to my questions.

Leyba: In Spanish, we say, "*Dime con quién andas, y te diré quién eres*" [Tell me who you walk with, and I'll tell you who you are].

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As I interviewed *Latinx* leaders, almost all of them shared *dichos* [sayings]. There was one college provost who was just the *dichos* queen! Dr. Deborah Santiago, the co-founder of *Excelencia* in Education, which is *Latinx* leadership at its best, shares the *dicho*: "*No soy de aquí, ni soy de allá, pero estoy aquí*" [I'm not from here, nor am I from there, but I am here]. Many successful *Latinx* leaders have found their place in the world. I'm reminded of one of my favorite musicians, Ramón "Chunky" Sánchez from Blythe, California, near San Diego. He described his struggles as a marginalized Mexican American in California. He said, "I never knew if I was American or *mexicano*. I was called a *pocho* [*Chicano*] in Mexico, and my parents were immigrants in the U.S. I was born in Blythe, but I was told to go back to Mexico. My teachers called me Raymond, not Ramón." The *Chicano* movement helped him find his place in the world. Successful *Latinx* leaders know who they are, they take their *Latinidad* with them, and they're unapologetic about making change for children.

Tarango: We have to be careful when we talk about "place" and "making space." As Dr. Leyba suggests, "place" is about where you fit in and what you define it as. It's not like a shoebox with your size. It's self-defined, like a career path. We think it's going to be one way—I thought I'd be an assistant principal, then a principal, then a superintendent—but then it doesn't turn out that way. When we speak with young people, we have to be careful about the words we use and the way we define things. They hear things literally, which is why our crucial conversations are so important. They see things through the lenses of social media, their peers, and socioeconomic status.

Leyba: I think it's important for our kids to hear our stories about the times when we felt marginalized. For many of us, it was those experiences that drove us to do what we do today.

Ramos: Before we conclude, I'd like to invite Luis to talk about an event that's coming up here in Texas.

Versalles: I've been with Courageous Conversations for nine years, and every year we have a national conference, but last year we created a three-day national conference on *Latinx* identity called the *Latinx* Summit for Courageous Conversation. This year, it'll be in Houston on April 15 to 18. There are intentional, facilitated spaces to lean into what it means to be *Latinx* across the color spectrum and all the diversity within our community. Learn more at CourageousConversation.com.

Ramos: We thank our panelists. These amazing human beings have taught me a great deal today. Let's continue to show up and embrace our positional and personal power to implement policy and promote good governance, so that our young people can have better educational systems than when we joined our boards!

¡La Despedida! Closing General Session

Dr. Ángela Valenzuela and Dr. Emilio Zamora
The University of Texas at Austin

We made incredible gains during the civil rights movement, and we finally succeeded in getting approval for Mexican American Studies in Texas – but discrimination and inequities persist, and, in many ways, we've lost ground. Yes, the Mexican American community has much to celebrate from the past 50 years – and still we have a long way to go, to achieve the world we desire for our children and grandchildren! Husband-and-wife duo Dr. Emilio Zamora and Dr. Ángela Valenzuela will draw together the "ribbons" of our golden jubilee conference experience, tie them into a bow, and send us forth with a call-to-action to ensure that the next 50 years of our association and our society are much better than the previous 50.

My name is Ángela Valenzuela. I'll provide some opening statements and remarks about ethnic studies and the importance of the inclusion of our histories, cultures and languages in our curriculum, and my husband, Emilio Zamora, will follow with a presentation on a specific fight that we're having at The University of Texas right now that involves the Hispanic Educational Equity Committee that has been established by the history department to challenge the university with respect to its treatment of Hispanics at The University of Texas. Because I'm also a faculty member at The University of Texas, the issue affects me as well, and I'm grateful for Emilio and the Hispanic Educational Equity Committee who are on the front lines, battling the very severe crisis of underrepresentation of Hispanic, *Latino* and Mexican-American faculty there at The University of Texas at Austin.

The overarching umbrella for both of our presentations is representation. We are underrepresented in the curriculum, in textbooks, and as faculty members at the university. A closely related issue is misrepresentation. Even when we are represented in history and curriculum, it is often distorted.

I've been involved in policy and have done a lot of work over the years with the state legislature. We're always fighting so many battles: in assessment, in school finance, in immigration, against charter schools and the privatization of our public schools. I've been part of these conversations for a long, long time. I find that what is missing in most school reform efforts is curriculum. There's a silence or absence with respect to curriculum, which is the reproduction of consciousness—how we're going to be in the world, how we're going to think and process, and our relationship to each other. That consciousness is like the air that we breathe; often we don't even think about it until we get into battles over curriculum or the review of racist textbooks that portray us in a very pejorative manner: as lazy renegades and outlaws!

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This is all part of a process that has played out since the 1960s and early 1970s, when we, as a community, called out for representation in the curriculum, for better teachers, for books that reflect our history and experience, and for bilingual education.

I challenge you, as school board members, to reflect on how curriculum is the reproduction of consciousness. As educators, we're supposed to be cultivating students who are critical thinkers. Too often, education can be the exact opposite. It can be narrow, reducing schools, teachers and students to numbers on a piece of paper in a very alienating way. That is *not* who we are. We are a very communitarian people. We work together and organize, and we have a long history of challenging systems of oppression.

It seems that everything happened 50 years ago. Emilio and I are members of the National Association for *Chicana* and *Chicano* Studies, which is also turning 50 years old. We need to celebrate, but we also need to move forward the agendas of our organizations.

Since 2014, largely because of the inspiration of Arizona, we advocated for a course in Mexican American Studies here in Texas. I published the story, which included the killing of a racist textbook.

To make a long story short, on April 11, 2018, the National Association for *Chicana* and *Chicano* Studies—with representatives from the Valley, Houston, San Antonio, El Paso, Fort Worth and Austin—was able to pass Mexican American Studies, African American Studies, Native American and Indigenous Studies, and Asian American Studies for the state of Texas. It's a big deal: We're the only state to do this!

We're now working on the standards for all these courses. The standards for African American Studies have been approved. Native American and Indigenous Studies standards are in process, as well as Asian American Studies.

We're not done with the State Board of Education, which has very jealously held onto a White supremacist agenda through a culturally-exclusive curriculum that presents this state and this country as exceptional. What is so exceptional about enslaving people? What's so exceptional about taking people's lands? What's so exceptional about continuing to colonize people under the ideology of White supremacy?

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What's really inspirational about our narrative is that it's ongoing. It's not over, and we're really well organized. It takes a lot of work, a lot of commitment. It takes support from universities. We became *familia*. We're close, and we're a force to be reckoned with. We're an inspiration—to ourselves, to our state, and to our country!

Ethnic studies is basically a college-level curriculum for our students, and we're seeing in Arizona and San Francisco that it's increasing test scores and matriculation into higher education because it's very synced with a university-based curriculum. We can actually begin at a very young age—during elementary and middle school—to offer a university-based curriculum to our children, and we aren't doing that in the context of our *escuelita*, our *Academia Cuauhtli* in Austin, Texas.

What is real important is that we've been able to circumvent what had been a time-honored approach to politics at the level of the State Board of Education. We had to play by rules of the game that weren't written by us. We are haunted by Audre Lorde's dictum: "You do not dismantle the master's house with the master's tools." It's a warning, a caution, an admonition that haunts us all the time. Often, when you use the master's tools and you think you're dismantling the master's house, you end up reinscribing it and becoming part of the system. We see this in higher education: Graduate students come to us all the time saying, "I want to commit to this graduate programs! I want to make the world a better place!" Then they're processed through the graduate school experience, and nine out of ten who become faculty lose that social justice center and their involvement in the community. We become individualistic, hierarchical and part of the system. We must hold ourselves accountable by "walking and chewing gum at the same time," by being part of these institutions and being part of a community that is working on a progressive agenda for change.

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Psychiatrist Madeline Levine just came out with a book where she says that the number one stressor for children is…school! We need to be thoughtful and mindful about the fact that the Western Europeans who invaded this continent created an educational system, a way of knowing, that is very hierarchical, linear, objectifying, and with a fundamentally flawed relationship to the land, to Mother Earth, and the neo-liberal agenda nowwith respect to the environment is horrifying. Where are we in stopping those horrible, evil forces?

The Western Europeans who invaded this continent created an educational system, a way of knowing, that is very hierarchical, linear, objectifying, and with a fundamentally flawed relationship to the land, to Mother Earth.

We all need to be champions for these agendas. It shouldn't have to take 65 years, as it did with our State Board of Education, to take an interest in ethnic studies.

I care very deeply about these matters. I'm also very proud of the work of Emilio and the members of the Hispanic Education Committee at The University of Texas at Austin. They care very deeply and are on the front lines of another fight with big consequences—but we're going to retire at some point; we're not going to be there, and there's no "bench." People are leaving UT because it is inhospitable. Without further ado, please welcome my husband and colleague in the struggle!

Good afternoon. I'm Emilio Zamora, and I need to talk to you about something very important for us at The University of Texas. I'm a full professor in the history department, which has over 60 faculty members. I'm number 13 in terms of productivity, books and articles, but I'm 32nd in terms of pay. I could live on $20,000, but it's not fair that we produce and aren't paid at the same level as others who produce less. I couldn't face myself if, after fighting the fight for curriculum, I don't stand up for my own rights. I have to do that. And I'm not just fighting for my own rights. I'm fighting for the rights of future generations of African-American and Mexican-American professors and others who will follow us.

I mention another colleague: Manuel Ramírez. Some of you may know him. Manuel was a psychologist who in the 1960s and 1970s made a major contribution to bilingual education at a time when we were fighting the legislature and fighting in local districts to get bilingual education approved. As a scholar, he developed a theory that children think and learn differently, and that we need to look at how Mexican-American children learn. Manuel is a full professor. He shared 45 years with the university. He has written five books and a number of articles, and he's getting paid $90,000 a year when his colleagues are making over $200,000. That's the problem we're facing at the university.

In the history department, three of us are *Latinos*. I'm the only Mexican American. We began to notice this pattern that affected us all, including some African Americans and one White professor. Equity was not being preserved, and our institution is no longer a meritocracy. We performed a preliminary analysis on the history, anthropology, English and psychology departments. We also secured university-wide data. We concluded that *Latinos* and *Latinas* are producing at higher levels than our White counterparts and are getting paid. This meritocracy is not working for us.

We're reminded in history that when we have been able to accomplish something, it's because we "rolled up our sleeves" and acted, often with the help of allies. We talk about social justice, but we have to ask ourselves what we're doing about it in our own work environments!

We're reminded in history that when we have been able to accomplish something, it's because we "rolled up our sleeves" and acted, often with the help of allies.

There are eight of us on the Hispanic Equity Committee. Alberto Martínez, a Puerto Rican, teaches math and has written five books. He and Francisco González-Lima assisted with the quantitative data. The university tried to block us by saying that they didn't have the data, or that our data were incomplete. We obtained the data from public sources, and we visited practically every department and asked for their data. We've told them, "Until you present your own verifiable data and analysis, you have to depend on what we're telling you." We're all pretty distinguished, and two full professors known throughout the world for their quantitative skills have led our efforts on data.

Like the bible, which says, "where two or three people gather in my name," the university administration tends to listen when two or three faculty members have a concern. We're a committee of eight people, and we've experienced all kinds of opposition, even from our colleagues.

We argue that we represent a growing portion of the population of Texas, yet our representation at The University of Texas is not keeping pace. We're pointing out that the issue is not only salary, but all kinds of benefits. Because we get paid $1,500 or $2,000 for other duties, we're not appointed to important committees, so our salary doesn't increase. There's a disparity in salary, but the disparity in benefits is even greater. None of the three *Latinos* in our department has ever chaired an important committee, including the committees that search for faculty in our fields. It's disrespectful.

We are also addressing enrollment. *Latino* students are enrolling at higher rates at The University of Texas, but the actual number of those who are admitted significantly drops. Our state's 10% Rule now only admits the top 6%. Over 30% of admitted students are *Latinos*, but a consistent 24% of *enrolled* students are *Latinos*, so for years we've been

A consistent 24% of enrolled students are Latinos*, so for years we've been one point away from being a Hispanic-Serving Institution. We have to ask why this is.*

one point away from being a Hispanic-Serving Institution. We have to ask whether why this is.

We have recommend changes with respect to student representation, which is worse for Hispanic women. In 2007, the university established an *ad hoc* committee to look at equity problems affecting women. The committee's report was published in 2008. Changes occurred in 2009. They came to similar conclusions: Women are paid less on average and are not in important positions. The chair of that committee said that *Latina* professors at UT are statistically insignificant. They don't count! During a meeting with the university's president and provost, one of the women on our Hispanic Equity Committee told a story and concluded, "I want to be statistically significant. I want *Latinas* to be significant!"

We're making a special appeal that the university correct equity problems immediately, particularly with women. There are still a number of departments at UT that don't have a single *Latino* professor. We made demands in 1969 and 1970 that UT hire *Latino* faculty. We have top-notch *Latinos* in all fields, and 50 years later, we have departments with no *Latinos*! The departments of business, government, human development, nutritional sciences, advertising, public relations and community studies have no *Latinos*!

Latino professors at UT attain tenure at lower rates than Whites, Asians and Blacks.

Of the 220 centers and institutes at UT, only eight have Hispanic directors—and most of those are for Hispanic studies programs!

In 80 years, our department of Latin American Studies has never been headed by a *Latino*, a person of Latin American origin! Imagine if the Women's Studies department at UT were headed only by males. It's ridiculous!

In 80 years, our department of Latin American Studies has never been headed by a Latino*, a person of Latin American origin! Imagine if the Women's Studies department at UT were headed only by males. It's ridiculous!*

All important positions in the history department have always been filled by Whites.

The discrimination is also reflected in budget cuts: During a recent round of cuts, $4.9 million needed to be cut from university budgets. $1.2 million of those cuts were born by the three units of the Mexican American Studies department, and the other 70 liberal arts departments divided the rest. It's discrimination, and it affects their research, their archives, and our history!

We have a legislative agenda. We're talking with State Representative Mary González on the Higher Education Committee and with State Representative Gina Hinojosa, who represents UT Austin. We want to propose a bill that all colleges and universities in Texas do an equity analysis and create a report and a plan of action. We've had a great reception with TLEC, the Texas *Latino* Education Coalition. We gotten favorable reports from newspapers.

You face similar problems in your organizations. The problem is huge. MASBA is doing great work and is a member of TLEC. MASBA has come to Austin and has advocated and been supportive. Together, we're covering all the bases, from elementary education through the university!

Reflections on Closing Keynote
by Dr. Emilio Zamora and Dr. Ángela Valenzuela

"It's 2020 and we're still dealing with salary issues—even for tenured professors at The University of Texas! What is wrong with this picture? And they say it has nothing to do with the color of our skin. They say, "She's Hispanic; she'll work for less!"

—Conception "Connie" Esparza, Aldine ISD

"We're in the 21st century, and we're behind. And we're behind another 10 years in Lubbock. We have a lot of work to do, and we have to continue the hard work!"

—Lala Chávez, Lubbock ISD

"It's not just in higher education. These issues affect our local districts. We wish everything were equal and that everyone could see through the same lens, but we don't. It's up to us as board members to uncover discrimination and injustice—and make them right for the sake of our children!"

—Elton Foster, Royal ISD

"Dr. Zamora and Dr. Valenzuela are very passionate about their work. *Latinas* are considered insignificant—and we need to be significant. There's a lot of work that remains to be done!"

—Dr. Ninfa Cadena, Carrizo Springs ISD

Remarks by MASBA Past Presidents

During the conference, Former MASBA Executive Director Juan Aguilera, who resurrected MASBA in 1993, invited past presidents of the organization to share brief remarks and recollections. Their words follow.

Juan Aguilera
Round Rock ISD
MASBA Executive Director 1996-2004

In 1992, I served on the Round Rock ISD Board of Trustees. After I attended my first TASB conference in 1992, I called TASB and asked if TASB had an organization for Mexican-American, Hispanic, *Latino* or *Chicano* school board members. They referred me to Lidia Moreno, formerly of the Austin ISD Board of Trustees. At that time, Diana Castañeda of the Austin ISD contacted me and told me that there had been a Mexican American School Board Members Association (MASBMA), which was founded in 1973. The following year, in 1993, I hosted a reception at a TASB conference for Mexican-American school board members, and we decided to get MASBMA going again.

I've been attending these conferences since 1999. This is my 21st MASBA conference! When we started these conferences, my friend, Alberto Martínez came to me and said, "Juan, let's have a conference!" I said, "Alberto, *estás loco* [you're crazy]. There's no way!" Thanks to Alberto, we had our first conference in 1999 with 40 people. Henry Cisneros and Ysleta ISD Superintendent Tony Trujillo came and spoke to us, and Tony said, "Juan, this is the best conference I've ever attended! This is a conference where we can sit around and talk about the issues that are important to *us*."

21 years later, we're still having these conferences! Let's give a round of applause to our Executive Director, Dr. Jayme Mathias! In 1999, I was blowing up the balloons myself, and look at how far we've come!

MASBA is all about students. We learn how to help our students and our school districts. In 1999, Henry Cisneros said, and I'm paraphrasing here, "I talk to a lot of groups, and when I speak with kindergartners and first graders and ask them what they want to be when they grow up, they say a firefighter, doctor engineer—or, in the case of my four-year-old granddaughter, a princess!—but when you

ask them in the third, fourth, fifth or sixth grade, they'll say, 'I don't know.' What happens to them between kindergarten and the sixth grade? As school board members, you have the power to make sure those kids succeed. That's the only reason you're an elected official: to help these kids succeed!"

Lidia Moreno
Austin ISD
MASBA President 1986-1987

I was elected to the Austin school board in 1984 and served through 1988. Judge Ciro Rodríguez pushed me to run for MASBA President in Odessa in June 1986. It was Father's Day weekend, and we had a *mariachi* play "*La hija de nadie*" [No One's Daughter], and Amancio Chapa asked, "What kind of a song is that for *el día de los padres* [Father's Day]?"

I served as President, immediately after Benny Figueroa of Robstown ISD. Our 1984 conference was in Corpus Christi, and there were a lot of *mexicanos* there, including people from California and Arizona. We rode a school bus to dinner at Joe Cotton's in Robstown, and we decided there to jointly host a conference with the National School Boards Association's Hispanic Caucus, which we did at the Marriott in Austin in June of 1987. It was a successful conference, with the support of TASB and the Austin ISD. At the end of that conference, Amancio was sworn in, and I handed the gavel to him.

Because of MASBA, I met a lot of beautiful and committed *mexicanos* throughout the state.

I consider myself a pioneer of sorts. At that time, very few *mexicanos* were getting elected, and we were fighting several battles. I'll share a story from our conference in Odessa. There was a school board member there whose superintendent wouldn't tell him when the school board meetings were being held! He was just elected, and he wanted to quit. I was feisty back then. I said, "Wait a minute: You don't quit. The people elected *you*! *You're* the boss! You call that superintendent!"

I'm glad to see so many *mexicanos* elected now. We had to fight many uphill battles—and I know you're still battle fighting them! I commend you for continuing this *lucha* [struggle], for giving your time, and for sacrificing to ensure that our students succeed!

Amancio Chapa
La Joya ISD
MASBA President 1987-1988

A lot of our memories are captured in MASBA's new book. I have some of the same observations as Lidia of when I first became involved in MASBA.

I was elected to the La Joya ISD Board straight out of college in 1971. We saw very few *mexicanos* at TASB conferences back then. Many of the districts in the Valley, which had 80% Mexican-American students, only had a token *mexicano* on the board.

The La Joya Board was founded in 1924 by seven local *mexicanos—rancheros*, farmers from that area—so we always had a majority of Mexican Americans on our board. In the other Valley districts, with the exception of Río Grande City and Brownsville, the representation and faces of *mexicanos* weren't there. As you went north from South Texas, you were lucky to find any *mexicanos* on school boards.

Things are changing: Look at the number of *Chicano* superintendents in Texas! That was unheard of back then. When I was elected, I wondered why all our superintendents seemed to come from East Texas and were all ex-football coaches! We wondered why Pan-American College wasn't turning out superintendents.

I was privileged to be elected, and one of our monumental MASBA conferences was the conference in Austin that Lidia mentioned. We had great speakers on hard-hitting issues. Back then, we didn't attract the number of sponsors that you now have.

¡Que siga la lucha! [May the struggle continue!] Harder times are in store for the students and school boards of Texas. This country is undergoing a demographic change. It will be incumbent on you, current and future school board members, to be vigilant advocates for our people!

Theresa Gutiérrez
Victoria ISD
MASBA President 1996-1998

Lidia talked about being feisty. I was the first *Latina* to be elected to the Victoria ISD Board. I would tell my colleagues, "The Brown wave is coming!" I would call them out for being racist, even during meetings. I was feisty, and I wasn't popular, but I did say what was

in my heart and on my mind. I strongly felt that our people had to be represented.

I remember a good friend of mine, Mr. Rojas, who would go to meetings where he was the only Hispanic in the room. I asked him, "Why do you go?" He said, "There has to be a 'drop' of us everywhere. We represent Hispanic children, and we are their voice!"

When people ask me, "What problems did you struggle with back then?" I reply, "The same we have now!" 50 years later, we struggle with the same issues! I have a theory about that: I feel we're fighting a six-headed Hydra: racism, prejudice, discrimination, lack of resources, and other issues—and when you chop off one head of the Hydra, another appears in its place! We're not talking about a mythical beast: The problems our students face are very real. It's up to us to "step up to the plate" and represent these students. They are everything to us.

A board member once asked me, "What do you people want?" I said, "We want the same thing you do. We want a slice of the pie that you have." I got a lot of flak, mostly because I was one women among six non-minority men who wondered why I didn't get along with them. I said, "Why worry about me? You have six votes, and I have one. You win on every issue that comes to the table!"

I leave you with some words from the Bible, from Matthew 5:13-16: "We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world." May we persevere as "salt." May we be tolerant and patient. May we be a light and bring hope to all our students!

Alberto Martínez
San Diego ISD
MASBA President 1998-2001

What a great feeling to see Viola García, Joe Muñoz, Juan Aguilera and so many friends here.

It was tough going in the beginning, when we hosted our very first conference, but thank the good Lord for Dr. Romo of UTSA, who partnered with us and gave us a place to host our conference.

MASBA has produced two good Congressmen: Congressman Rubén Hinojosa and Congressman Ciro Rodríguez. I, too, work for the U.S. Congress, and I'd like to read a letter from my boss, Congressman Vicente González. He writes,

Congratulations on celebrating MASBA's 50th anniversary at the Wyndham San Antonio Riverwalk. It is truly an honor to work with an organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap for students in Texas. Thank you for continuously being champions for higher education. Each and every one of you is a role model who instills hope and pride in Texas. I greatly appreciate the work that you are doing to fight for educational equality and continued achievements for the *Latino* community in this country. I know that during the next 50 years, the organization will achieve many more incredible milestones. Thank you for all you do for our community. Please know that I and many South Texans are proud of you.

Dr. Viola García
Aldine ISD
MASBA President 2003-2004

Juan Aguilera was a very large part of the resurgence of MASBA. Thank you, Juan, and thank you, Escamilla & Poneck for providing us the space, the staff, the energy and the effort to get us back on track. I appreciate you and your firm very, very much!

Our work has grown, and we enjoy a wonderful opportunity. The work began when there were great injustices, and we have not resolved those injustices. Our students still struggle, and we have the responsibility to move forward.

Thank you to all who are part of this organization and who have attempted to work collaboratively, in coalition with other important organizations like IDRA, MALDEF, and so many other organizations that provided a lot of foundational support. Texas has a great opportunity with MASBA. We've had our challenges, but we are leaders in many respects!

Óscar García
Ben Bolt-Palito Blanco ISD
MASBA President 2004-2005

I'm from Palito Blanco in South Texas, about two hours south of here, on Highway 21. I was a school board member for the Ben Bolt-Palito Blanco Consolidated Independent School District for 12 years.

During that time, I got involved with my MASBA. They recruited me, and I volunteered. I got involved and helped them out with their bylaws. I was a great typist in high school, so I helped create the first draft of MASBA's bylaws, which are still used today.

I enjoyed my time with MASBA. I served as President for about a year and a quarter. We had some great times, obviously, but we also struggled, as some people have already mentioned. We had issues with finances, but we were able to hang on—and now, here we are!

I was asked what I might say to you, as school board members, to help MASBA continue for another 50 years. The one thing I want to tell you is: When you're on your school board dais, when you're "at the table," and when you're doing your jobs out in the community, don't get complacent. That happened to me. If you're lucky, you'll have a good superintendent and staff, and things will move along. But don't get complacent. Do your homework. Prepare for your meetings. Know the issues. Ask questions. Try to learn. The world is changing really fast. Know the issues, resources and trends to help your classrooms become better and to help prepare your children for the future.

Those are my words of wisdom as a former school board member: Don't get complacent, learn for yourself, and contribute even more!

Congratulations to MASBA for 50 years. Thank you for inviting me back, and, hopefully, we'll all be here in 50 more years!

Joe Muñoz
Hays CISD
MASBA President 2007-2009

We're blessed with a delicious lunch today. Many of you may not remember this, but in the days when we had no money, we had frito pies for lunch! We've come a long way under the guidance of Dr. Jayme Mathias.

I started at the Hays Consolidated Independent School District, from 1999 until 2010, when I was defeated. It was the best day of my life because I became Executive Director of MASBA the next day! We had a vote to remove the Confederate flag from our high school, and I was very vocal about that, and people didn't forget that. It cost me my seat on the board, but we no longer fly the Confederate flag on our campuses!

In 2006, when Dr. Manuel Flores was elected MASBA President at our conference in Corpus Christi, I was the next in line as Vice President. When Manuel took over, we passed a proclamation to make sure that *mariachi* was equivalent to jazz band, marching band, choir, etc. with the University Interscholastic League. As Vice President, I looked at Manuel and thought, "Good for you. You have a long road ahead of you!" That was January. In May, Manuel lost his local election in Corpus Christi, and he lost, I became MASBA President, and *mariachi* was now on me. I contacted TAME, the Texas Association of *Mariachi* Educators. We all know Mr. Juan Ortiz and his wife, Belle, from *Mariachi Campanas de América*. I went to a TAME meetings with *mariachi* directors from across the state, and they said "There's no way we're going to get 57 *Latino mariachi* directors to agree!" You know how it goes with our people: If he's for it, I'm against it! I told them, "I don't know anything about *mariachi*. I can't play a single note, but I do know this: If we work together, we'll make this thing happen!" They agreed to try it.

Juan and I went to the University Interscholastic League. They probably laughed at us. There were people behind us trying to get bowling as a UIL sport. We were shot down. We went back to Austin the second year with a young lady from Boerne who was counted absent from school when she attended *mariachi* competitions. Because of her absence from school, she had to go to detention because of her participation in *mariachi* during the school day. She was given three minutes to testify, and, when she finished, there wasn't a dry eye on the dais of the University Interscholastic League! I looked at Juan and said, "We got it!" If it wasn't for that young lady, we wouldn't be here today."

Getting UIL approval was an uphill battle. Some people advocated against us and made phone calls behind our backs. I received a phone call from Juan Rangel in Fort Worth, saying that his fine arts director received a phone call from the UIL director, saying, "Let's take our time with *mariachi*. It took us 20 years to pass marching band!" I told Juan, "We don't have time. We don't have 20 years for these kids. We need to do it now!"

So we knew the UIL was advocating behind our backs, even though they said they were supportive. I said, "If you support us, give us a letter of support."

The UIL director said, "I'll have it to you in two months."

"No."

"O.K., I'll have it to you in two weeks."

"No," I said. "I'm not leaving your office until you give us a letter of support."

He called his public information officer, and they drafted a letter, and she brought it out in a sealed envelope. I opened the letter and said, "This is B.S.!" The letter wasn't signed. I took it to the UIL director, and I said, "You forgot to sign it."

And he said, "I did?"

The rest is history. We started out with nine groups of 16 to 21 kids on stage, and we ended up with 75 groups in 2016. There are probably over 100 groups today.

Our *mariachi* competition wouldn't have come to fruition without some good sponsors. State Farm was a sponsor for a couple of years, then Lucy and Manuel González sponsored it for four or five years.

I want to thank all who attended our competitions. They were beautiful and great, and they're still beautiful and great—as those kids are to us!

María Leal
South Texas ISD
MASBA President 2009-2010

As I stand here and see this beautiful ballroom and all these people, I think, "Wow, we have in fact developed a great organization!"

It was not always easy. It was hard work. There were times when things broke down, but we just hung in. It's a worthwhile effort to continue the work that this organization is doing!

Things are not the way they were 50 or 100 years ago, but our work is not over. We need to educate our board members, so that they'll know what's going on in the world and in education. This morning, the Colonel said, "It starts with us, the adults." It really does. Our attitude, enthusiasm, knowledge and decisions trickle down to our staff and children.

I have some beautiful memories of MASBA—and some that are not so beautiful. If we don't take care of things, they slide. As Preident, I remember we were kicking off our conference and welcoming people, when Joe Muñoz told me we didn't have enough money to pay for the conference. I worried about it until 5:00 in the morning. Bleary-

eyed and with the bags under my eyes hanging down to my cheeks, I welcomed people in the morning—and we had some former sponsors save us. Our sponsors saved us many times. So let's take care of what we have.

We, the adults, are responsible for our children and making sure they get the education they deserve!

Louis Q. Reyes, III
Seguin ISD
MASBA President 2015-2016

Before I begin, let's take a moment of silence for Manuel Rodríguez, Diana Castañeda and all our MASBA Presidents and Board members who have passed away. Thank you.

I started with MASBA back in 1993. We spoke with Juan Aguilera and Albert Martínez, my cousin, and we came together. From the beginning, it was about being *hermanos* [brothers and sisters].

This is *our* organization. MASBA belongs to each and every one of you, its members. We have accomplished a lot. In 2014, when I became Executive Director, MASBA was having financial problems. I said, "We need to change that." I want to thank the Chief, Danny Bueno, for what he did for us. I've enjoyed being part of MASBA. We're all brothers and sisters!

Irene Galán-Rodríguez
Big Spring ISD
MASBA President 2016-2017

What a big milestone for MASBA to be celebrating 50 years. This is beautiful. Willie, Jayme and everybody involved have done an outstanding job to help us celebrate 50 years. One song says, "*con dinero y sin dinero* [with money and without money]." Look at what MASBA has done *con dinero y sin dinero*. It's been encouraging to hear the history of MASBA from Past Presidents!

A big milestone for MASBA during 2016 was our partnership with TASB. Louis Reyes was our Immediate Past President. Armando Rodríguez was our President Elect. Willie Tenorio and Ricardo Gutiérrez were on our board. We went to TASB, and they signed a

three-year contract with us. This partnership has benefited our students and our members, allowing us to provide better training and more scholarships for our students. It's been a real win-win for our organization. I also want to thank Jayme for the book on MASBA history. It brought back a lot of memories and is a good history of MASBA. Thank you all for serving MASBA!

Armando Rodríguez
Canutillo ISD
MASBA President 2017-2018

Reading our new book of MASBA history, there have been so many people who have laid the foundation. I want to thank all our Past Presidents.

I attended my first MASBA conference in Corpus Christi. I remember the impact it had on me and on my ability to grow as a board member. When I came home to Canutillo, we passed several resolutions for Mexican American Studies, as well as for our support for *mariachi* as a UIL-sanctioned event.

When I became Vice President, I wanted to examine our MASBA structures and systems and ensure that MASBA would grow regardless of who is leading the organization. We looked at how we could bring added value to our members. We put bylaws in place. We hired Jayme Mathias to continue the growth that the Godfather, Louis Reyes, had begun.

When I served as President, we summarized MASBA's mission in three words: Educate, Inspire, Act. We wanted to make sure that our board members are educated. We wanted to help them to be inspired through events like this. And we wanted them to go back home and act, putting policies and procedures in place in their school districts.

I love the way that MASBA continues to grow. We have a lot of work to do, but we're building on a strong foundation!

Words from MASBA Immediate Past President Homero García

During the annual President's Reception on Friday, February 21, 2020, Immediate Past President Homero García of South Texas ISD shared the following words. His term on our MASBA Board ended at the conclusion of our annual Member Assembly on February 22, 2020.

"After this weekend, I'll still be with you in *corazón* [heart]! We do it for the kids and for education. That's what it's all about. Education is my number one priority. I've been in education for 49 and a half years, so my heart is with the kids all the time, regardless of whether they're Brown, Black, Gray, whatever color they are. We care about them, and we want the best for them. That's my philosophy. Education is very important, and it starts at home. We also have a wonderful executive director, Dr. Mathias, who has done wonders for this organization. We got us a great person in Dr. Mathias. His mind and his heart are with the kids all the time. And we owe a lot to Louie Reyes, too, who's here with us tonight. He's a hard worker and is dedicated to MASBA. He comes to South Texas, where we live in Weslaco, about seven miles from the river. MASBA has been actively involved in helping our students in the Valley. Thanks, too, to our past presidents, who laid the foundation for us. They went through hard times, but they never gave up. They made it easier for us to pick up the shovel and continue digging. Our membership has grown. Our sponsorships have grown. We now give scholarships to students in every member district, so there's no reason for our kids to stay behind. Let's always be there for them! We know that MASBA will be in good hands with our new president, Jacinto. He has already committed himself to visiting us in the Valley and doing what's best for our students in the Valley. Thank you for being here. I wish you the best. It has been an honor to serve as your President—and better things are still to come!"

A Tribute to MASBA President Willie Tenorio, Jr.

During the annual President's Reception on Friday, February 21, 2020, the following words were shared in honor of MASBA President Willie Tenorio, Jr. of Hays CISD.

"Willie is a great guy. He's a hard worker. He and his wife are very close friends, and we admire them a lot. We're going to miss him. Willie, I thank you for your years of service, especially this past year as President. You did a lot of work. You were here in MASBA before I was. I've only been actively involved for about four years, and you've been actively involved for years."

—Homero García, South Texas ISD

"I cannot tell you how humbled I am to follow a gentleman like this. He's a man who is a servant-leader. He put himself aside for the benefit of our organization. He had the vision to ask what will take MASBA to that next level. Part of that included him going onto social media and incorporating interviews as part of his *¡MASBÁmonos!* Show. It's one thing to do the work; it's another thing to make sure that people know that we're doing the work. Willie, I cannot thank you enough for bringing a lot of these themes to the forefront and letting not only Texas, but the entire nation know, what we're doing, that MASBA is in the house, and that we're unapologetic about the work we're doing for our young people. Thank you for the work you've done!"

—Jacinto "Cinto" Ramos, Jr., Fort Worth ISD

"Willie took my place on the Hays CISD school board, and he's done an outstanding job. I tune in to the *¡MASBÁmonos!* Show, and during his recent interview of Dr. Mathias, Willie's dog was barking and excited about the conference! Willie is a great guy, and I could talk about him all night!"

—Joe Muñoz, Hays CISD

"I've always looked up to Willie—literally. He called me for the very first *¡MASBÁmonos!* Show. Willie is a very nice guy, very intelligent, and he completely backs MASBA. He protected MASBA while we worked together and made sure that his directors were there for him. Thank you, Willie, very much for doing that!

—Ana Cortez, Manor ISD

"When I came aboard two years ago, I knew who had my vote for President Elect because, if he lost, I'd be going up against him for Region 2 Director! I showed up, and I introduced myself, and he was very warm and open. Once he was named President Elect, Jayme came to me and said, 'You don't have to sweat it anymore: You're in!' I have something indirectly in common with Willie: My brother was the *mariachi* director at Lehman High School in the Hays CISD and told me about MASBA's instrumental role in getting UIL approval for *mariachi*. Thank you, Willie, for being a mentor for me. I look forward to one more year with you—and to seeing what Cinto has for us!"

—Marco Ortiz, Taylor ISD

"I ran against Willie for the MASBA presidency, and I am proud that he won. There was no conflict between us, and the race was very close. Willie brought great pride and honor to the MASBA presidency. Thank you, Willie, for your service!"

—David Espinosa, Grand Prairie ISD

"Wait! I remember that election in 2018: David kept putting his campaign flyers on the door to the Presidential Suite, and I had to tell him, 'Stop it! Be professional!' Willie, it's been a pleasure to work with you side-by-side to develop educational leaders across the state of Texas. Your work has been critical. I'm excited that we're going to continue to see that grow because of you, and I appreciate your service—not only to your own local district, but to MASBA!"

—Armando "Mando" Rodríguez, Canutillo ISD

"Willie, I just want to say thank you. You have put MASBA on a different level, and I am so proud. Willie, if you ever need anything, you're part of our MASBA family, and I really appreciate you!"

—Louis Q. Reyes, III, Seguin ISD

"Willie, I'm here to congratulate you for the tremendous work you've done for this organization. We're on the cusp of moving this organization to higher levels, and we appreciate your dedication, your focus, and your leadership. You've done a great job, a tremendous job! I congratulate you. God bless you, and keep doing what you're doing!"

—Miguel "Mike" Rosales, Ysleta ISD

¡MASBAchanga! The Annual President's Ball

During our annual *¡MASBAchanga!* President's Ball, Outgoing MASBA President Willie Tenorio, Jr. shared the following words.

> I want to thank everybody for all the support that I've received this past year—for the outpouring of love and support from all Board members and from the membership here. We all had a good conference! We got together as a Board, and we set a lot of goals. These Board members here are very awesome people! They are incredible! When you have a group of people that is this dedicated, you can't help but go further!
>
> Several people who've never been to a MASBA conference told me, "This feels like a *familia*. When you walk into MASBA, it feels like coming home at Thanksgiving or Christmas!" That's what we're going for here, and that's what we'll continue to do!
>
> I'm so proud that you'll have Cinto Ramos, Jr. as your MASBA President. He's an amazing gentleman, and I'm so happy to know him and work with him.
>
> Thank y'all for a great year. I appreciate every one of you.
>
> Thank you!

After being sworn in as President of MASBA, Jacinto Ramos, Jr. of Fort Worth ISD shared the following words.

> First and foremost, Past Presidents of MASBA, my friends, it has been an honor to listen to you the last couple of days. I'm the son of immigrant parents. My dad is from Acuña, Coahuila, and my mom is from Morelia, Michoacán. I'm unapologetically proud of that. Listening to you and the struggles and the fights that you've had, the things that you've done: We pay homage and respect to you today for everything that you've done for this organization! You are like the line of the ancestors. My friends, it has been a journey!
>
> Willie, I have to start with you, my friend. You've done an amazing job of being a steady leader, an ethical leader, and a

gentleman who brought a lot of integrity that continues that line of work that we've done in MASBA. We cannot thank you enough for your leadership, the vision that you've had, and the work that you've done—everything for "free-ninety-nine," because nobody gets paid for doing this job. My friend, you put your blood, your sweat and tears, your heart and your soul into it, and, for that, we honor you, my friend.

This weekend, we learned from Dr. Leyba about the seven leadership constructs for people of color—specifically for us, *latinos, latinas, mexicanos, mexicanas, chicanos, chicanas*, whatever term we want to use. I really latched onto one of those seven. Dr. Leyba said: Great leaders in our community drink their *cultura*. When we drink our *cultura*, we become unapologetic in what we do and we push systems—as José Ángel Gutiérrez suggested at lunch today.

We cannot forget who we are and where we come from. Even in the history that's been given to us, we know that there's not only the lies we've been given, but there are even lies by omission—that it is not by accident that our children are hurting and struggling right now. It is actually by design. Those of us who sit in these positions do not sit here for ourselves. We sit here because we know who we serve. As my mentor, Rickie Clark, has said: Education is more than reading, writing and arithmetic; it must teach us *who* we are and *whose* we are.

My friends, that's the work that we have ahead of us. I heard it multiple times this weekend: that we have a lot of work. No doubt, this is the team that's going to get it there. These are servant-leaders, these are amazing human beings, and, my friends, we are well on our way to do that!

Dr. Leyba, thank you for teaching us about drinking our *cultura*. I'm going to take that with me, and I understand that's it's going to be part of a scholarly article, so that you can walk around and say, "There's research behind this thing!"

I want to talk about solidarity. It's something I've been pretty unapologetic about. TABSE—the Texas Association of Black School Educators—invited us to hang out with them. We've got our brothers and sisters of TABSE here tonight, with Dr. Kimberly McLeod—and Ty Jones of the Texas Caucus of

Black School Board Members. Thank you for being here with us tonight!

I'm going to echo what Dr. McLeod said in her speech at TABSE—and I always say "echo" because I understand my male privilege, and I'm not going to repeat what a woman said already. Since most of you weren't there, I may have permission to do so. And none of this is by accident either: that when Black and Brown and White and everybody gets together and we fight for children, systems move! We don't have time to be wasting until we get that work done. Really, genuinely, Black Caucus and TABSE, it means so much to me that you're in the house today. Thank you for being here!

We've got a lot of good people from TASB in the house: Thank you, friends of TASB, for being here!

We have great leaders from Arizona as well. We have the Arizona *Latino* School Boards Association in the house!

Somebody jumped on a plane and flew over here from Compton Unified School District in California: my brother, Micah Ali, former Chair of the Council of Urban Boards of Education!

The Fort Worth ISD crew is in the house: our superintendent, Dr. Ken Paredes Scribner, with Dorene Benavídez and Karen Molinar. Thank y'all. It means a lot that Fort Worth ISD is in the house at MASBA!

Last but not least, on this one I've always got to do it right. I've got to give it to my wife, Anita Ramos, my high school sweetheat. Even back then, she said she knew she was going to have to share me with the world—and you've shared me more than you needed to. I can't thank you enough!

What am I envisioning? This right here. This is what I envision: a movement to take this back for our young people, that they might know who they are and where they come from. As my mentor says—and I dropped the line earlier: You can't love the fruit if you don't love the root. We've got to make sure our young people know who they are and where they come from. We've got a lot of work to do, my friends. Thank you all for being here. Let's keep growing MASBA, spreading the word, and letting people know what we're about!

Let's get this started, my friends!

Reflections on the Annual MASBA Conference

During the Sunday morning wrap-up session of the conference, the following words were shared by attendees.

"This conference was great. I found here the answers I've been looking for. It was great to be united with everybody and to know that, if I have any questions, I now have the phone numbers of the people I met here and can reach out to."

—Lala Chávez, Lubbock ISD

"This conference gives you a different perspective, and you get energized at a different level. You always get ideas from conferences, but this conference is different. You meet people, you hear stories, and you're reminded that we still have a long way to go!"

—Sotero Ramírez, Ysleta ISD

"I got more out of this conference than any other conference or training session that I've ever attended. I enjoyed the stories of the history. The keynote speakers were fantastic. I don't know how you could ever get anyone better. They had me in tears and laughing. They give you a broken heart, and they build you up—every emotion imaginable. And it's all directed toward the kids. That's where everybody's heart is. To hear the stories of where some of these kids come from, and where some of their families come from, will allow me to go back to my district—an affluent district—and really focus in on a lot of these kids. I got so much out of this. It was tremendous!"

—Bill Lacy, Katy ISD

"I've gone to a lot of conferences, and this one has an energy that most do not. It's palpable and very satisfying."

—Charles Stafford, Denton ISD

"One thing I appreciated was the history. Many of our children don't know the struggles that were paid to get them 'to the table.' If you don't know your history, you're subject to fall right back into it. We need to keep that history up front—not just for Mexican Americans, but for all children. All our children have stories and struggles. We need to reach them and touch them and bring them out of the past into a bright future. That's the challenge we have."

—Elton Foster, Royal ISD

"The most impactful breakout session was on the lies our children have been taught about Mexican Americans—and you can expand that to any other ethnic group. It's important for us to understand not only the history, but the truth about it, so that we can control the narrative and not let anybody else tell our story. It forces me to be more diligent and to go back and make sure that I understand all the struggles that not only African Americans went through, but also Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, and even White Americans. Everybody has a history, and we've got to get it right. And we have to speak truth to power, especially when people are trying to control a narrative that is not true—especially when it harms kids. We need to do everything we can to protect and preserve successful outcomes for kids."

—Robert Selders, Garland ISD

"Our district is 75% Hispanic, so I figured I needed to be here, at my first MASBA conference, to understand what's in my district. My key take-away is that we're more alike than we are different. My life wasn't as extreme as Roy's, but I was also told that I wasn't good enough and that I couldn't succeed. I came from an inner-city school. I had the opportunity to go away to college. My brother, who never made it out of the neighborhood, would call me and tell me who had died and who was shot, and drugs would ultimately overtake him. Academically, I wasn't prepared, so I punched out of school my second semester. I remember the exit interview with my college counselor, who said, "You're not good enough. You're not college material. You should get a job at the steel mill."

And I did. I got a job at the steel mill, where I realized God had something more for me than that—but I had a big hill to climb. When I listened to the stories here, I closed my eyes: A lot of us could give that same story. One of the reasons I ran for school board is that I was that at-risk kid, and I want to make sure that I help identify other at-risk kids. I'm a motivated person—but I'm pumped right now. I'm leaving more motivated than when I came. I look forward to continuing to attend MASBA's conferences. Thank you for putting together an extraordinary program!"

—Randy Bates, Jr., Aldine ISD

"Sometimes I ask myself, 'What are you doing?' I don't need to be 'unretired' and traveling like this. But then I came here. Now I know why I have to do this. I still want to run away from it because it's a lot of work. All my life, I've worked with kids with sad stories. It gets embedded in your mind when they say, 'I'm never going to amount to anything.' The worst part about it is that they believe it. 'You're too shy.' 'You're too this.' 'You're too that.' This conference is amazing. I've gone to other conferences, but this one is different—or maybe *I'm* different now!"

—Connie Esparza, Aldine ISD

"I've been to many conferences, but this one is totally different. It was overwhelming. I enjoyed it. We've already booked Roy for our district in August. My parents and I were born in the United States, but we lived as migrants, going back and forth working. Our history is important—regardless of what color we are. Years ago, when I joined the Marine Corps, I learned that it doesn't matter: We're all the same color. Like Cinto said last night, we're all a family at this conference. It doesn't matter what your title is, or where you come from, or what color your skin is. At the end of the day, we're here for one reason and purpose: for the kids!"

—Adam Soto, Plainview ISD

"I enjoyed all the speakers Our superintended was with us—he's only been with us for six months, and he was blown away. We want to get Carlos Ojeda to our district. I went to a class that I really enjoyed on how we communicate with our community. Next year, we'll bring more people with us!"

—Gloria Torres, Gonzales ISD

"Just like we do for TASB conferences, we need to come united as boards to the MASBA conference—because what I tell you about this conference is different from you experiencing it. It would be hard for me to explain what I saw and how I felt to school board members who didn't come. How can I tell you what we need for our Hispanic culture, if you don't understand it? During the interview for our new superintendent, I asked, 'If we hire you, are you willing to come to the conferences of MASBA and the Black Caucus?' He said, 'I don't know what MASBA is.' When I told him, he said, 'Definitely! I'd love to.' I knew that if he said 'yes,' he'd be willing to make a difference and change the culture in our district. He came and fell in love with the conference, so I'm hoping that we planted a seed that will continue to grow!"

—Justin Schwausch, Gonzales ISD

Héroes de MASBA

During our annual *La Campana* luncheon on February 22, 2020, we recognized the following schools districts as *Héroes de MASBA* [MASBA Heroes] for having sustained membership in MASBA during the past five years.

Aldine ISD
Austin ISD
Big Spring ISD
Canutillo ISD
Cedar Hill ISD
Cotulla ISD
Denton ISD
Dilley ISD
Donna ISD
Edinburg CISD
El Paso ISD
Fabens ISD
Fort Worth ISD
Garland ISD
Gonzales ISD
Grand Prairie ISD
Harlandale ISD
Hays CISD
Hidalgo ISD
Houston ISD
Jim Hogg County ISD
La Gloria ISD
La Joya ISD
Manor ISD
Mercedes ISD
Mission CISD
Monte Alto ISD

Raymondville ISD
Ricardo ISD
Region 1 ESC
Region 2 ESC
San Benito CISD
San Marcos CISD
Santa María ISD
Seguin ISD
Socorro ISD
South Texas ISD
Southside ISD
Southwest ISD
Stafford MSD
Taft ISD
Valley View ISD (Hidalgo)
Weslaco ISD
Ysleta ISD

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Father Libardo came to Holy Family in 2015, after more than 20 years of ministry as a Catholic priest in Rome. As a young man in Colombia, he was well acquainted with the context of Latin American liberation theology. As a professor of dogmatic theology at a pontifical university in Rome, he shared his love for the history and doctrines of his church. Father Libardo draws from a deep spiritual and theological well, enriching the lives of those whom he teaches and to whom he preaches. He is a gift to Holy Family; more importantly, he is a gift to Independent Catholicism