Seats at the Table

School Board Members'
Perspectives on Race & Racism

As told to
Joshua Emmanuel Guilliam

Edited by
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Foreword

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Chair, Council of Urban Boards of Education
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This book is an unapologetic call to action.

It's 2020, my friends, and time to put an end to the racism that has plagued our world for far too long. This summer, amid a pandemic that only widened gaps for socioeconomically-marginalized children of color, the students of our public schools grappled with another hardship. They found themselves forced to process in a socially-distanced way the senseless murders of George Floyd, Atatiana Jefferson, and Breonna Taylor by police officers as well as the gunning down of Ahmaud Arbery by men who felt compelled to bar an unarmed Black jogger from their neighborhood. Members of the Black Lives Matter movement mounted protests, marching with invigorated chants for justice and an end to racism. To make matters worse, our U.S. President showed little empathy, condemning protestors for their quick action and suggesting that there might be "something we didn't see on tape" from the senseless shooting of the unarmed Arbery.

We must not be silent. We must stand together. I thank my sisters and brothers from so many state and national school boards associations—not only for their advocacy for our Black, Brown, and Indigenous children, but also for their willingness to add their voices to the chorus of persons willing to fight against oppression, discrimination, and systemic racism. I urge you to really listen to and meditate on their stories. We can be inspired by their vision of ways in which we can create change in our school systems.

As school board members, we comprise the largest body of elected officials in the nation. I invite you to lean into tough conversations and acknowledge that we are charged with the education of the students in our schools. We could shape future generations with a new set of values—and we could put in place the necessary policies

to end discrimination and bring about equity in our school districts. I am *not* looking for allies; I am looking for disruptors and co-conspirators! This summer has pushed our country to a new reality, and we have only two choices: to be *racist* or to be *anti-racist*.

For years, my personal motto has been *así derechito*, a Spanish phrase that challenges us to examine the direction in which the needle of our moral compass points. For centuries, our views on race and racism have been anything except *así derechito.* In a constantly-changing world, we've struggled to locate the "north star" of racial justice, and we've failed to unwaveringly progress toward anti-racism. Instead, we've allowed our systems—which are perfectly designed to attain the goals they achieve—to maintain the *status quo*, the existing, sad "state in which" those systems find themselves. As a result, some persons enjoy unearned privileges, access to institutional power, and other advantages based on their race, while others continue to be oppressed, disempowered and disenfranchised.

I invite you to lift your eyes, pull back the curtain, and see the ways in which racism has enshrined injustice in our school systems.

I invite you to lift your eyes, pull back the curtain, and see the ways in which racism has enshrined injustice in our school systems. I challenge you to strengthen your "muscle" on race, by learning to identify and dismantle those factors in your own school district that enforce and perpetuate racism. I solicit your help to join us in being agents of institutional transformation, by siding with those who have struggled against the weight of centuries of racist oppression.

If not us, who?

If not now, when?

If not here, where?

If not for the sake of the generations who will come after us, why?

Let's get to work! *¡Así derechito!*

Acknowledgements

Joshua Emmanuel Guilliam
Mexican American School Boards Association
Austin, Texas

Racism is real. It's extremely real. I remember enduring third grade with a racist teacher who refused to answer the questions I had on my lessons. When I asked my classmates for help, she angrily sent me to the principal's office, where I found myself seemingly every day. I remember telling my mom, "My teacher is racist! I don't want to be in her class anymore!"

White privilege is also very real. In the ninth grade, I was bullied and pushed down a school staircase. Expelled from school for trying to defend myself, I was exiled to a military camp with mostly Black students. I remember thinking that White kids don't get punished in the same way as Black kids. I realized that a White man and a Black man can commit the same crime—but the Black man is guaranteed to receive a harsher punishment.

We are judged by the color of our skin. Even when I'm dressed in a suit and tie, I notice how people in stores look at me, as if watching to make sure I'm not stealing anything. Their eyes ask, "What are you doing here?" Their stares seem to say, "Your kind is not welcomed here!"

Before assisting the membership and sponsorship efforts of the Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA), I sold magazines door-to-door. I'll never forget a White man in California who pulled a 12-gauge shotgun on me and cocked it, saying, "You don't belong here—and I don't like your race at all!" (I should have known by the Confederate flag in his window.) Another White man sicced his pit bull on me.

I couldn't help but call these memories to mind this summer as I listened to the stories of school board members throughout the United States. Even in the 21st century, people of color are targeted and mistreated solely based on the hue of their skin.

Nevertheless, I prefer to be an optimist. I believe that we can come together and make this world a better place. We can change the laws

that damage people's lives. We can fix the racism that plagues our nation. Yes, if we do our part, America really could be great!

People aren't born racist. They become racist by absorbing the words and attitudes of those around them. They, in turn, pass those attitudes on to their children and grandchildren. This seems especially true here in the South, a region known for its legendary racism, where public schools still carry the names of Confederate "heroes" who fought to destroy our nation, in order to keep my ancestors enslaved.

People aren't born racist. They become racist by absorbing the words and attitudes of those around them.

School board members possess a powerful place in our society: Through their influence over our public school systems, they possess the ability, as cliché as it sounds, to shape future generations. They can create policies that dismantle institutionalized racism. They can create systems that intervene in the lives of children who are taught, "Don't hang out with Black people or Hispanics!" Indeed, they possess the opportunity to form the next generation of anti-racists who might quicken the end of the cycle of racism in our world!

I wish to thank Dr. Jayme Mathias for the opportunity not only to share my gifts with MASBA, but also to roll up my sleeves and be involved with this project. I also owe a debt of gratitude to MASBA President-elect Ana Cortez and Vince Zubicek of MASBA Sponsor E3 Entegral Solutions: Their sharing of their own experiences of race and racism during a pandemic lunch conversation brought Dr. Mathias back to our office with the mission of making this book a reality!

Now that the Mexican American School Boards Association is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, it enjoys a budding relationship with the Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members (TCBSBM). I would be remiss if I didn't thank the leaders of the sister organizations of MASBA and the TCBSBM throughout the United States—both at the state and national levels. The following persons helped put me in touch with their officers and directors for this project: Martín Quezada and George Díaz of the Arizona *Latino* School Boards Association, Tracey Benson of the Arizona School Boards Association, Óscar de la Torre of the California *Latino* School Boards Association, Armando Rodríguez of the National Hispanic

Council, and Jacinto Ramos, Jr. and Liya Amelga of the Council of Urban Boards of Education.

I am grateful to the many school board members throughout the United States who willingly participated in this project. Your stories helped me to reflect on my own experiences of race and racism, and I'm hopeful that your ideas will inspire change in our public schools!

I could not have created this book on my own. I thank the many people who responded to Dr. Mathias' invitation to assist with transcribing and editing interviews: Olivia Cason, Amani Eley, Dinah Emmons, Ann Guidry, Mike Nichols, Julie Rogers, Alec Rubman, Sofia Tyremann and Dr. David Wiley. The generous sharing of their gifts helped this project to come together in less than twelve weeks!

I am especially grateful to Carlos Alonso Rodríguez for his efforts in coordinating the work for this project. He communicated with interviewees, transcribers and editors, enabling us to publish this work in time for a presentation on it at our annual TASA/TASB conference here in Texas. I firmly hope that other state school boards associations will follow suit.

During the final week of this project, Alec Rubman generously shared of his time and talent to review this entire work, while Dr. Mathias assembled the index and Carlos communicated with Yerai Ibarria, the talented designer of our book cover. As Dr. Mathias is fond of saying, "Teamwork makes the dream work!"

Finally, I thank Dr. Mercedes de Uriarte—not only for readily sharing with me her wisdom and experiences, but also for her patience in working with Dr. Mathias to edit this work.

This book makes clear that racism is extremely real, even in our nation's public education systems. For the sake of the children entrusted to our care, may we all work together to sentence racism to the annuls of history.

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"Racism Has Made Second-class Citizens of People of Color"

Norma Alcalá
Director, California *Latino* School Boards Association
Washington Unified School District Board of Education
West Sacramento, California

I identify as a *Latina* – or *Chicana* is the actual term I use. We have Hispanic last names, and we use the term *Latino* to encompass many people who share the Spanish language and similar values. The term *Latino* encompasses many of us from many heritages. Caucasians often don't distinguish between Mexicans, Guatemalans or persons from other countries who speak Spanish. They group us together, so we reach out our hands in friendship to our brothers and sisters who share similar histories and difficulties. This empowers all *Latinos*.

As *Latinos*, we were taught at an early age to appreciate our cultures, as well as many other cultures. My family has been here in the present-day United States since the 1700s, my ancestry includes a lot of Spaniards and Indigenous ancestors. Through colonization, Whites harmed the Indigenous population. These events pretty much make us who we are.

I grew up in Brownsville, Texas in the 1960s. My father was in the Air Force, so we traveled throughout the South, where we witnessed horrible racism and discrimination. From an early age, I was aware of the different attitudes toward *Latinos* and African Americans, compared to the treatment of Whites. I remember the first time I saw an African-American girl, and my mother explained that there are diverse people throughout the United States and all over the world. I also remember an early Thanksgiving that we celebrated in Savannah, Georgia: Mom didn't know how to cook a turkey, so we ate at a restaurant where a White man insisted that I use the White restroom, rather than the Colored restroom. I didn't understand the difference at the time, but later came to understand that I was a person of color, even though I was light enough to pass as White. Explaining that things were different in the South, my mother pointed out that the Colored restroom was for the beautiful, little, African-American girl across the room. Our doctor in Savannah saw Colored

patients and White patients on alternating days, and my mother never felt comfortable identifying with White people.

On another occasion, we were driving through Kentucky where White men in a woods stopped our station wagon. My father explained that we were lost. They probed his thoughts on Martin Luther King, Jr., and they asked that he and my grandfather step out of the car. My quick-thinking mother said, "Pete, the kids are getting cold." The men looked at her, then at us, and then admonished my father to get back on the road. That was our first experience of the Klan, I sometimes wondered what might have happened to my father and grandfather that day, if it weren't for my mother.

People are beautiful in all the different colors that they come!

Born in the 1910s, my grandmother was a product of the South who instilled in us the belief that lighter skin is more beautiful than darker skin. "Stay light," she counseled us as girls. Uncle Robert would get upset at her, saying, "If she doesn't get some sun, she'll look like the Pillsbury Doughboy!" I once asked my Uncle Robert, a strong influence in my life, why I couldn't look like my light-skinned doll with platinum blonde hair. He replied, "Nora, people are beautiful in all the different colors that they come!" He then pulled out a copy of *National Geographic* and showed me people from Spain, Mexico, and different parts of Africa and Asia. "Look how beautiful these people are," he said, and I saw the incredible diversity and beauty in all of them. Uncle Robert was a teacher, and he wanted his nephews and nieces to appreciate beauty in all people.

Products of the 1960s, my aunts and uncles had friends of different ethnic groups. Unlike my sweet grandparents, who mostly had contact only with *Latinos*, they saw beauty in diversity. My paternal grandmother, whose parents came from Spain and England, once admonished me for inviting my Portuguese/African-American friend, Susan, to our home: "Don't bring that Colored girl into our home!" I recall how angry that incident made my father, who told my mother, "You are not going to teach our daughter to be a racist!" He later told me that Susan was welcome in our home anytime.

When we came to largely-*Latino* California, we saw much less discrimination, but institutional racism reared its ugly head, often in

subtle ways—like passing up competent, intelligent *Latinas* and African-American women for jobs and promotions.

I was raised to be polite, but that's sometimes difficult to do in the face of racism. Recently, I was helping a very intelligent, Muslim attorney with a voter registration drive, when a tall, White woman verbally assaulted a registrant dressed in a hijab, accusing her of being part of ISIS. I angrily confronted her, and she apologized to me. I retorted, "You need to apologize to her!"

On another occasion, while selling cupcakes for a back sale, one of my *Latina* catechism students was told by another girl, "I'm not going to buy anything from a Mexican!" I was furious. At that moment, I realized that kids grow up with racist attitudes because their parents allow them to perpetuate racism. This is a problem we need to address not only on an individual level, but also on a larger scale.

Give a child a White doll and a Black doll and ask him/her which is the good doll and which is the bad doll. Instantly, you'll see how that child has been indoctrinated with racism. It's disturbing! We know that the greatest brain development occurs between birth and age five: That's where we have to start. Beginning in pre-school, we need to teach kids to appreciate people of different colors.

For over 200 years, racism has shaped policy in this country, for the protection of White people and to the detriment of people of color. Hateful racists continue to control our nation. We see this with the Trump administration, whose agenda to "Make America Great Again" is seemingly an agenda to make America White again.

Racism has made second-class citizens of people of color. We see this in the hiring of civil servants, like police officers and firefighters. We see it in housing and segregated neighborhoods, where people of color are consigned to neighborhoods with power plants and lower property values, while White neighborhoods enjoy beautiful gyms and pools. Communities of color have more run-down schools with less funding. Racism plays out in all this. There are a million and one examples of this—which is why ethnic studies are so important.

Here in California, we've been pushing for an ethnic studies bill, to include *Latino*, African-American, Asian-American, Muslim, and Native-American communities. We want a statewide mandate for students to learn about the contributions and incredible leaders of these communities. You'd think that parents would want their children to be educated about different cultures, and you'd likely be

surprised by the opposition to this bill. We have great, enlightened families, but we also have other elements that prevent our kids from obtaining a more expansive education. We saw this as well in our fight for dual-language immersion. For whatever reason, trustees in the California State University System opposed it!

Nearly all our U.S. history books are written by White men and women. We need history books written by people of color, showcasing the contributions of our people. I recall an incredible presentation by an African-American professor, who noted that factions of Mexicans and African Americans fight one another in our Southern California prison system—without themselves knowing the rich history of *Latinos* and African Americans working together. Mexico outlawed slavery before the United States did. Many Mexican presidents possessed Indigenous and African blood. His words shocked those of us who didn't know this history!

We need history books written by people of color, showcasing the contributions of our people.

We also need to address issues of race and racism with our teachers. I love and support our teachers. For this reason, we need to help them understand the norms of other cultures. In our district, we saw our truancies and suspensions dramatically decrease after we hired more *Latinos* and African Americans as vice principals, principals and members of our cabinet. Our homeless and socioeconomically-disadvantaged no longer get in trouble for wearing the "wrong" pants to school—which is what happened when White, middle-class teachers didn't understand our kids and their home environments. We definitely need to recruit more teachers and administrators who understand our kids and can serve as role models for them. This, in turn, leads to the building of trust, to greater parent participation, indeed, to changes in the entire educational system!

In addition to hiring diverse teachers and administrators, we need to have zero-tolerance policies toward racist words and behaviors by students, teachers and administrators. As school board members, we also have a say over the curriculum taught to our students: We should ensure that they're reading fantastic stories about other cultures and that they're celebrating a different culture within their schools each month. If we start doing these things, we'll bridge gaps!

"Race Is"

Micah Ali
Immediate Past Chair, Council of Urban Boards of Education
Chair-elect, National Black Council
President, Compton Unified School District Board of Trustees
Compton, California

I am a Black man, which makes me very comfortable talking about race and racism. Why am I so comfortable talking about it? Because I learned early that race *is*. That remains the simple fact. My whole life, I have confronted racism against me and my community. I find it impossible to ignore the repercussions and impacts of what I face. It cannot be ignored, blurred, or grayed out. It exists.

I learned early that race is. *That remains the simple fact.*

I grew up in a mostly-Black community in which my family became heavily involved. My mother, a social worker, wanted to give back like numerous other family members and friends who forged careers in social work, public education, and healthcare. I soon realized that, in addition to skin-based racism, advantage is anchored in economics. Affluent communities benefited from access to resources and great public education, while our community lacks necessary basics and fairly-funded schools. I stress entrepreneurship and education in Black communities, because those things can carve a path out of economic oppression. In this country, Black people constantly face uphill battles or deliberate sabotage if they achieve too highly. Self-advocacy and self-realization are vital for progress. We must analyze racism as a system and ask ourselves what specific steps we can take to combat it.

Self-advocacy and self-realization are vital for progress.

Not always overt, racism generates harsh realities. Implicit bias and racism are widespread and function just as nefariously as explicit racism. In the education system, students of color are consistently held to lower standards. The tyranny of low expectations confirms

the bias of some teachers and administrators who don't put in as much effort to help students of color achieve their goals.

Even standardized testing, like the SAT and ACT, serve to perpetuate inequity in our education system. Certain students cannot afford specialized training and classes, so they perform at a lower level than their more affluent peers. I succeeded in combatting this issue through a lawsuit brought by the Compton Unified School District. We convinced California's public colleges and universities to phase out standardized testing in college admissions over the next three years.

I also firmly believe that every teacher, administrator, and staff member should complete implicit bias training. Even one instance of implicit bias from a trusted educator can leave lifelong scars. In my own district, I created an Office for Black Student Excellence, which provides support and structure for Black students across our district. Even with these victories, much remains to be done. Some people refuse to accept that privilege and racism exist. Others seek to undermine and discredit our mission of equitable education. First and foremost, we must recognize and call out racist behavior. In fact, it is our obligation to speak out and shine a light on the darkness of racism and discrimination in all its forms.

Even one instance of implicit bias from a trusted educator can leave lifelong scars.

Last year, the California Association of Black School Educators released its inaugural Blueprint for Educational Equity. It focuses on three areas to help Black students unlock their full potential. First, educators must adopt a cradle-to-career approach for their students, ensuring that opportunities become maximized from a young age. Next, we must embrace technology as the great equalizer, and ensure that students can use and understand technology. Finally, we must work to change the climate on our campuses and challenge bias by promoting social and emotional learning and offering ample mental health supports.

I am encouraged by the fact that our struggle is being magnified like never before.

I am encouraged by the fact that our struggle is being magnified like never before, and that people are slowly coming to understand our daily lived experience. It grows more and more difficult to ignore the reality of race in this country due to coverage on social media, the

internet, and television news. However, now is not the time to relieve pressure or go easy—not if we hope to break down entrenched power structures.

Race *is*. There remain so many bigoted opinions and false senses of superiority that Black people must deal with daily. Even as we make progress, I am still floored by how often we need to prove our humanity. Certain people only bring up America's "melting pot" identity when it supports the views of those in power. It cannot be ignored, but we can confront it far stronger together. People may attempt to divide us, but we must unite and continue the fight for an equitable society. We must keep up the work until everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources. The late Congressman John Lewis said it best: It is time for us to get into some "good trouble!"

"Change Needs to Start at the Top"

Rubén Archuleta
Chair-elect, National Hispanic Council
Española Public Schools Board of Education
Española, New Mexico

My self-identity has changed over the years. When I grew up, we said we were *Chicanos*. That's what others told me we were. When I went to college, we became "Hispanic," a term imposed on us by the federal government. Now we're told that *Latino*s is a broader, more-correct term

Fortunately, having grown up in a community that is 95% Hispanic and Native American, I've experienced very little racism in my life. In elementary school, I had two best friends: David, who was White, and Michael, who was Black. One day we were riding our bikes to the arcade, when a Hispanic man asked me, "What are you doing with that *güero* [White boy] and that *negro* [Black boy]?" I remember wondering what he meant—and why he used words that I interpreted as derogatory. Before that, I wasn't aware of the difference that skin color makes in the minds of some people. That man's words and manner bothered me. I thought, "My friends and I ride our bikes the same way, we eat the same food—so how can we be different, just because one is darker and one is lighter?" They were my friends, we had fun, and none of us chose our skin color: We're born the way we're born!

I asked my mom about that man's comments. She replied, "There are cruel people in the world—but in God's eyes, we're all the same." Growing up, I was never prejudiced. I didn't see people as being any different because of their skin color. David came from the east coast. Michael's ancestors were from the South, and his great, great grandfather was brought to this country as a slave. As I learned more of the history of the South, I wondered how people can be so cruel.

My parents taught us not to judge people by their skin color or any other aspect of their appearance. They taught us to treat all people with respect. When we saw people treated otherwise, my parents told

us to imagine putting ourselves in their place, then to ask ourselves if we would want to be treated that way.

We've all experienced racism. Twenty years ago, I worked as a CT technician. Some doctors invited me to their homes in Los Alamos, where the majority of people are White, wealthy, and from out of state. During a visit to Los Alamos one night, a White cop stopped me and asked for my ID, which listed my address in Española. I was wearing a hoodie. He told me, "There's not a place for your kind up here." I wondered, "What does he mean by 'my kind'?" On another occasion, a White lady said, "I don't want your kind x-raying me"—so I found someone else to x-ray her. To this day, those incidents bother me. I'll never treat people that way, but I know many people deal with these kinds of things every day.

"What does he mean by 'my kind'?"

I like to read history and listen to stories of how things used to be, so I know we used certain restrooms and different water fountains. We couldn't eat at certain restaurants. We had segregated schools. That's wrong. I try to teach my kids that we're all equal—the way my parents taught me and their parents taught them.

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Here in Española, an uproar emerged when we recently took down a statue of Juan de Oñate, the first *conquistador* to colonize New Mexico in 1598. He mistreated and enslaved the Native Americans who were here. It became a big controversy focused on race.

A few years ago, when I served as our school board president, we were working with our New Mexico Public Education Department when a man from that organization said, "You people here in Española…." His comment upset me. I lost my cool and asked, "What do you mean, 'you people'?" We heard rumors that he was racist, and we *knew* what he meant.

Last year, I took my kids to the Black History Museum in Washington, D.C. I told my 12-year-old son, "We've come a long way with respect to civil rights." With recent events, though, it seems we've gone backward. Yes, we've come a long way since the 1960s,

but there remains a long way to go for the Black and Hispanic members of our community to be treated like others.

I've never seen so much racism in my life as I have in recent years. In February, a young, unarmed, Hispanic man was killed by police in Las Cruces. Maybe these things always happened, but we weren't as aware of it as we are now, with cell phones and news media. Maybe I'm simply more in tune with it now that I'm older, more educated, more experienced, and a father.

Racism also affects educational funding. Our schools continue to be funded in inequitable ways, especially in Native American communities, which don't receive the Impact Aid to which they are entitled. As a result, our Hispanic and Native American kids fail in college. A legal fight in our state now addresses this—the *Yazzie and Martínez v. State of New Mexico* case, where we're suing the state for the funding our kids deserve. The plaintiffs won, but an appeal has been filed. New Mexico is among the states with the most poorly-funded public education systems, so we don't have the best tools for our students to succeed. Educational funding needs to be a priority in our state and nation.

Educational funding needs to be a priority in our state and nation.

Change needs to start at the top: As school board members, we must make sure we're teaching our kids about racism from an early age. It remains important to educate all members of our communities on the effects of racism. Kids are bullied. Some even try to take their lives—all because of the racism they've faced. We must eliminate this.

I sometimes wonder whether racism can ever be ended. Children learn it from their parents and elders—and people can be evil. I'm hopeful that racism will diminish in our lifetimes, but some people have it embedded in their minds, from generation to generation, that they are superior to people with other skin colors. It's unfortunate and untrue.

We're not born racist. We're not born any better than anybody else. We're all human, and we need to treat people with respect. We all have feelings. Let's be good to one another—regardless of their physical appearance or skin color—and let's treat people the way we

want to be treated. As my mom always taught me: Treat people the way you want to be treated.

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you want to be treated.

I hope and pray that we can educate ourselves and our kids on these issues and get rid of this nasty word, racism. We need to unite as a nation and make this world a better place for future generations—for our kids and grandkids!

"Our Strong Commitment to Equity"

Anna María Chávez
NSBA Executive Director & CEO
Alexandria, Virginia

Issues surrounding race permeate all levels of society, and education is not immune. Because racism remains pervasive in education, we say it is institutional and structural. When we refer to institutional racism, we mean the organizational programs or policies that work to the benefit of certain racial groups and to the detriment of Blacks, *Latinos*, Asians, Native Americans, and other people of color. In school districts, this shows up in discriminatory discipline practices, dress codes, hair guidelines, and in many other areas.

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Structural racism is the interplay of policies, practices, and programs of multiple institutions that leads to adverse outcomes and conditions for people of color compared to members of other racial and ethnic groups. In other words, when institutional racism in education combines with racist policies in other institutions, like health, law enforcement, or housing, there is structural racism at play. The school-to-prison pipeline is a clear example of structural racism, where the racist regulations that cause disproportionate discipline outcomes are perpetuated by the racist policies, practices, and laws of the judicial system. Furthermore, institutional racism at the state and federal levels compounds what is occurring at the local level. All of this is to the detriment of our most vulnerable students.

The Civil Rights Act was a monumental piece of legislation that made great progress toward ensuring that everyone who lives in this country is treated equally and with humanity. However, we have much more work to do. Racial discrimination, or any discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, *et cetera*, is not acceptable in society and much less in public education.

School boards have an amazing opportunity to begin to reconcile the injustices of their histories and take bold and equitable actions to provide the highest-quality education for every one of their students no matter where they come from or how they show up at school. Working in partnership with our member state associations, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) helps school boards achieve their goals, especially those that align with our strong commitment to equity.

School boards have an amazing opportunity to begin to reconcile the injustices of their histories.

School boards have the unique ability to impact several areas of education, including advocating for the intentional allocation of funding, staff diversity, culturally-relevant curriculum, and safe and supportive school climates.

Several years ago, NSBA's board of directors approved this equity statement: "We affirm in our actions that each student can, will, and shall learn. We recognize that, based on factors including but not limited to disability, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, students are deprived of equitable educational opportunities. Educational equity is the intentional allocation of resources, instruction, and opportunities according to need, requiring that discriminatory practices, prejudices, and beliefs be identified and eradicated."

NSBA also created an Equity Department, with the explicit mission of providing resources and training for our members in this important area.

NSBA continues to invest in its commitment to educational equity with a national initiative that explicitly focuses on racial inequities in education. Through our new Dismantling Institutional Racism in Education (DIRE) Initiative, we will continue to provide resources for school districts to support their journey in addressing institutional and structural racism.

The DIRE initiative also provides a useful acronym for a framework of practicing equity.

- **Define** data to know who your students are and support a shared language, shared goals, and shared efforts that tie into your strategic plan.

- **Identify** inequities, root causes, opportunity and access gaps, and potential policy and practice solutions.
- **Revise** approaches, practices and policies.
- **Evaluate** reporting on accountability metrics, progress towards your goals, and definitions & appropriate terms as they evolve.

I encourage school leaders to reach out to their colleagues in other districts and states. As a federation, NSBA's greatest strength is our state associations. There is a network of like-minded professionals with similar goals ready to share resources with you.

"We *All* Have Biases about *Everything*"

Steve Corona
Immediate Past President, National Hispanic Council
Steering Committee Member, Council of Urban Boards of Education
Fort Wayne Community Schools Board of School Trustees
Fort Wayne, Indiana

I self-identify as a second-generation Mexican American—which is probably an old term, like me. I'm 71. I grew up in northwest Indiana, where most people there were drawn to Gary by jobs in the steel industry: More so than Pittsburgh, Gary became recognized as the steel capital of the world. People of all colors and races flocked to Gary to find work, among them my grandfather, Hilario Corona.

My grandfather came to this country in the early 1900s and eventually found his way to northwest Indiana. He acquired a third-grade education then taught himself to read, write and understand English. I keep the Spanish/English dictionary that he bought when he came to this country; it's a family heirloom.

During the depression, when so many people lost jobs, he worked at Inland Steel. Because he understood two languages, he served as the intermediary between the White foremen and the Mexican labor pool, communing the foremen's tasks for the day. By listening to my parents talk about my grandfather's work in the steel mills, I learned that race defines work.

I grew up in a household where we respected everybody, and the N-word was as bad as the F-word. Back then, we used the term, "Colored people."

When I was a child, Gary Public Schools was a very segregated school district. I didn't understand the reasons for it, but it was very clear at the time that Gary had its White and Black parts of town, and there were no efforts to integrate the schools. At that time, they built a new school in the Black neighborhood. It was clearly for Black students, and it drained them from my school, moving them to the new school. Whenever they built new schools, they made damned sure the new school would only cater to a certain segment of the population.

In grades seven through nine, I attended a junior high school that was 90% Black. We later moved to a part of Gary where my high school was nearly all-White, with only a few *Latinos*. I attended junior high school with Black students. Socially, I got along with them better than with students at my nearly-all-White high school. I never feared a person because of his/her skin color. I've been to implicit bias trainings where participants are asked how they feel when a young Black person comes up to them. I've never experienced biases in that respect. Growing up, I knew that there were good Whites and bad Whites, just as there existed both kinds of Blacks. We took people for who they were and what they said and did. I've always judged people that way. I don't categorize a whole group of people because of their skin color. You must interact with each one to determine if they're good or bad.

We didn't learn a lot about race back then. We didn't delve deeply into any race or culture, particularly into the Mexican or Mexican-American culture, race and history.

As a high school student, pressure to change school boundaries led the district to start busing Black kids from downtown Gary to our school. As a result, some 50 brave, Black kids attended Lew Wallace High School.

I always feel sad to hear ignorant people express their opinions about other races and cultures. I believe those observations reveal how their parents raised them and how their mindset and thinking became formed by their parents. The wife of one of my wife's friends recently described how pissed off she felt because Robert E. Lee High School in Springfield, Virginia was renamed for Congressman John Lewis. She was so upset! Earlier that day, I read in *Education Week* that more than 200 American schools were named for Confederates—many during the struggle for and passage of Civil Rights. It's one thing to *remember* people for what they did and what they believed. It's another thing to *honor* them—and that's what we do when we name a school after someone. We shouldn't be honoring anyone associated with the Confederacy, slavery, or any belief that some people can be the property of others. That's wrong.

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Consider this: The Germans never tore down Auschwitz, but they don't *honor* those who committed such atrocities there. They preserved it to remember, not to repeat, the past. Confederate "heroes" treated Black people as property, rather than as humans. As traitors, they opposed the Union to protect their right to slavery. If there were a Robert E. Lee Elementary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, I would fight to change it! I'm so proud that several years ago we changed our school mascot from the North Side Redskins, to the North Side Legends. People weren't happy about it, but it was the right thing to do.

The Germans never tore down Auschwitz, but they don't honor those who committed such atrocities there.

Those conversations must continue in our country. We should ask ourselves, "What have we done here?" I'm not a person who believes that we should take down statues—if there's an opportunity to understand the complexity of who these people were and what they represented. Maybe all such statues need two signs on them, providing two perspectives about who those people were. A Black historian on "60 Minutes" held the same opinion: If we can't take these down, then we must put up new signs, to help people understand how they came to believe slavery belonged in a country that officially believed that all men are created equal. We cannot cancel or change the past, but we can demand an accurate retelling of our history.

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I just started my 40th year on the Fort Wayne School Board. During my first ten years, we had a superintendent who told me point-blank that he would never appoint a Black woman to be principal of a high school as long as he served as superintendent. His view prevailed among our school board at the time. I was in the minority. A highly-talented woman, Sharon Banks, was frustrated and left the school district. She went to work for the mayor for a couple of years and then, when we hired a new superintendent, she came back and was appointed principal. She eventually became Superintendent of the Year in Michigan!

There's always somebody new to pick on, somebody at "the bottom of the pole," who becomes the brunt of our biases, fears, racism and hatred. At one time in Fort Wayne, you would never be hired by Fort Wayne Community Schools if you were Catholic; to be hired, you had to be a conservative Christian of the Assembly of God. Then other groups and ethnicities replaced Catholics as the lightning rod of racism and fears.

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During those first ten years on the board, we were sued by a parent group because we maintained segregated elementary and middle schools. We grudgingly integrated our high schools, but our elementary and middle schools remained neighborhood schools, in White or Black neighborhoods. The school district fought this for seven or eight years, until leadership changed. I was our board president when we finally got four of seven votes to say, "enough is enough." We settled the lawsuit and integrated our schools, and shortly thereafter, the superintendent resigned. He knew he was going to be fired, so he "beat us to the punch" at the end of the school year.

The conservative newspaper at the time encouraged us to kiss the Fort Wayne Community Schools goodbye, suggesting that our decision would lead to "White flight" and a downward spiral in our school district. Thirty years later, our student population is about the same. We've lost some students, primarily because of the impact of vouchers and charters, but we're a better district today than we were 30 years ago.

For years, our school district allocated funds away from the central-city, Black schools, which were in worse shape than other schools and possessed less-experienced teachers. That's not the case today. More recently, a city council member accused us of redlining and abandoning her single-member district. I showed her the facts: Of the $400 million that we've invested in school renovations during the past ten years, $43 million went to schools in her district, which is pretty damn good.

I've seen what the disinvestment in schools looks like. A few years ago, as part of a tour of schools with the Council of Urban Boards of Education, we visited one school in terrible condition. I was

embarrassed for the school board members responsible for that run-down school. They seemed to have simply said, "Screw it; we're not investing here." The message stood out as really sad. Our district would never allow any of our buildings to be in that shape.

The world is a complicated place, with a lot of players, but I'm resolved to effect positive change. I attended college in the late 1960s, when colleges were a great place for demonstrations and unrest. We protested the Vietnam War and the rising price of education. It was an exciting place to be! I studied journalism, went to work as a reporter, and always appreciated the people who led protests: In order to effect change, you need that front edge that makes people uncomfortable. I also sensed that those people weren't going to stick around and make the commitment to effect substantive change—which takes a hell of a long time. I vowed that I would work within the system to cause and effect change. That's really how I've lived my life, to make change happen. That's one of the reasons I'm still on my board. There's always more to do!

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Because we're a more divided country today than ever, the threats continue. Social media provides an arena for opinionated "experts" to persuade others to join their bandwagon, and our U.S. President has undermined truth, science and facts, allowing people with opinions to get a lot of attention. As a result, it's more difficult today to fight for justice and what's right. However, I remain committed to being a voice of reason, believing in change, and doing positive things.

There exists an upside of social media. When wrongs are perpetrated, such as the murder of George Floyd, people can see it. Institutions can't hide that stuff anymore.

I turn the issue of race back on academic achievement: Each year, we take out a full-page ad in the local newspaper to highlight the top ten students in our five high schools. This year's photos weren't very different from the photos of the past five years: Despite the fact that our district is 25% Black, only three of our top 50 scholars are Black! You might count the young girl from Somalia as the fourth Black student, but she came here only five or six years ago—and she still wouldn't get us to 25% of our top scholars being Black.

Family structure is a serious issue affecting our students, and I don't have an answer for it. Tonight, I have a Zoom chat with Fort Wayne United, to continue a conversation we started a few weeks ago about the absence of fathers in the Black community. I was the lone non-Black voice on the panel, with five, younger, Black fathers. Systemic racism makes it hard for Black men to remain within the home.

We need to work to turn that around. It would be so easy for us to say, "It's not our fault. It's the Black family structure. We can't do anything about it!" Instead, we have to be more innovative in finding ways to reach our students and their families. We have to find those people who make a difference, and we need to invest resources into taking their efforts to scale. We get into a habit of punishing people and not providing them support for their deficits. If a golfer can't drive the ball straight or can't putt or chip, he hires a coach. What coaching do our kids get? Nothing! Do we really want to help our kids who need assistance? Eliminate the issue of race, develop a system that identifies struggling students, and provide them the resources they need. We should be able to say: "That student—regardless of his/her personal details—needs help. How will we provide it?" It seems so simple, but that's not how we operate. It's frustrating.

I love talking to teachers, because they remain so committed, and they believe in our young people. They know they have the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life.

For the past eight years, I ran a $30 million non-profit employment training agency for 300 people in three states. I left that, to start a non-profit called *Latinos* Count, where I'm a staff of one. I have constant contact with our *Latino* youth and other minorities. It's the most rewarding work of my life—more so than being a school board member. Our teachers experience that same opportunity. They feel driven by a desire to affect a young person's life. They are community advocates and leaders. You've got to admire teachers for what they do. It's a tough, demanding job!

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Racism also exists in the values, culture and belief systems of organizations, including our school districts. It exists in our policies and practices. As school board members, we must analyze our policies and practices. We have to ask ourselves: Are we punishing

Black students more severely than White students who perpetrate the same "crimes"? Have we forgotten that we're in the business of education? The goal should be to keep kids *in* school, rather than kicking them *out* because we don't want to deal with "troublemakers"? Every district needs to break down its discipline data. Every district needs champions, beginning at the highest levels, with the superintendent and school board, who do what they're supposed to be doing: setting the tone through values, beliefs and policies.

We can't have a binary system in the way we treat people. Many people in our community voted for our U.S. President, so I assume they believe some of the things he claims about race and racism. We have to help people to put their political beliefs aside, to talk about how we treat people in our organizations. That's a tough conversation for a lot of people because we're all "hard-wired" with our implicit biases and belief systems.

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We also need to create dashboards to measure those things that are important to us. We've long worked with a balanced scorecard in our district, created by some folks at Harvard. We need to create a dashboard that addresses how we treat students. Like businesses that want to retain their customers—or like hotels that ask, "How was your stay?"—we need to be constantly asking our students and their families about the services we provide. We don't do enough of that. We should try to get a true report on the service—the public education—that we're providing. If we ask them, they'll tell us. We need to ask. We're so often focused on process, on measuring the number of meetings we've held, rather than measuring what they said.

Finally, we have to talk about racism. We shouldn't be bashful about bringing in experts for this. A few years ago, Micah Ali of Compton brought in Brian Marks, who does implicit bias trainings for police departments. It was one of the most fascinating workshops I've ever attended! He talked about how we *all* have biases about *everything*. That's the type of person our school districts need to bring in, to get us talking about who we are, how we think, how we can

Sometimes we need others to help us confront who we are.

understand our own biases, and how they affect our work with young people. Sometimes we need others to help us confront who we are, to help us see that part of the "Johari window" that's unknown to us, to help us identify our blind spots and how our assumptions about others may hold us back from being better people!

"Stories Help Us to Better Understand Our True History"

Ana Cortez
President-elect, Mexican American School Boards Association
Manor Independent School District Board of Trustees
Manor, Texas

I self-identify as Mexican-American or *Latina*. My entire family is from Mexico, but, of all my siblings, I'm the first born in the United States—in the small town of Hearne, Texas. That's right: Due to my country upbringing, I speak Spanish with a Texas twang! Even though they lived in Madisonville, my parents went to the hospital in Hearne because the hospital in Madisonville had no Spanish speakers and was known to be racist.

When I was a child, my family and I visited extended family in *México*. My maternal grandmother belonged to an Indigenous tribe there—though I don't know which one. Now, more than ever, I'm curious to learn more about my heritage.

Many of us in Black and Brown communities experience racism. My earliest memories of racism occurred in the early 1980's, when Mexican-American students weren't allowed to ride the school bus in Madisonville. As a result, a mix of Latin-American nations—Mexicans, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, Ecuadorians—piled into the back of our parents' station wagons, all because we weren't allowed to ride the school bus!

At school, we weren't permitted to speak Spanish—the language we spoke at home. I felt scared going to school: I wasn't confident in English, so I tried to memorize the most important English words I would need at school. I didn't want to be paddled, which was the punishment for speaking Spanish there. We received little literacy support, but social "survival" forced us to act like we knew English. It was a struggle.

My White classmates said I spoke "Mexican." They did not know that "Mexican" wasn't a language, nor did they understand that, although the *Latino* students were from many nations, we weren't all Mexicans.

My family lived in a trailer park, among several other Hispanic families. My brothers are four years and eight years older than me, White kids bullied them. I remember the name-calling and racist remarks. One day I felt so brave, I even tried to break up a fight—only to be shoved to the grass.

White men sometimes terrorized the park. Riding on horses and dressed in cowboy hats and bandanas, they shot their guns into the air. My mother was the childcare provider for many of the families whose parents worked in the local mushroom factory. She always told us to hide under the kitchen table. Jimmy, an older White man who looked out for us, would grab his shotgun and yell at the men, "Get out of here! This is *my* property!" I was too young to know what was going on, but I remember feeling terror.

Once a young boy in the park split open his head and needed stitches. Passing people yelled, "Call the ambulance! Call the cops!" I remember how upset the residents were—but they didn't call for help because they didn't believe anyone would come to help our community. My uncle and cousin took the boy to the hospital.

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One teacher in Madisonville, Nina Foster, looked out for the Hispanic community and advocated for our rights. She secured the attorneys who fought for our right to ride school buses in the mornings—though we still weren't allowed to ride the afternoon buses home. I'll never forget Mrs. Foster: With her help, we slowly gained our rights, and, when my family moved to the *Río Grande* Valley, she gave me a teddy bear.

Thinking about race and racism transports me back to that small town. Once my family moved to the *Río Grande* Valley, we found a place where nearly everyone was Hispanic and spoke Spanish. It was a completely-different experience!

My dad greatly shaped how I think about race and racism. I translated for my mom, but my dad spoke some English and had several Black and Brown friends. Our families stuck together, like a tight-knit community, because we believed that we had to. As a result, we celebrated birthdays and all sorts of occasions together.

Many of the stereotypes I learned addressed gender, rather than race: Hispanic culture expected women to stay at home, cooking and cleaning, taking care of the kids and serving their husbands. Born in 1933, my father didn't want that future for me. He taught me to shoot a gun and defend myself. When I delayed some of my chores because of extracurriculars, my dad, who didn't think I'd become a typical homemaker, would shrug it off, saying, "Our daughter is going to be educated and be something big—and she'll have someone doing those chores for her!" So I didn't end up doing what my culture expected. When I was 11 years old, Governor Ann Richards came to our town in the *Río Grande* Valley. I really wanted to meet her. My dad told my cousin to take me and my mom to the interfaith event where Governor Richards spoke. I remember my brief encounter with her as she walked to her car, surrounded by bodyguards. I don't remember what I said to her, but she bent over and told me, "Don't get married, and don't have kids"!

Racism still plagues our world. My son works for a delivery service. Recently, he was called to assist a Black associate involved in a hit-and-run in the small town of Dale, Texas. It seemed the collision was no accident. The driver of a pickup truck targeted my son's friend due to the color of his skin. My son has a darker complexion, too; you can tell he's Hispanic. While they transferred the packages from the inoperable car, to my son's, two White men in pickup trucks came and pinned them in on both sides, yelling racial slurs and saying, "You don't belong here! Get the hell out of our town!" My son rushed his friend, hurt in the exchange, to the nearest urgent care center. I don't know all the details, but my son later said, "I wonder what would have happened if I didn't show up. They could have done something worse to my coworker!" Crazy incidents like that "hit home."

The more we learn about Black and Mexican history, the more we understand where we come from, the common struggles we've had, and the challenges we continue to face. I identify with the stories of those who fled slavery, often finding refuge in small, Texas towns. Those stories help us to understand our complex history and the struggles of others.

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I've been an advocate for teaching our students their accurate history. Some of this remains hidden by our educational systems. The speakers at our MASBA conferences share stories that we don't hear from anyone else, a history that our students seldom hear in our schools. We must teach our students Mexican American Studies. MASBA was on the forefront of the fight for that curriculum here in Texas. Now we also benefit from other ethnic studies courses, including African American Studies.

Texas is diverse, and we're all a blend of something: We must provide a more complex history for every ethnic group we represent, so that our students can hear their history, value the histories of others, and shape a more knowledgeable future.

Hearing courageous conversations on race and equity heartens me. We're heading in the right direction. We've made a lot of progress, but we're barely scratching the surface. We have a long way to go toward equity.

As school board members, we must make sure we name the most appropriate people to positions of leadership. We also need to educate ourselves on the resources that we can tap to better serve our communities and understand their demographics. We support better representation, so that our school boards reflect the communities we serve.

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We all truly want to see change. We just need to come together now to create it. In Spanish, we say, "*la unión hace la fuerza*," (unity creates strength). Let's continue coming together—with all our friends of the National Hispanic Council, the National Black Council, the National American Indian/Alaskan Native Council—and let's make a bigger impact!

"Put the Issues on the Table, and Stop Sugarcoating Them"

Donald Davis
Treasurer, Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members
Spring Independent School District Board of Trustees
Spring, Texas

I'm a Black man all the way, 100%. Born Black, there's nothing I can do about that.

Born in 1956, I have lived through a lot of experiences. My great grandmother, the first Black female to own a store in her small town in northern Louisiana, outraged the Ku Klux Klan. They opposed Black-owned businesses, and they burned crosses and other things in our yard in an attempt to force her to close her store. It was painful to see. The KKK was rotten. They left a bad taste in my mouth. They created hatred in my heart toward other races, and they left me wondering why they treated my grandmother differently just because she tried to be an entrepreneur. I certainly felt that they violated our rights and even threatened our lives.

Some folks can be hateful. I had a friend in Louisiana who lost his life because he dated a White girl. As a youth, I tried to cope with frequent trauma. It was painful to see how people were—and *are*—discriminated against because of their skin color, or what they look like, or where they come from, or who they love. Louisiana has changed quite a bit in the past 20 years, but some parts of the state remain the same, old way: Society won't accept who you love.

The military changed my life. Discrimination and racism exist there, but the military creates a setting where everyone seems the same: Whether you come from Virginia or New York or the cowboy state of Texas, you must work as a team. In war, the bullet doesn't care about your color. A young man from Kentucky may not like me, as a Black man, but, when I go out on the front line, he needs to cover my butt, and he needs to know that I'll cover his, too.

In war,
the bullet doesn't care
about your color.

In the military, words would slip out of people's mouths, and we learned to deal with it on the spot, saying, "That's not a nice thing to say" or "Those words are very painful. Please don't say that again." It remains important to do everything in our power to reject racism and discrimination. We must pull people to the corner and let them know, "I don't like what you said" or "I don't like how you're treating me."

We must pull people to the corner and let them know, "I don't like what you said" or "I don't like how you're treating me."

A lot of people become uncomfortable during conversations on race and racism. We must overcome that. Conversations about being Black or being Native American or being an undocumented immigrant become important in today's world. We need conversations with folks who have issues with others unlike them. Don't walk away from such conversations. When it comes to race, racism and discrimination, we all need to hear the other person's ideas. However, when people don't want to deal with their prejudices, or with their racism and discrimination, it can become difficult. Sometimes people don't care if they say horrible things. They don't care if they hurt others. Nevertheless, as a society, we must find a way to interact with such people. Everyone finds their own path. If someone says "nigger" or anything clearly racist, I don't let it rest. I seek conversation with them. I don't accept glib excuses: "It was just a mistake" or "I didn't mean that." Personally, I believe that if you said it, you meant it. Most people don't say those kinds of things, unless they mean it.

When it comes to race, racism and discrimination, we all need to hear the other person's ideas.

I'll never forget one exchange. A White friend once said, "Hey, man, you's my nigga." I corrected him: "No, I'm *not* your nigger. I'm a grown, professional. I didn't call you 'my honky' or other street names. We're professionals, so don't use that language around me." He responded, "No, I'm just playing!" I said, "No. You said it, and you meant it. I'm not your nigger, and you're not my honky." After that, our relationship changed.

When people are going in the wrong direction, we need to speak with them, and teach and train them. We're often afraid to begin conversations about discrimination, prejudice and racism.

I've experienced blatant acts of racism committed against me. More than once I've stopped overnight at small towns in Louisiana and asked for a hotel room. The desk clerk told me the hotel was full, but then a White family came up behind me, and they were told that rooms remained available. That straight-up prejudice denied me access to a facility based on the color of my skin!

Once in Louisiana, a Black police officer pulled me over. He opened his holster and put his hand on his gun—so these aren't simply biases possessed by people of other races! This was Black-on-Black. I actually had a conversation with him. I asked him why he put his hand on his gun. He said, "You don't understand: It's tough out here. I have a family I want to go home to, so I have to be safe all the time." I was 60 years old and experienced. I can only imagine what our young folks go through when they deal with people in uniform. There are good and bad officers: We need to praise those who deserve it, and we need to investigate and remove those who are bad.

More recently, after I retired from the military, I interviewed for a job for which I was highly-qualified. They told me they had already filled the position. A week later, the ad was still posted, so I approached them again. It quickly became obvious that they were not interested in hiring an African-American male. Highly-qualified, with various degrees, I didn't enjoy the opportunity to be considered for the position due to the color of my skin! Their behavior was illegal under equal opportunity laws. Preferring to be positive, I think of it as a blessing in disguise: If they don't want to hire me, I don't want to be in a hostile environment.

Overcoming entrenched racism requires education about race and racism. We also need related conversations. Protesting is powerful, but we need to do more than protest. We must train and rehabilitate the attitudes of people. Instead of covering up racism, prejudice and discrimination, camouflaging them, or putting them "under the table," we need to deal with them straight on immediately. We often try to avoid tough conversations because we don't want to hurt people's feelings. Recent events in

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our nation make clear to us that we need to have conversations. We need to put the issues on the table and stop sugarcoating them.

Racism and discrimination are alive and active. People continue to mistreat others because of where they come from, or their walk of life, or which side of the tracks they're born on. Racism will always exist, unless we talk about it and have tough conversations that reach the source of the issue: the hatred embedded in people, which they've inherited from their parents, and which they pass on to their families.

It hurts me when I see people passing on racist attitudes to their kids and teaching them to be hateful. I'm a fairly-big guy, so when I speak to some children in the store, they'll grab their parents, as if I were going to attack them! Something is going on there: That child fears me because I look different, because I'm big and/or because I'm Black. We need to shape mindsets from an early age. We need to let kids know we are all human and need to be respected. We need to educate older people, too. They're more set in their ways, and they're the most discriminatory.

On one hand, it seems we've come a long way in my lifetime. On the other, it also seems that we're taking a big step backward with the politicization of race. Racism is a human problem. It distorts how we deal with people. If we can eliminate politics and realize racism is a human problem, perhaps we'll make progress.

Racism is a human problem. It distorts how we deal with people.

As school board members, we must focus on policy. In my district, we're allocating funds for an equity audit at every level of the organization. We're currently in the first phase, using a survey to identify issues, so we'll be able to create a plan to assure every student succeeds. We're already starting to address some issues, like hiring more *Latinos* and more bilingual principals.

We must make sure that all students receive a quality education and that all students are treated equally, regardless of their zip code. Look at what's happened with the coronavirus: We're pushing virtual learning while many families don't have access to Wi-Fi or to a computer! Other students' families have money and access. This pandemic makes it very difficult for our Black and Brown students to learn. This sets them up for the school-to-prison pipeline. So long as we have Black and Brown kids in our prison system, we have

problems. And, statistically, those issues continue until we help African-American boys read on grade level from a young age.

Testing is one of the most discriminatory factors in education. High-stakes tests are often on topics not connected to minority realities. Many of our students are not good test-takers, and so many things—like college admission and scholarships—are based on testing and grades!

Overcoming these problems requires a solid strategy and a united effort. MASBA doesn't need to stand alone. The Texas Black Caucus shouldn't be standing by itself. We must find solutions to these problems together!

"Public Schools Act Like Incubators of Racism"

Óscar de la Torre
Past President, California *Latino* School Boards Association
Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education
Santa Mónica, California

Race, a substantive issue, sometimes makes people uncomfortable, because discussions about race and racism requires an analysis of power, wealth and class. Because problems cannot be solved without talking about them, let's talk!

I've long considered myself a *Chicano*, a Mexican American without an Anglo image of himself. My identity as a *Chicano* and an American largely resulted from my education. As a freshman in college, I took my first *Chicano* Studies course, which made a real impact on me.

The neighborhood I grew up in differed from other parts of Santa Mónica. Ours was a racially-segregated neighborhood in a majority-White city. Blacks made up most of the homeowners on my street, at 16th and Delaware, and all the *Latinos* there rented. No White families lived on our block.

Later, I came to realize how our neighborhood was segregated by race and class. No Mexicans or Blacks could own property north of Santa Mónica Boulevard due to deed restrictions or "racial protective covenants." Discriminatory laws and housing policies kept us in that neighborhood, next to a graveyard, where Whites didn't want to live. This combination of factors kept housing prices low.

Early on, I learned that racism and segregation shaped my experiences. Our neighborhood suffered from poverty and social neglect. Our schools, lower-performing and underserved, drew a higher concentration of students on free and reduced lunch. When I went to school, I realized schools were somewhat segregated and that, in middle school, most of my classmates were Black or *Latino*. The White schools on the north side of Santa Mónica—"on the other side of the tracks"—benefited from having a monopoly on the political power that governed public schools. Our southside schools always got "the short end of the stick."

I learned about superiority and inferiority in our public schools. Before I knew anything of slavery and colonization, the factors in my environment led me to develop an inferiority complex. In kindergarten, my mom sent me to school with a *burrito* in a brown bag, so I endured the taunts of my classmates who ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches from their Spiderman and Superwoman lunchboxes. I remember coming home and telling my mom, "I don't want any *burritos*!" I didn't want to be different. I wanted to be like everybody else. I wanted to fit in. So, I unconsciously rejected my Mexican culture. I perceived it at the time as causing the problem. Schools are powerful tools in assimilating students to the dominant culture.

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I remember the embarrassment of my mother coming to school when I got in trouble: I didn't want my friends to know mine was a Mexican mother. My social environment taught me that Mexicans were inferior, that being Mexican meant being poor and uneducated.

My first interactions with local government did not involve mayors or city council members—who never campaigned in our neighborhood—but with law enforcement. I received my first traffic ticket at 9 years old for riding on the handlebars of a bike! The police officer said, "This will teach you not to break the law."

In the sixth grade, tests identified me as gifted and talented. That placed me in an honors program. I remember walking into that classroom for the first time: My friends weren't there, the teachers were White, and most of the students were White. We talked about topics related to White-dominant culture. As one of the only Mexicans in that classroom, I felt out of place! Again, in a seventh-grade pre-algebra honors class, another Mexican kid and I sat in a class of White students. I told my counselor that I didn't want to be in that class. Without discussion, she took me out. Needless to say, I didn't study algebra until the tenth grade. Due to social-emotional issues and counselor disinterest, I lost three years of math in the public education system! The lack of diversity made me feel

unwelcomed and out-of-place, and, because no adults intervened to help me or to diversify my classes, I gave up.

In public schools, we all learned that the White race, the superior race, held supremacy. We learned about George Washington, who couldn't tell a lie, and about Abraham Lincoln, who freed the slaves. We never heard about the slaves fighting for their freedom. We never learned anything about being Mexican, *Latino* or Mexican-American in this country. If I learned anything in U.S. history, I internalized that Blacks were slaves and Mexicans lost their land to a superior race in the Mexican-American War.

Much of my activism around racial justice issues were triggered by political attacks and acts of character assassination against me. One in 1991 happened when I served as the student body president at Santa Mónica High School: Someone used the school's bulk mail permit and database to send to all school families a horrific hate letter naming me and attacking Mexicans generally. To this day, it is the biggest hate crime in our city's history, and it's still an unsolved case.

As a senior in high school, I attended the Brotherhood-Sisterhood Camp of the National Conference for Community and Justice, the NCCJ. That included a three-day program about racism and stereotypes. Learning how racism works empowered me to become the activist I am today.

In hindsight, it's no wonder that so many young people joined the gangs so prevalent in my neighborhood. The destructive identity they absorbed from the environments around us—including our public schools—left them thirsting to resurrect their identity: to cast off the labels society imposed on them. They took on new names, grasped power through violence, and gained a sense of belonging within those gangs. As kids, we thought those gang members looked so cool in their low-riders, with their tattoos and style.

When I was a freshman in college, I really began thinking more deeply about race. I saw correlations between poverty and lack of education. I recall a conversation with a Black friend, who said, "I could have gone to Harvard—but I didn't do too well on the English portion of the SAT, because my mom never went to college and her

English was limited because my great grandma couldn't read, because if she was caught reading, they would have chopped off her hands." Suddenly, I realized the timeline effects of systemic racism, leading to a lack of education: The restrictions of more than four generations conspired to keep her from getting into Harvard!

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Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest experience similar dynamics with segregated schools. In California, Mexican Americans led the movement to desegregate public education twenty years before *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the 1934 case of *Méndez v. Westminster*, Mexicans challenged segregated public schools—and won! More importantly, the experience prepared Justice Earl Warren, who served as California Governor during the school desegregation lawsuits, to progressively rule on *Brown v. Board*.

I've confronted more outright racism as an adult, than as a child. As an adult, when you figure it out and start working against racism, there's pushback. It's not easy. This sh** doesn't end. As an adult, I decided to run for city council, and the police targeted me in a biased investigation. I started a youth center to promote social justice and to organize youth of color and their families to change the social conditions leading to gangs and violence. Certain people within law enforcement and city government attacked us for 13 years until they succeeded in defunding us. I'm convinced that racism played a role in all that: They defunded us because of who we were and what we stood for. They defunded a youth center serving youth of color but continued to fund the city-run Police Activities League, which settled a $42.6 million lawsuit earlier this year for the molestation of 24 *Latino* boys.

I've long said that racism hurts White people, too, by giving them a false sense of superiority, in the same way that it gives people of color a false sense of inferiority. Racism diminishes its victims. It also robs White children from living a full life. Granted, racism does a lot more damage to Black and Brown children, because it takes away opportunities and leads to an inferiority complex that causes people to doubt themselves.

Knowledge of self leads to self-love, and all humans need to understand where they came from. We need courses where young people learn about their culture and come to discover their identity, so that they can appreciate the story of others as well. Our curriculum must be inclusive.

In my experience, people drag their feet against real change with respect to race and racism. In our district, diversity hiring stalled. Ethnic studies stalled. The promise of an inclusive curriculum stalled. Every authentic conversation on race and racism eventually touches the power and privilege of the people in the room, who will find ways to block or avoid those conversations. So attempts at real change become a constant fight.

Since being elected to my school board, I've been challenged to get these items on our agenda. It's nearly impossible without a majority of board members who support these issues! I push for ethnic studies; my colleagues keep stalling and dragging their feet. I called for a report on our district's diversity in hiring; they delayed it for two years because it's hard to look at the data and see that we have deficiencies in our staffing patterns. We need more men—especially men of color—in our classrooms and administrative offices. In response to recent events, our district is just now releasing a report on diversity in hiring. Its conclusions are predictable: People of color don't feel supported, and Black administrators are thrown "under the bus" when they upset White parents.

We hired a Black superintendent, but our board keeps him from moving forward on various issues. When we talk about institutionalized racism, non-minorities will resist Black or Mexican superintendents, who occupy a perceived position of power, so the superintendents learn to play politics and to count their votes, sometimes to the detriment of a real agenda for change.

Having dark-skinned people holding positions of power means nothing if those people are not consciously anti-racist. Malcolm X talked about the "house Negro" and the "field Negro." Not all Black people are for racial justice, just as not all White people are racist and not all Mexican people will stand

Having dark-skinned people holding positions of power means nothing if those people are not consciously anti-racist.

up against racism. It doesn't move us toward social justice to find more Black and Brown people in positions of power, if they are not committed to equity and doing what's right. We need bold leadership to really provide equal educational opportunity.

I've seen Black and Mexican-American people who behave like outright bigots. Like other groups, our history includes people putting their personal gain ahead of collective progress. Be careful before you say, "The White man is the problem." In every struggle for justice, many Whites also participate. The struggle for justice is complicated. Let's be straight-up and real: It isn't just White men who perpetuates racism and support systemic racism in America; it's also the people of color who become allies of racists. I am surprised to see so many White people—particularly young White people—as allies in the struggle now. I am grateful to find White people involved in the movement for racial justice. It gives me more hope than electing a Black or *Latino* president. All good change comes from the bottom up.

I am surprised to see so many White people—particularly young White people—as allies in the struggle now. I am grateful to find White people involved in the movement for racial justice.

Nor is racism exclusive to conservatives. White liberal supremacy also exists. Even before national protests around Confederate monuments, we demanded that a racist mural in our city hall be removed, because it depicted a Native American expressing inferiority by bowing to a Spaniard. Many self-described liberal and progressive Whites ignored our calls for change.

I've learned that just because you are the numerical majority doesn't mean that you are the majority in power. No one easily gives up power, which must be taken through the vote and new multicultural majority coalitions. In certain sectors of White America, people become very nervous about having Black and Mexican-American people in charge. Ultimately, though, nobody's talking about real, radical reform. We know change is incremental, but we're also seeing at the national level that people want more radical solutions. They want to take a leap, and we'll see what real change comes from the movement.

Every generation bares a responsibility to fight the deeply embedded racism in this country founded with stolen labor on stolen land. We live with the residue and modern-day impacts of slavery and colonization. As a country, we've never really addressed or repaired that damage. We have made some positive gains, but we must have systemic change to alleviate systemic racism.

When I see all our beautiful children playing, I can't imagine anyone would want them to struggle with inferior education or to suffer self-destruction or incarceration. Every child deserves an equal opportunity. We need to help them overcome violence and trauma, and we need to provide them educational opportunities.

Racism is a cancer in our society, and poverty is a death sentence. We must eliminate them both.

"School Board Members Serve Racist Institutions"

Devin Del Palacio
Chair, National Black Council
Tolleson Union High School District Governing Board
Tolleson, Arizona

As a biracial child, I held a fortunate perspective into two beautiful cultures: My mother is Black, and my dad is Mexican. I also discovered at a young age that, to some people, these cultures do not seem so beautiful. With regard to race, colorism and racism, I've experienced various reactions, and my White peers quickly pointed out the different shades and colors of others.

Being biracial certainly assures a journey. My comfort with owning my identity didn't appear overnight. I struggled under the pressure to choose a single identity: as Black or as a Mexican. My Black friends would say, "You're a Mexican!" while my Mexican friends said, "You're Black!" White folks labeled me Black. I never neatly fit into the "boxes" of others. Only later in life did I decide that I am not obligated to "choose sides" or pick one identity over another. To honor my parents, I now identify as Afro-Mexican, and I take deep pride in both heritages. It *is* who I am.

My comfort with owning my identity didn't appear overnight… I never neatly fit into the "boxes" of others.

In the second grade, in the early 1990s, I remember having to mark my ethnicity on a standardized test. The presented choices: African American, Native American, Hispanic, and non-*Latino* White. I raised my hand.

"Hey, Miss! What should I write if I'm two of these: Black and Mexican?"

"Devin, don't be silly," she said. "You're a Negro."

I remember the embarrassment of her calling me that in front of the entire class. It's one of my earliest memories of being viewed differently as a result of my skin color.

Negative stereotypes abounded in our housing project, and they influenced my subconscious. At school, our discussions of Black history largely focused on the subject of slavery. It was awkward. My classmates would turn to me and say, "Man, I'm sorry." Even while I wondered why they looked at me, I was developing subconscious biases. My race and history, it seemed, added up to a mere footnote, summed up by slavery and Martin Luther King, Jr. Others were glorified: George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin. Christopher Columbus discovered America, and the pilgrims made friends with the Indians. History painted White men as courageous, kind and intelligent. Everyone else was secondary. Native Americans, for instance, were the Indian antagonists of cowboys, and needed to be yanked out of their homes, taught English, and converted to Christianity. We didn't learn about the struggles and contributions of other races and cultures. Our history, I learned, is a history of struggle.

My race and history, it seemed, added up to a mere footnote, summed up by slavery and Martin Luther King, Jr.

What we learned in school—good or bad—influenced my perceptions of race. The people I saw in movies and television also influenced me. As children, we're subjected to White supremacy. The messaging is so subconscious that we're hardly aware of it. The views of prejudiced friends, the racist remarks of strangers: The culmination of so many experiences shape our views on race.

As children, we're subjected to White supremacy.

It's easy to see trends of blatant racism. Before the killing of George Floyd came the murder of Trayvon Martin. Before Trayvon, the beating of Rodney King was captured on film and shared with the public. Before Rodney, the beatings endured during the Civil Rights movement made national news. As a young activist in the 1960s, my grandma endured such horrors. She talks about White waitresses spitting on her and in her coffee.

Perhaps the most blatant, unapologetic, in-your-face racism that I've witnessed comes from our U.S. President. His open, nonchalant prejudices float by as daily dog whistles. His support of neo-Nazis

and White supremacists, unbelievable and appalling, register as the most egregious, high-level racism I've ever seen.

I know the emotions that these experiences stirred in me: the feelings of inadequacy, unbelonging and overwhelm. Thanks to my family, I also know the opposites: resiliency, pride, grit and inspiration.

Kids, like sponges, soak up everything. No one is born to hate, or as a racist. Racism is a learned behavior passed from generation to generation—attitudes that must be dismantled and eradicated.

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As school board members, we possess the ability to shape the minds of future generations, helping them to be more inclusive, empathetic, loving and caring toward others. I don't take lightly the immense responsibility to dismantle toxic, racist thinking. We must lead courageously and be bold in our actions to eradicate racism.

Systemic racism runs deep, impacting every aspect of our lives: the lack of resources owned by our families, the places we live, our access to education and health care. It's one of this country's original sins. As school board members, we must do something about it.

My great, great, great grandfather, born into slavery and known by his slave name, Ambrose Henderson, was forced by his master in Mississippi to fight for the Confederacy during the Civil War. After the war granted him his freedom, he became one of the first African Americans to serve in the Mississippi House of Representatives. Five generations later, as a result of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, we've come a long way from slavery and Jim Crow laws, but we face a long way to go for my daughters to experience a nation free of racism. In fact, some of the things our grandparents fought for are now in danger of being dismantled. The fight continues. We can't become complacent because we've had a single African-American President. We must continue moving forward.

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Racism runs deep in our public education system, which was created for White children, not for people of color. As a result,

curriculum, the demographics of the educators in our classrooms, and the inequities of funding strategies perpetuate racism. The creation of charter schools and the school-to-prison pipeline exacerbate the problem. Designed to enforce opportunity and achievement gaps, public schools do exactly what they are supposed to do. We must understand and be comfortable with the fact that school board members serve racist institutions. Rather than allow this to bog us down, we should relish every opportunity to dismantle the systemic barriers that exist within our school systems.

We should expect inequitable educational outcomes—not because our students aren't good enough or without grit, but because our students aren't given the same opportunities and resources to reach their full potential. Our Black, *Latino* and Native-American students are some of the best and brightest in the nation, but they don't enjoy a level playing field. Huge disparities and inequities persist despite desegregation—hardly a saving grace. As school board members, it's within our "wheelhouse" to do something about these inequities.

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It's not enough to simply draw up an equity policy or to hire a person of color to lead conversations on diversity and inclusion. As school board members, we must begin by acknowledging that racism exists in our schools, and that systemic barriers hold back our students. Then we must commit ourselves to the anti-racist work of analyzing our districts, stripping them down, and looking at every aspect of operations: curriculum, staffing, nutrition, *et cetera*, in order to dismantle systemic barriers. We must prioritize the allocation of resources for anti-racist work.

You can't teach an old dog new tricks. If we're going to mitigate racism, we need to educate our kids from an early age. We need to hold conversations with them. We all know the greatest value comes from investing in kids at an early age; the same is true of our anti-racist efforts.

If we're going to mitigate racism, we need to educate our kids from an early age.

We need to ensure that our students benefit from teachers of color. It's no secret that a majority of our teachers are White and female. Despite their passion

for education, we do a disservice to our students if we don't surround them with many professionals who reflect their faces. Research shows that students perform better in the classroom when they learn from someone who looks like them.

We must also create pathways and pipelines for young leaders to be involved in every aspect of our society—especially as policymakers, so that they need not feel limited to the stereotype of sports and entertainment.

We should each ask ourselves if we do enough, and what else we might do, to ensure racial justice and to overcome the public health crisis of racism. As education leaders, do we give enough blood, sweat and tears to eradicating racism in our nation? Are we honoring the oath we took as school board members to uplift all children?

Lastly, it's not just up to us, people of color, to dismantle racism. I challenge our White brothers and sisters to join us in the work of dismantling racism and creating a more equitable society.

"There's No Room at the Table for Racism"

Angelann Flores
Director, California *Latino* School Boards Association
Stockton Unified School District Board of Education
Stockton, California

I see racism every day: on the news, and in our educational and judicial systems. I teach in a juvenile detention center where the majority of our detainees are students of color. I've always wondered why we don't examine the way they're treated in classrooms and other places *before* they end up in our judicial system. It's our responsibility to create change for them, so that the next generation doesn't suffer the same experiences.

The image of racism I carry from my childhood is of sitting on the floor watching White girls dance: When I was young, my dance teacher only chose White girls to perform at our assemblies, so they benefited from more practice time, while the rest of us, children of color, sat on the floor watching. It was frustrating, but I didn't have the words to express what I experienced. So I simply sat on my hands. I can no longer do that.

As a school board member, I take very seriously my responsibility to be the voice of my community and the students we serve. I say this all the time, at every meeting. When I speak about equity or the Black Lives Matter movement, others respond, "Thank you. Let's move on."

As a single mother of color, I often find myself passionately speaking up for children, and I find that our *Latino* passion is sometimes mistaken for aggression. As a result, people slander me as seeming unprofessional. They harass and bully me. Students would be disciplined if they sent the types of emails that these people send to my district. They mock me because I say, "We are responsible for children, and, if you're not here for the interests of *all* students, you need to go."

When I speak about equity or the Black Lives Matter movement, others respond, "Thank you. Let's move on."

Still I persist. I advocate for what's best for children.

I grew up in a neighborhood that taught me to hit back when struck, but I've learned as an adult that the best way to "hit back" requires a knowledgeable, mature, respectful and professional personality. Michelle Obama's message about going high when others go low especially resonates with me.

I remain optimistic that working together we can make a difference. We had a Black President, and he and his wife were amazing. We also have a number of leaders who step up and speak out against racism. We must add our voices to theirs. Now that we're "at the table," our conversations must examine race and racism. I'm done talking. It's time for action!

As school board members, we best confront racism through our policymaking. Many educational policies disproportionately disadvantage people of color. As elected officials, we have the ability to spotlight to the administrators of our educational, judicial and government systems—and if they don't support and encourage equity efforts, they should move on. Anyone not working for the best interests of our students has to go.

As school board members, we best confront racism through our policymaking.

As school board members, we need to fund equity and anti-racist efforts. Because we still have a lot of important work to do, we need to create a movement to change policy. Instead of disciplining our students and sending them into the judicial system, we need to fund the necessary wraparound and mental health services for them, to address the deficits in the environments in which they're raised. White folks don't like to acknowledge White privilege. They don't understand the number of our children who grow up with domestic violence. It's hard to focus on what happened in 1900 when your mom was just beaten last night. Imagine the difference we could make if we shaped policy and channeled funding toward ensuring that our students have access to top mental health professionals and resources!

It's hard to focus on what happened in 1900 when your mom was just beaten last night.

"Our Educational Model is Broken"

Ray A. Freeman
Steering Committee Member, Council of Urban Boards of Education
Warrensville Heights City School District Board of Education
Warrensville Heights, Ohio

I'm a Black male, born just before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Unable to enroll in a White college, my mother graduated from an all-Black college in the 1940s. Before that, she graduated from a Negro High School in West Virginia—the actual name of the school!

As a little boy, I remember seeing some of the civil rights struggles filmed at that time, showing how our people were beaten, attacked by dogs, and sprayed with hoses. Those events made a strong impression on me.

When I was ten years old, I heard the altercations between my father and some White neighbors who didn't want me to play with their kids, or to come over to their houses. This hurt.

When shopping for shoes in the late 1970s, I asked for a certain pair. The clerk told me the store didn't carry them—but while I was in there, they sold that same pair to a White customer.

When I was young, my school was 50% African-American and 40% Mexican-American. Then a shift took place around ninth grade, when more White students started coming into the district. Because I played sports and was a good student, I was afforded opportunities that many of my Black and Brown friends didn't enjoy. I was also raised in a two-parent household, which was rare among my friends.

Still I had to overcome a lot of barriers—beginning with getting Whites to see me as equal to them. That's something they didn't offer. We've slightly turned the dial on education, but many Whites do not think that Black and Brown children can accomplish great things or achieve the same heights. By the time I was a senior, I was becoming a great football player. White people began to respect me—and to want to be around me. Some even asked for autographs. Our educational model wasn't geared to Black and Brown children. We

Our educational model wasn't geared to Black and Brown children.

didn't have teachers telling us to come after class with questions. If we didn't understand the lesson in class, we were overlooked. For 150 years, our history books didn't speak at all of important accomplishments by Blacks and African Americans. Now we find all sorts of great Black and Brown teachers and leaders who shine a light on this. I'm still learning about the contributions of Black Americans to this nation!

For 150 years, our history books didn't speak at all of important accomplishments by Blacks and African Americans.

I remember hearing that America is "the land of the free," but thinking this was not for me and my friends. I knew I would have to do more than any White person to be a successful Black man in America. It became a sort of game: Am I wearing the right shoes? Do I have the right tie? Am I saying the right things? Am I speaking the language they understand? We play games like that in education and in business.

When I reflect on my own high school education, I realize that we learned a lot about Black history and other areas, but, unlike others, we didn't learn about finance, about how to actually obtain money, or about how to have a bank account and pay bills—practical skills that would help us create real change for ourselves, our families and our community. By the time I became a senior, I wanted to know the things my teachers *weren't* teaching me! They would come to the end of the class and say, "That's all for today"—and I wouldn't settle for that. I needed to learn more!

Fortunately, I had great African-American and *Latino* educators, who shared with me their personal experiences and what they went through to become public school educators. They alerted me to the challenges I would face after graduation. During my sophomore year in college, my Black History professor, Mr. Jones, invited Bobby Seale and Huey Newton of the Black Panthers to speak to us. He brought them from Oakland, California, to Colorado, so that we could spend the weekend with them and hear their stories. They told us how they started food drives and fed kids in Oakland. I learned a lot from those two gentlemen.

I'm well aware that we need to adjust our education model for Black and Brown students in America. We would do well to begin by examining our implicit biases. Unconscious of their implicit biases, many people do not notice their own stereotypes.

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Implicit bias impacts the children in my school district and throughout the state of Ohio. We see this especially in the way that district police treat students. Some officers won't even allow 15-year-olds to explain their actions! It's as if our police lash out at students, simply in resentment of being required to respond to a disturbance. I see implicit bias in my neighborhood, too. The other day, a neighbor questioned two young, Black males in front of his home, seemingly superimposing a personal interpretation on their presence in the neighborhood.

I sometimes wonder whether White people know what Black and Brown children go through. They'll never be able to walk in a Black or Brown child's shoes, but it is necessary that they know the situations faced by the students in our public schools. Sometimes our students don't eat at night, or they can't sleep. Some of them face domestic violence at home. The last thing we should do is assume that, "they're normal students; they'll be fine."

We maintain food pantries at our schools because, without them, some of our students wouldn't eat. Single-parent households try to survive on few resources. They do the best they can on a limited income. We need to do a better job of telling the stories of Black and Brown students and parents.

Our educational model is broken and doesn't provide our children an equitable education. We've imposed the same educational model for generations, despite its failure to generate equity. It's time for a new model.

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Here in Ohio, we know that our state curriculum and tests do not align with the gifts and experiences of our Black and Brown children. I remember, for instance, reading a question about log cabins on a state test for eighth graders: Many Black and Brown children cannot identify with that. Do educators draw from the students' realities when they design the curriculum and tests for our students?

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When they're first elected, most school board members want to make a difference. Then they see how difficult it is to create good governance and to change policies to help Black and Brown children. We can't sit on the sidelines and hope that change will come. We have to raise our hands and stand up and say, "If this is what's happening in education and in our local public schools, I want to be part of the change! I want to advocate for our kids! I want to look at—and change—their curriculum!"

We have to step outside our comfort zones and do more. We have to look at the children who are the next generation, and we need to do everything possible to ensure equity in their education.

We must initiate conversations on these topics in our boardrooms and in the halls of Congress. We need to insist that our Black and Brown children receive the education they need. The difference we need to make is political. We need to elect people who understand that we need smart, educated Black and Brown boys and girls who are committed to making a difference in their communities. That's the tune that I'm tooting as I try to be a Pied Piper in Ohio for a better life and future for our students!

Everyone who touches or helps a child must become involved in the solution.

Everyone who touches or helps a child must become involved in the solution. It's going to take all of us. President Obama drew groups of people together: Blacks, Whites, *Latinos*, Asians—everyone with the hope and dream of changing our world. We need to apply the same with education.

Thanks to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and all those brave people who were hit with bricks, sprayed with water hoses, and attacked by

dogs, we're maybe a quarter of the way in our fight for civil rights. Now we have to ask ourselves how we'll achieve the other 75%. We need to talk, plan and be strategic. We need courageous conversations. Some White educators, congressmen and peers don't want to hear that. They don't want to hear the struggles of Black and Brown children. Sometimes, we need to be raw and uncut with people, to let them know what our children are going through. Until then, many of our Black and Brown children are not even close to achieving what other students are achieving. We're doing the best we can, and we have outstanding students across America, but we have 75% more to go.

To confront racism, school board members need to do their homework. They need to do their research. They need to be part of CUBE and our statewide and national organizations advocating for Black and Brown children. School board members need to be advocates who shine a light on inequities and who stand up and join the fight for public education!

If we're going to fight racism in education and in America, that fight begins in our public schools. We can't be quiet about it. We need to move the needle. We need courageous men and women who won't sit back and allow our model of education to stay the same. It has to change!

"A Pupil of Race and Racism"

Karla Guadalupe García
Director, Mexican American School Boards Association
Dallas Independent School District Board of Trustees
Dallas, Texas

The influence of race on our education system is undeniable. We are at a critical turning point where our solutions must go beyond making equal academic opportunities for students. Instead, we must focus on the core components of race in relation to perhaps the most complex and intersectional problem in America.

I identify as a *Latina* woman, but it took years to select that. For a long time, my understanding of race was limited to the five on the U.S. Census, where I self-identified as "other." I used to self-identify as Mexican-American, then as Hispanic—until I learned the history of the term. No one wants to be labeled without their consent. For me, *Latina* encompasses the language and culture of immigrants from Latin America, like my parents, so now I respond to the question of ethnicity with *Latina*.

One of my first experiences of racism occurred at a doctor's office, where no one on staff could communicate with my Spanish-speaking mother. At six years old, I sensed we were being treated differently, that our need for a translator was an inconvenience, and that receiving medical and dental services was going to be more difficult than it had to be. Fortunately, bilingual secretaries or patients stepped in to selflessly assist at times. They became a bridge between native and non-native speakers. As I learned more English, I, too, began translating for my parents and other Spanish speakers.

At home, the descriptions I heard of Mexican immigrants were "hardworking," "providers" and "dreamers." We were a people working toward something greater than ourselves: the American dream—a security and freedom unknown to my parents growing up in rural Mexico. For other groups, the stereotypes were less positive. Racial biases plagued Black families in my neighborhood and seeped into our classrooms. As early as elementary school, I was exposed to racial stereotypes directed at my Black peers by teachers who yelled,

"If you keep acting this way, you'll end up in jail—just like your other family members!" Implicitly, adults taught me to believe that Black people were inclined to behaviors and attitudes different than our own, and that *Latinos* could only become essential workers. Like my parents, who worked in construction and fast food, I heard about other possibilities but could not imagine them for myself at the time. Many of the Black Americans in our neighborhood held administrative roles, but each group seemed to reinforce a racial, White-supremacist hierarchy where the color of your skin, rather than hard work, determined your outcomes. The matter of race, so embedded in our *Latino* homes, experiences and culture, attributed to light-skinned *Latinos* attaining more excellence and higher achievement.

Fortunately, I attended a magnet school for girls, which exposed me to opportunities, such as summer camp and college campus visits—experiences not enjoyed by other family members or neighborhood children. I interacted positively with Black and White students. We became friends who respected our cultural differences. In college, though, I experienced nothing short of a cultural shock: In contrast to summer camp, the devastating lack of students who looked like me suggested I wouldn't thrive in higher education. Few students came from my socioeconomic background, and, in an attempt to discover a sense of belonging, I spiraled into an identity crisis. Fortunately, I learned a history untold by my high school textbooks and I enjoyed personal experiences with young people unlike myself, affording me the opportunity to deconstruct race as a human creation, rather than as a standing, hierarchical truth. Long before they arrive at college, it's imperative that our students understand that race is a social construct.

Race and racism influence how we view ourselves, others, and the world.

Race and racism influence how we view ourselves, others, and the world. Without context, this can leave us feeling betrayed by, distrustful of, and even angered at the ideals of Lady Liberty in the *Latino* community. Asking for help is often hard to do, so when we meet racism while seeking assistance and resources, we begin to distrust others. In contrast, a single positive experience can reshape a worldview.

I hope that our stories ignite conversations they will inspire compassion and open-mindedness, so that our children can grow up without reliving our negative experiences. More people have to understand why our communities, schools, and workforce look the way they do. The Black Lives Matter movement provides a perfect example of our society's collective consciousness on race and racism, by moving us in a direction that the Civil Rights movement continues to this day.

Today's educational system is a reflection of our society's historic and living racist biases. Labeled, marginalized, and set up in this way, students maintain the *status quo* history attached to their race. Designed for segregation, our classrooms enable growth for some and inhibit it for others. School boards must determine why certain students "succeed" by standardized metrics, while others don't. They need to examine the significant "whitewashing" of textbooks, which undermines Black and Brown students.

Today's educational system is a reflection of our society's historic and living racist biases.

To confront racism, we must engage in self-reflection, but also in collective rejection of the systemic inequity in our schools. Such actions will display the ugly truth of racism in our schools. We need people to share their stories, so that we can get to work and start changing the system. It's imperative that every school board and superintendent examine racism through a historical lens, to intimately understand its influence on inequity in our schools. We must identify the policies that create equity and change those that maintain the *status quo* for Mexican Americans. We need to invite more voices to the table and into the decision-making process, inclusive of all the features that have kept so many from it. To heal, we need acknowledgement and inclusivity. As diverse voices enter the conversation, the *status quo* bends.

We need to invite more voices to the table and into the decision-making process.

Sixty years after the Civil Rights movement, we no longer need to hesitate to explore and expand. I'm hopeful that the conversation on race and racism will continue to become more enlightened, especially for our children and students. If we can truly get it right in our schools, we'll prepare our students to be agents of change in higher education, the workforce, and the world we inhabit.

"Our Social Norms of Equity Are Based on Racism"

Bill Graupp
President, Oregon School Board Members of Color Caucus
North Marion School District 15 Board of Directors
Aurora, Oregon

I'm reasonably comfortable talking about race and racism, though I'll admit I'm not always comfortable confronting people of privilege who deny exhibiting racist behaviors.

I am Asian-American. Although my father was an American, my values, morals and biases come from my mother, who emigrated from Japan at age 25. She raised me as a single mother of five children. After my father's leaving, when I was four years old, my mother, my siblings and I moved to a housing project in Reading, Pennsylvania, where 90% of the residents were low-income people of color. When we walked outside the housing project, people identified us by color, with clearly-biased words. Racist stereotypes also existed among residents of the housing project. Color defined social placement. Residents treated White-skinned Puerto Ricans better than their family members with darker complexions, and better than Haitians or Dominicans. Being Asian certainly made us unique, as we intermingled with others and learned to survive.

Color defined social placement.

My earliest memory of overt racism directed towards me came from my eight-grade geography teacher. When my friend asked why Glenside, our housing project, did not appear in a city map that our teacher created, he replied, "Nobody cares where Avenue A is." My address was 553 Avenue A. At that moment, I determined to become relevant—though I admit I sometimes mistook "relevance" with being against society.

In the 1970s, I attended college in Philadelphia during MOVE, the Black liberation movement. It ended a few years later, when the police burned down a city block. My residence was a few blocks from their compound, and we watched them through the police barricades. My older brother engaged in deep discussions on their plight. Corruption

filled Philadelphia during the previous decades, and police notoriously beat people before asking questions. Meanwhile, as an engineering student, I mostly mingled with and tried to find ways to be accepted by White students.

More recently, two board members of color in our school district drafted a statement on solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Their description of racial justice and opposition to systemic racism in education became controversial. Other members objected to the wording. They didn't wish to align themselves with the protests in Portland, now made notorious by violence and the claims of our U.S. President, who implied that the violence originated with people of color.

Change comes too slowly to this nation, but we can learn many valuable lessons from history. Change often begins with protests and anguished demands for the attention of those who defend the *status quo*. Often there is violence. In the end, though, meaningful discussion by reasonable people provides the path toward lasting change.

Change comes too slowly to this nation, but we can learn many valuable lessons from history.

During the last 155 years, our country made numerous moves forward and backward. The net effect leaves us better off than previous generations, but certainly not far enough ahead. We continue to systemically segregate. We see a long way to go before we can speak of racism as a historical period, rather than as the current issue. During the last 100 years, reformers have pointed out both peacefully and violently that our systems of governance embody systemic racial bias. Systemic injustice remains built into our judicial system and compounded by the same injustice in our Caucasian-based education system. The data are clear: The historical-European aspect of our education curriculum often prevents us from addressing our embarrassingly-cruel history, leading students to conclude that only the White perspective is valued. This, in turn, engenders and perpetuates implicit bias toward non-White students—all based on the color of one's skin, language, religion, or gender.

We see a long way to go before we can speak of racism as a historical period, rather than as the current issue.

Education cannot be equitable for all students as long as our social norms of equity anchor in racism. Equitable educational outcomes are also impeded by such factors as socio-economic status, lack of health care, homelessness, and lack of access to opportunity. The absence of diversity among our education professionals also contributes to our students' inability to see skin color as a non-factor in their career destinies.

As school board members, we must bring updated historical perspectives into the curriculum of our schools. It's not harmful for students to learn about genocide, mass incarceration, war, and corrupt government behaviors. As George Santayana said, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

It's not harmful for students to learn about genocide, mass incarceration, war, and corrupt government behaviors.

Instead of broad statements, like "closing the achievement gap," we must demand accountability of our superintendents through plans and metrics for such areas as math/reading/science standards, participation in Advanced Placement, dual-credit courses, and disaggregated data on expulsions and suspension.

We need to hire accomplished leaders with culturally-diverse backgrounds. We can't hire staff members just because they are people of color; this tokenism limits opportunity. Instead, we need to hire successful individuals who happen to be minorities. This concept scales to create more great leaders of color with each generation. We must try to ensure that the racial makeup of staff and administration mirrors parity with community demographics. If educators of color will not interview in our districts, we should learn why and work to change that.

We must try to ensure that the racial makeup of staff & administration mirrors parity with community demographics.

We must insist that students and employees have teaching and training in implicit and systemic bias, including examples from U.S. history. We must mentor young leaders of color, to get them successfully through their early years—not only in their education, but also prepared for their career paths. In order to lead the charge

and dismantle systemic racism, young leaders must break through systemic barriers.

I sometimes wonder how many more generations of social commitment and encouragement will be necessary before we actually break the cycle of racially-based low expectations. We need to mentor all students—and adults—to seek high expectations. The cycle of low expectations traps students; it takes the adults in their lives to extract them.

We need to mentor all students – and adults – to seek high expectations.

Change is coming—but at a painfully-slow pace. Many diverse people demand change now, but we don't see a great leader like John Lewis or Martin Luther King, Jr. serving as a unifying voice, bringing to the table multi-generational, multi-racial, multi-cultural people with purpose and goals.

Let's educate people about the presence of racism throughout human history and work toward social advancement for all!

"No One Wants to be Discriminated Against"

Ricardo Gutiérrez
Director, Mexican American School Boards Association
Region 1 Education Service Center Board of Directors
Río Grande City, Texas

As a young girl, my mother came to the United States from Mexico. Educated here, she taught me not to discriminate. My parents instilled in me the belief that we are all created equal by God—that I wasn't any better than others, regardless of their nationality or color, and that others weren't any better than me. They modeled this by not discriminating against anyone. Nor did they let anyone discriminate against us. They also led us to understand that if we were not going to be discriminated against, we had to become educated and prove ourselves.

I never faced racism in the *Río Grande* Valley, where I grew up. I first experienced racism as a student at Texas A&I University in Kingsville in the 1960s. I dated an Anglo-American girl. Her dorm mother called her in to tell her, "You can't hang around or date those kinds of people. They have their own kind, and we have ours." That really upset me! At the time, I was the first Mexican-American senior class president in the university's history. I called my dad and my uncle, who were very politically-active. We went before the Board of Regents, and the chancellor reprimanded the dorm mother—but we were not happy. It upset me to be discriminated against. I didn't want anyone else to experience what I went through.

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When I studied at Texas A&I, there were no Mexican Americans or people of color among the administrators there. Later, when Governors Briscoe and Clements appointed me to the university's Board of Regents for 12 years, we created opportunities for many people in our community. We saw Mexican Americans serve as administrators, presidents and chancellors. We provided those

opportunities to everyone. It was gratifying to chair that board for eight of those years of great change.

Many great people in our Mexican-American community have earned degrees. I sometimes wonder if those who discriminate against us resent the way in which we've proven ourselves, or perhaps they feel threatened by Blacks and Mexican Americans who achieve upward mobility.

I live about one mile from the U.S./Mexico border, and I've experienced racism at meetings, conventions and seminars outside the *Río Grande* Valley. Some people look at me as if to say, "Where do you come from? What are you doing here?" When I tell them I'm from Texas, they'll sometimes reply, "Really? You're not from Mexico?" Their words sometimes make me feel like an immigrant. They know better. They know that we're Mexican Americans, that we're Texans, that we're American citizens, but they act as if we're not part of this country.

There's more police brutality perpetrated against Mexican Americans, Blacks, and Indigenous people simply because of their color. We frequently see it on national television. People are dying because of racism. It's wrong, and that's why people protest.

People are dying because of racism.

Similar mistreatment of undocumented Mexican Americans denies many of their international right to seek asylum. People also come here for a better living. I sympathize with them, because my mother came from Mexico.

The discrimination in our country intensifies and weakens depending on political issues. In the 1920s and 1930s, Mexican Americans and Blacks were barred from going to East Texas or West Texas. Interracial marriage is no longer illegal, and many people now accept it. I have Anglo relatives and relatives from the north; I treat them all as I treat my own kids. If everyone would accept that we're all created equal, and if everyone would treat everybody equally, we would have a better nation.

As school board members and educational leaders, we need to choose the best candidates, the most qualified people for our top leadership positions, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or nationality. We have a lot of Mexican-American leaders out there, who can do as good a job as anybody else. One day we're going to have a Mexican-American governor in Texas.

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The way to create change does not happen by rioting or going to rallies, but by proving to ourselves and others—that we're as good as anyone else—and by sharing with others the golden opportunities they deserve.

"We Have to Be the Example"

Xavier Herrera
Secretary, Mexican American School Boards Association
Stafford Municipal School District Board of Trustees
Stafford, Texas

I and my entire family identify as Mexican-American. We trace our heritage back to when Texas existed as a part of Mexico. Born and raised in Houston's East End/Second Ward, which recorded a population over 90% Hispanic, everyone there pretty much looked like me, and I did not experience racism. Family and community members emphasized the values of hard work, love for family, and dedication to community.

In my early teens, I attended Sharpstown Middle School, which educated quite a few Anglos and African Americans. Because I was accustomed to seeing *Latino* students and teachers, this was my first experience of cultural shock. Fortunately, I interacted well with students of other ethnic and racial backgrounds, so I enjoyed relationships across racial lines. I easily swayed in and out of the groups of "preps," athletes, skaters, and more studious learners.

I can only remember a handful of negative experiences with students of other communities and ethnicities. Once called a "wetback," an insinuation that I was subpar, I felt hurt and angry, but I also knew that I faced a choice: I could curse the person out and pick a fight—but then I would be suspended or expelled and have issues at home—or I could learn from that situation and improve myself. I'm very, very sorry when children have to deal with similar situations without guidance. I was lucky. My uncle became a tremendous role model, an example for me during tough times like that.

I often joke that I'm the product of a one-week stand: My father was with my mother for one week before he left her—then my uncle stood in as my mentor and father-figure. He was the first person of color in the Houston Mayor's Office. He eventually rose to become the first Hispanic fire marshal, then the first person of color to be fire chief in Houston. Through all that, he reminded me of certain things. Because of him, I've been blessed to know a good amount of folks,

including elected officials and community leaders, whom I could call upon in difficult times.

On another occasion, a stranger surprised me by telling me to "go back to where [I] came from." Confused, I wondered, "I should go back to the East End?" Then it dawned on me: I was born and raised in Texas, but he was telling me to go across the border!

As a result of these experience, I've always believed that people should be treated equally and fairly. I try never to fall into stereotypes or to treat others in ways that I don't want to be treated. I don't appreciate insinuations, and I only want to be judged for the person that I am—not for the stereotypes sometimes yelled at us.

Now I'm a balding, overweight Hispanic and recognize that we all are different, but we all can bring something to the table in our household, community and place of employment. We should always seek the positives in people and recognize the possibilities to learn from one another. We must find a way to respect others and hope for reciprocity. Only then will we be able to move our community forward with equity.

We all can bring something to the table.

As I grew up, I sought to emulate leaders and models like César Chávez, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. They inspired me to strive for the betterment of our communities with strategies proven useful in the past, rather than getting involved in the negative back-and-forth that only leads to more harm. We don't need to "go low." Even when the negative is thrust upon us, we can still hold our heads high and do something positive and productive. César Chávez provided an example of this by mobilizing people to peacefully protest against their working conditions. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. undertook similar strategies. They worked for equal rights, voting rights, and respect. I'm unable to believe they would support the violence we've witnessed during recent weeks and months across the nation. The rallies and fights following the death of George Floyd divided our community. Chávez, Gandhi and King urged us to find other, more-

Even when the negative is thrust upon us, we can still hold our heads high and do something positive and productive.

productive ways to address such grave injustices. I still hold hope that justice will prevail. It feels as if we took a step or two backward, risking our families, our homes, our communities, and well-being.

I still hold hope that justice will prevail.

We should strive to be the example. When people spew hateful, racist comments, we must reject the urge to retaliate with a fight. Instead, we earn a long-range gain by improving ourselves academically and professionally, and by helping ourselves and others reach for higher levels.

Historically, the South can be criticized for maintaining negative attitudes about communities of color. Our Hispanic community remembers such crimes as the Moody Park Riots of 1978, which exploded after the murder of Joe Campos Torres, a veteran beaten and killed by Houston police officers. I remember the anger I felt as a child upon seeing the news coverage of that atrocity.

With the passage of civil rights legislation, we've come a long way since the 1950s and 1960s—but fifty to seventy years later, we still don't see or hear stories about reported successes. Minority communities must insist that our stories become part of students' textbooks and that our teachers speak about those realities. Our principals and administrators, too, must remain supportive of this work.

When it comes to our educational systems, we hold an obligation to listen more attentively to the values of our communities. If we did so, we'd likely see a multiplication of courses in Mexican American Studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies, and LGBT Studies. Early rejection of these American histories resulted from bias, and we now recognize that we must bring these perspectives to the table. We also need more people of color in leadership positions. As school board members, we can influence this if such measures become part of our scorecards for the evaluation of our superintendents.

The only way we'll effectively confront the evil of racism comes through conversation. Imagine for a moment that you and I share the same workplace, and that I always finish the coffee from the breakroom without putting on another pot of coffee. That would "burn" you. Whether you tell me or not, you'll have negative thoughts about me. Unless you tell me, though, I might not be aware

of my actions. We need to do the same with race and racism. We need to have honest conversations on how people's words and actions affect us. These won't be easy, comfortable conversations, but that's the only way that we'll be able to address some of the problems we face.

We need to have honest conversations on how people's words and actions affect us.

Let's build on the progress that has been made by those who've gone before us. Let's continue the positive, forward motion of improving our lives and the lives of individuals, families and communities!

"Our House is on Fire"

Berdetta Hodge
Vice President, Arizona School Boards Association Black Alliance
Tempe Union High School District Governing Board
Tempe, Arizona

Racism is pervasive. It is in our schools. It is in our workplaces. It is in our world. Our kids experience it every day, and if we do not discuss it, we will never agree on how to defeat it. If we try to hide racism, or if we are afraid to talk about it, we are part of the problem.

If we try to hide racism, or if we are afraid to talk about it, we are part of the problem.

I am proud to be a Black woman raised by Black parents, and proud to be a mom to two Black sons. My mother's family is from South Carolina. My father's is from Mississippi.

A school picture taken in third grade captures one of my earliest memories of being treated differently because of the color of my skin. The photographer fussed because the three Black girls in the class were standing together. He implied that we should be split up for the picture to look good. We had to "blend in." I still have that photo, and the three of us talk about that experience to this day.

I'm dark-skinned, so I saw firsthand how people treated the darkest Black girls differently. Unfairly. The fair-skinned girls were always seen as better or prettier than others. My dark-skinned peers were suspended more often than others, and I was taught that Black girls had to be tough. We don't cry. If I ever argued with a White girl, the teacher would rush in, and ask her, "Why are you crying? Is everything O.K.?" Then the teacher would glare at me and ask, "What did you do?" Those microaggressions hurt, but they fueled my decision to serve on the school board and eradicate racism from our schools.

I recall once bravely announcing to my class that I wanted to be the President of the United States. The words out of my teacher's mouth would never have been said to a White peer: "There's not much of a chance that you'll ever become president—not in your lifetime or

mine." The message rang clear: Because I was a Black girl, there was no chance that I would ever become President.

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Arizona held out and was one of the last states in the nation to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. I was seventeen years old when we fought for that day here. We peacefully marched in honor of a man who embodied peace and harmony in the face of racist bombings against Black America. White people clutching rocks and glass bottles called us niggers. Believe me when I say that racism is real.

I've witnessed a lot of blatant racism in my life. When I was first running for office, I was told I couldn't win if I put my face on campaign signs or literature. "The people can't know you're Black!" Those words struck deep. It meant that Black people, even in the 21st century, cannot run for office.

As a Black girl, I felt I was always a few steps behind everyone else. Clearly, I had to work twice as hard and be twice as smart to achieve as much as my peers. I still feel that African-American women don't get the same respect and credit as others, which may explain why, in 2016, I became the first African-American woman to be elected to public office in Tempe, a city home to one of America's biggest universities.

Until now, African-American women have never been front-and-center in America. Now that there are Black women leading in business, entertainment, academia, and politics, I want to hold open the door for the next generation of women who won't have to be passengers, take a second seat, or temper their passions. They can be first chair. They can be the drivers. They can be the leaders. They can make a difference in this world!

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I recall a positive experience I had as a result of my race. As a senior in high school, I sat with Rosa Parks and Maya Angelou at a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day breakfast. Maya asked me, "What do you want to do with your life?" I was 17 years old, and I didn't have a clue. She counseled me to craft a plan for myself, saying, "A sister will always

know how to get a job, but the sister who knows *why* will always be her boss!" Maya's wisdom resonated with me. Since then, I have focused on the "why." Why am I here? Why is service important to me? Why should I run for office?

While visiting a school, I once saw a teacher questioning students in her classroom about an object missing from her purse. She looked at the Black boys in the classroom first. I asked her afterward why she did that. "They always give me trouble," she said, admitting, though, that they had never stolen anything from her. I pointed out that her words and actions implied that Black boys steal, lie and cheat. "That's not what I meant," she said. It was exactly what she meant. It later came to light that none of those boys stole anything from her purse. I could share a million similar stories.

To ensure equity and inclusion in our school districts, we must have a seat at the table. We need to be part of the conversation. We need to represent our communities. I am the first Black person to represent minorities on my local board and to point out injustices.

We need to be part of the conversation. We need to represent our communities.

Racism won't disappear until we change the way people think—and we won't do that with a single policy or a single conversation. This requires building coalitions and getting others to acknowledge our struggle over time. Many school districts still fail to acknowledge that racism exists in their schools. As school board members, we are obligated to face this. We must also mandate that others face it as well.

When George Floyd was murdered, we marched with our high school students. A community leader spoke at the Black Lives Matter event, not realizing how he showed blatant disrespect for the event when he stated that *all* lives matter. We understand that all lives matter, but African Americans are the ones being killed every day. We're in the midst of a crisis. Our house is on fire—and we need the fire department racing in the direction of *our* house, not in the direction of *all* houses.

We continue to fight for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream, but we're nowhere near the Promised Land of which he spoke.

Very little has changed in the last fifty years. We continue to fight for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream, but we're nowhere near the Promised Land of which he spoke. We have traveled a long way, but many miles remain. Our President didn't attend the memorial for Congressman John Lewis, one of our most respected leaders who fought racism for over 60 years. We have yet to put the right people in positions of power at all levels. Think of the lessons our kids will take from our President clearing protesters and threatening Black officials—especially if we fail to call his racism what it is.

We must adopt proactive strategies, not merely reactive ones. We need to plan. We need to think, for instance, of how to work with the police before another Black man is killed on our streets or before another Black woman loses her life in her home. We cannot become complacent until our kids can wear hoodies without fear of being killed by police, or until we've ended the pre-school-to-prison pipeline. Trends start at young ages: I know one African-American girl who was suspended 22 times in kindergarten—she has ADHD. Her teachers didn't see a person; they simply saw a problem. You can imagine why our students sometimes feel defeated and voiceless.

We cannot become complacent until our kids can wear hoodies without fear of being killed by police.

Perhaps the most poignant examples of the ways in which racism is perpetuated by our education system today are through high-stakes testing and suspensions. The language of high-stakes tests is geared toward Caucasian students, and not everyone reads the same words the same way. Also, until we fix the way we discipline students, African-American children will miss far more instructional hours than White children will. It's not fair: A Caucasian student can make the same mistake as a Black student, but not be punished with the same penalty.

We have to keep fighting—not just when someone is shot or killed. We have to keep talking about the need to dismantle the racial caste system in this country. We need to have conversations with our elected officials at all levels, from our city councilors and chiefs of police, to our congressmen and senators.

I wonder why some people believe that others should be treated differently because of the color of their skin, as if they have a say in

that matter at birth! It is appalling that, in the 21st century, we continue to judge people on their race, religion, or sexuality—all things that we are born into.

I conclude with a quote that resonates with me: "Your fingerprints never fade from the lives you touch." Think of the "fingerprints" left by John Lewis, Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou and so many others. They have not faded over time. When I lost my first race in 2014 by less than one percent, I was discouraged, but members of our Black Student Union encouraged me, saying I touched them deeply and that I was effectively their Michelle Obama. "If you can get elected in Arizona," they said, "it will make us feel like we can do anything, even be President." I ran again, and I won. I cannot touch everyone's life, but I can touch the lives of those young people around me, leaving thousands of "fingerprints" that will change this world. You can, too. Let's face racism head-on, so that our granddaughters' daughters won't have to hold back their tears, hide their faces, or reserve their passions.

I cannot touch everyone's life,
but I can touch the lives
of those young people around me,
leaving thousands of "fingerprints"
that will change this world.

"Finding Your Voice Within the Journey"

Ty G. Jones
President, Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members
Steering Committee Member, Council of Urban Boards of Education
Lancaster Independent School District Board of Trustees
Lancaster, Texas

Growing up in the 1970s and spending many of those summers with my grandmother helped to shape my views. Many of her days consisted of working in the fields. My age did not permit me to actively participate; however, I was present, I participated when I could, and I witnessed the work and interactions. Those experiences, along with educational opportunities and various other experiences, have collectively allowed me to self-identify as African-American.

My grandmother felt proud to be Black, and so did I. The majority of those in the United States continued to utilize the race of "Black" on applications and other documents. However, as I was exposed to varying perspectives and began to research more, I began to self-identify as African-American, because that term links to the home of my ancestors.

During my elementary school years, I mostly studied with other students from my community who were of the same socio-economic status. During those years, I encountered only a handful of people from races outside of my own. There was a White gentleman who visited our house to collect insurance payments, our neighborhood ice cream man, our principal, librarian, a few teachers and fewer students. I had several *Latinx* classmates, but no *Latinx* teachers.

I learned about race through reading. Black History Month highlighted the accomplishments of African Americans. For the month, we researched and did book reports about people from our own culture and race, but, outside of that, identifying people of our race who excelled—except in sports—remained difficult. I felt different about Black History

I felt different about Black History Month at the time—and recognized the symbolism in receiving the shortest month of the year.

Month at the time—and recognized the symbolism in receiving the shortest month of the year.

Middle school offered more diversity and provided a first-hand view of the disparities amongst students, but it also provided an opportunity for us to learn from each other. The experience influenced how I thought about and intermingled with people from different races. Interacting with diverse populations allowed me to learn about myself through them. I attended the middle school's academy, which included about 300 students in a separate wing of the campus. We shared lunch periods and participated in extracurricular activities with non-academy students. We were introduced to various languages—Latin, Greek, French and Spanish—which allowed each of us to learn about different cultures, comparing, contrasting and dialoguing with all of them. The interactions highlighted differences and similarities that allowed me to appreciate those years and how they truly influenced and contributed to the person I am.

I attended three high schools: one of the first and largest magnet schools, a business-centered magnet, and a predominantly African-American high school. Each of these experiences provided various views related to race. I acquired the ability to listen to lectures and learn from Asa Hilliard, III, who educated us about the contributions of Africans to America. The information he shared had not been introduced during my previous education. It inspired me to learn more about African contributions to America. During my junior year, as a member of the mathematics cluster, I was introduced to mathematical concepts that originated in Africa and influenced internationally. These experiences incited me to learn more—for the pure gratification of knowing that we are a great people!

For most of my life, I have been subjected to various forms of racism. I have been treated differently by store clerks and waitstaff, denied opportunities, and presented with unfavorable options. Stereotypes and biases led to many of these instances. I decided to immediately address the biases I encounter, to educate those with whom I interact.

I decided to immediately address the biases I encounter, to educate those with whom I interact.

I recently visited a restaurant where the waiter provided better service to the people at other tables, than he did to my table. He was very attentive and proactive, providing them things that I had to ask for. He brought them unrequested refills. When I asked for takeout containers, he provided containers to the other table and failed to supply my request. At that point, I asked him to sit down. I made him aware that the quality of service he offered me differed from how he served other tables. Oblivious of his actions, he provided a defense, which allowed our conversation to deepen. His manager noticed him sitting with me, then later came over to inquire about the interaction. I asked the manager to sit down. I explained the entire situation. I think it's important that we educate people on the impact of racist words, actions and biases.

People hold biases which ultimately stem from ignorance and limit opportunities for others. That's sad. We must confront racism and biases, speak our truths to others, and tell them how their words and actions make us feel. I could have left the restaurant without saying anything. Instead, I let the waiter and management know that the situation didn't sit well with me for various reasons. We have to let people know when their behaviors or actions appear racist to us. The same must be done in our educational systems: quickly and effectively confronting those who commit acts against our students and/or staff.

People hold biases which ultimately stem from ignorance and limit opportunities for others.

As school board members, we must adopt policies to address racist actions and ensure they don't become recurring events. We must also educate our staff and students in the areas of equity, diversity and inclusion.

One way of increasing our personal awareness is to employ the 3 R's: read, relate, and reflect.

- We must read to learn as much as possible about ourselves, our heritage, and our culture. My grandmother always said, "Know your history." She shared with me what she learned through her schooling and experiences. Learning from Asa Hilliard, III allowed me to go further, to "leave" the North American continent and identify the great knowledge and wealth that my ancestors brought on the slave ships from Africa. We all need to know and embrace our history and the origins of our culture. We

should also read to learn about other cultures. Every person we meet provides something that we can build upon as we become more informed people.

- Next, our mission should call on us to relate. We shouldn't limit our reactions with others simply because they don't look like us. We benefit by building our relational capacity with those around us—both within and outside our sphere of influence. We also gain by learning and inquiring about their history, so that we can galvanize our joint efforts and have a stronger voice to create sustainable change in people. James Brown's song "Say It Loud" inspired my hashtag: #SayItLOUD. The hook of the song is, "Say it loud: I'm Black and I'm proud!" This level of pride is enjoyed by many people, cultures, races, sports teams, *alma maters* and so many others. We embrace and celebrate the differences of our sports teams and *alma maters*; however, those individuals are still treated with respect because those elements are only one aspect of their identity. The same benefit should be rendered to all. Building relational capacity helps locate commonalities in each encounter to which we can relate, build upon, and respect and appreciate the differences.
- Lastly, we need to always reflect. My participation in this project has provided me a chance to reflect on this topic of racism. It offered a challenging exercise which allowed me to enjoy discussions with my children, family and colleagues regarding their experiences and perspectives. Reflection is defined as having serious thought or consideration. We usually reflect when things go wrong: on what we did, and what we could have done differently to alter the outcome. We often fail to reflect when things are going great—on how we can replicate that. This type of reflection yields "best practices" that can be documented and tested. We must take the time to reflect, to ensure we do not repeat failed experiences. We should also share our successes and misfortunes. I share my stories and my testimony with others, so they can avoid the emotional trials I suffered.

We often fail to reflect when things are going great – on how we can replicate that.

With respect to civil rights, my experiences and opportunities became more bountiful than those of my grandmother and others of her generation. Unfortunately, many issues continue to exist and show us we still have much farther to go. In his work, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, Bryan Stevenson writes:

> We've been quick to celebrate the achievements of the Civil Rights movement and slow to recognize the damage done in that era. We have been unwilling to commit to a process of truth and reconciliation, in which people are allowed to give voice to the difficulties created by racial segregation, racial subordination, and marginalization.

Just as the murder of Emmett Till in 1955 galvanized the Civil Rights movement, the murder of George Floyd has spurred a movement to address police brutality, racism and accountability. The topics of equality, discrimination, and equity persist and must be a congruent part of the conversation. We have always hoped for a better tomorrow, and many have provided the light for us to follow.

As school board members, we should foster dialogue with our students, teachers and educational leaders, so that we can understand their concerns and institute policies to address them. Perhaps we can also implement quarterly teacher trainings or professional development on a systematic basis. We might create a department of equity, diversity and inclusion in our districts. We might do an audit or survey in the community, to assess feelings about race and racism. The bottom line is that we need to utilize our collective voices to implement systems so that future generations are not exposed or even presented with the events we have experienced. I challenge you to find a cause and support it to the fullest, to empower your brothers, sisters and neighbors to work toward sustainable change.

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I submit to you a few that have provided hope and inspiration for all, but particularly for those of African descent. Their perseverance and accomplishments provide footprints to follow as we embark on achieving our hearts' desires:

Barack Obama
Barrington Irving
Bessie Coleman
Charles Drew
Colin Powell
Daniel Hale Williams
Dennis Archer
Ella Fitzgerald
Fritz Pollard
George Washington Henderson
Guin Bluford
Gwendolyn Brooks
Hattie McDaniel
Henry O. Flipper
Hiram Rhodes Revels
Jack Johnson
Jackie Robinson
Jill Elaine Brown
Juanita Hall
Lois Jean White
Mathew Henson
Nat King Cole
Ralph J. Bunche
Robert Johnson
Ruth Simmons
Shirley Chisholm
Sydney Portier
The Tuskegee Airmen
Thurgood Marshall
Toni Morrison
Wendell Oliver Scott
William Pinkney

As each of the aforementioned provided us with hope, they also provided us the voice to speak loudly to the injustices we continue to experience by our fellow Americans. We must use our collective voices to ensure that each student and family we represent is provided an environment that will allow them to excel free from discrimination and inequitable conditions. It this way, we will realize the vision "that all men [and women] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

We must read, relate, reflect, and #SayItLOUD!

"Until We Change the Mindsets of People, We'll Never Overcome Racism"

Juanita Jordan
Steering Committee Member, Council of Urban Boards of Education
Prairie-Hills Elementary School District 144 Board of Education
Markham, Illinois

I identify as a Black American. I am not Colored. I am not a nigger or Negro. Neither am I Afro-American, which denotes that I am from Africa. I am not from Africa. I am from America. I am a Black American.

Race is a fact of life that I've always discussed with my children, so they can avoid some of the pitfalls experienced by people of color. The systemic racism that exists in this country requires these talks. Simply due to the fact that my children are Black, they are more likely to be stopped in a car for no reason. They must know how to comport themselves, so that they don't escalate the situation.

Simply due to the fact that my children are Black, they are more likely to be stopped in a car for no reason.

When I turned two years old, my parents became part of the great migration from Mississippi to Chicago. My father drove us back to Mississippi every year, to visit relatives. In Mississippi, I saw "Whites-only" bathrooms and drinking fountains; in Chicago, we didn't suffer such reminders that we lived a separate and unequal life. One year, on our way down to Mississippi, we stopped at a restaurant on the highway, because we were hungry. We were the only Blacks in the restaurant. The waitresses just waited on the White customers. After half an hour, we left the restaurant: They didn't ask us if we wanted water or bread—or anything! They did not acknowledge that we sat there. My father didn't say anything to draw attention to this; we didn't want to end up dead on the side of the road. Even at that age, I knew racism exists and is dangerous.

As a child in the 1950s and 1960s, I attended Chicago's segregated schools. Our overcrowded school decide to place us in "Willis Wagons," the trailers brought onto the school parking lot and named

for Superintendent Benjamin Willis. We studied in those trailers rather than in the White schools that weren't crowded.

Our parents marched on the Board of Education—sometimes with us in tow. They demanded that we get the same education that White kids received. When I entered the eighth grade, they opened a mostly White school to us. We had to test to be accepted. Only the best of the best got into Lindblom High School, a White school. The White people there made it known that they did not want us there, but once we were inside the school, no one treated us differently. Even the White kids treated us like they treated other White kids. In fact, I just ate lunch last week with one of my White high school classmates. We were children, we were friends, and the racism that existed outside those walls didn't exist inside them.

The racism that existed outside those walls didn't exist inside them.

Because of that experience, I came to see that prejudice and racism are taught. A Black child and a White child can grow up next to one another, not knowing anything about race or racism until their parents, their upbringing, or their environments instill those ideas in them. In high school, I saw that not every White person becomes prejudiced, and not every White person is racist. Later, when I started as a pre-school teacher, I noticed that kids don't know color; they just know and love their friends.

I went to Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, home of "The Great Debaters." Wiley is an HBCU, a historically-Black college. It was created because White people didn't want us in their colleges. I put the education I received at Wiley on par with Harvard. I got an excellent education, and I knew if I got out of hand, my professors would call my parents!

Blatant racism can be overcome. My father's parents were sharecroppers, but my maternal grandfather owned his land. He bought his farm implements at the local John Deere tractor shop—but he couldn't go through the front door. He had to go in the back door! History now comes full circle: My daughter, who earned two engineering degrees from Illinois Institute of Technology, interned for John Deere all four years. They hired her straight out of college, and she's now in John Deere's upper management!

I've always told my kids, "You are as good as anyone else. Don't ever take a back seat to anyone." Both my girls took that to heart and excel at what they do. I'm not saying that they don't experience racism, but certainly they don't experience it at the levels of intensity that their ancestors experienced it. Hardly more than 150 years ago, White people didn't allow their slaves to learn to read, because they feared that if we received an education, we would excel. Look at all the accomplishments we realized without an education—and just imagine if our ancestors had enjoyed the same education as Whites!

Fortunately, I have not experienced a lot of racism in the last five to ten years. White store clerks still sometimes follow me in their stores. They don't follow White people in their stores—but they'll follow me. I turn around and tell them, "My money is as green as anyone else's, and I can spend it somewhere else: I did not come in here to steal." It's systemic racism to see a Black person and to think s/he is a thief, liar or murderer. In the past, I've been stopped by the police. I'm convinced it was merely because I'm Black. They couldn't even tell me why they stopped me.

I lived through the Civil Rights movement. I was a young teenager during the March on Washington. We've come a long way since then, but a long way yet remains before we get to where we should be—where the color of our skin no longer affects the way we're treated.

Systemic racism remains pervasive and inherent in educational systems throughout the country. Young White teachers come to teach in our districts so that their student loans will be forgiven—but once their loans clear, they go out the door looking for more money, or to serve in White neighborhoods rather than in Black ones.

Our boys are especially treated as kids who are dishonest, lazy or dumb. Let's be honest: Black boys aren't equal to the White boys. Our boys develop fragile egos in response to their treatment. We must build them up, rather than tear them down, which is what systemic racism does. I raised my nephew from the time that he turned two, until he reached his twenties, so I saw how differently he was treated compared to the White boys in his class. I didn't like that at all. That's one of the reasons I ran for school board. Because of

Because of systemic racism, most White people don't even recognize their negative connotations toward Black people.

systemic racism, most White people don't even recognize their negative connotations toward Black people.

We still provide segregated school systems that don't deliver equitable education to kids. This pandemic brought this to the forefront. My district is 96% Black, and 30% of our kids cannot access the internet from their homes. We bought hot spots for them, as well as devices for them to access online learning. The White suburbs of Chicago, in contrast, had technology and easily adapted it to face this pandemic.

In Illinois, the funding of our public schools adjusts based on property taxes, so folks in richer suburbs will always have more tax revenue than Hazel Crest. They'll be able to buy the best of everything, whereas we can't. We live with a system designed to be unequitable to Black and Brown children.

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To directly attack systemic racism at its core, we need more professional development in sensitivity training, to help people recognize their prejudices. Our superintendent shared with us the book, *White Fragility*, which suggests that we all hold unrecognized biases. I wonder why it continues to be so hard for White people to talk about racism. Perhaps they know that if they do, they will be forced to do something to eliminate it. Meanwhile, we have to help one another to recognize our own biases.

I don't have all the answers, but I remember Dr. King's words during the March on Washington: We need to judge people not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. When everyone can start on a level playing field in education and in the workplace, we'll know that we've arrived closer to "a more perfect nation." Until then, I have few, if any, words of optimism to share. Until we change the mindsets of people, we'll never overcome racism.

"When We're Not Allowed a Seat at the Table, We Need to Bring Our Own Folding Chair!"

Adam López-Falk
Director, Arizona *Latino* School Boards Association
Alhambra Elementary School District Governing Board
Phoenix, Arizona

I self-identify as *Latino*, and I'm very proud of my roots: I cherish what I know of my ancestors, who came from Mexico to Arizona in 1871. For me, the term *Latino* best reflects my experiences and who I am as an individual. I don't necessarily like the term "Hispanic" because, as a revisionist perspective toward our history, it ignores the fact that my family is from Latin America—and not from Spain.

For 40 years, my *tata* upholstered vehicles, planes, and seats for concert halls and sporting facilities, so my mom, who worked for him, took me along to several interactions with distributors and suppliers. I was a young, fair-skinned child with a very dark mother, so people presumed that she must be my nanny. It seemed as if they were saying, "He's so beautiful—but he *can't* be *yours*. He doesn't look like you." I share many of my mother's features, but, as a child, I realized what sticks out to people: the color of our skin. That was a wake-up call, providing me insight into colorism and privilege in our community.

As a child, I realized what sticks out to people: the color of our skin.

As a fair-skinned *Latino*, it became difficult for me to see myself as *Latino*. In the classroom and in school programs, people treated me differently because of my color. I wasn't subjected to racist ideas or to preconceived notions about my being *Latino*, because I wasn't treated differently than Whites. In fact, I thought, "This must be what it's like being White!" Instead, I experienced race through my mother, who expressed in art her experiences as a Mexican American.

If you didn't know my last name or anything about my family or my life, I could pass as White. This allows me to be an ally in giving less-privileged people an opportunity to provide input and lead

conversations from a place of learned experience. I try to talk about race and racism as often as possible in White spaces.

I now realize that the history we learned in school came to us "whitewashed." At that time, textbook companies provided the curriculum for our schools. Because I am a "bookworm," I noted the differences between what I would see in our textbooks and what I saw in other books. Curriculum continues to be a problem in many majority-*Latino* districts, like ours.

Curriculum continues to be a problem in many majority-Latino districts, like ours.

One of the guiding stars in my life has been someone who looks like me: Former Congressman Ed Pastor, the first *Latino* in Arizona to be elected to Congress. He made me think that there is a place in top leadership positions for me, my family, my friends and my community. Prior to his election in 1991, no one represented our community at decision-making tables.

A significant, formative experience for me with respect to race and racism came with Arizona's SB 1070 debacle in 2010. I organized and marched against this "show-me-your-papers" law, which criminalized undocumented families in Arizona.

As a policymaker, I now try to find ways to fix things that need fixing. I try to help community members articulate what they need. Despite pushback, I ensure we translate to Spanish at district meetings, to ensure that our Spanish-speaking parents and community members are included. We want to be inclusive of all people and remove as many barriers as possible.

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The most recent act of racism I've experienced occurred less than twelve hours ago. Last night, our board finally discussed a Black Lives Matter resolution—which we should have done months ago. It's important that we say the names of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd at this flashpoint in history. During our conversation on the dais, a White board member said a lot of really unfortunate, misinformed things that filled me with disappointment and disgust. She said, "My family suffered, too, when they came to this country—and we're not including all the other races that

suffered." I couldn't believe that she said this while we debated a Black Lives Matter resolution. She argued that we shouldn't include the names of victims in the resolution because then we'll need to update the resolution every time someone gets killed. The whole point of the resolution is to say, "This is unacceptable, and we don't want any more names added to this list!" She also used the bullsh** argument that police aren't the only people who kill Blacks. I was furious. This morning, I was on the phone with our district's new Director of Equity and Inclusion—a position I pushed to create. Racism still happens. It happens all the time—even though we like to think that things have gotten better

For a long time, I've seen such implicit and explicit biases bubble up and express themselves as microaggressions in our meetings. Thankfully, as I've gotten older, I feel more emboldened to call them out and to challenge people with my experiences. People can't get away with saying stupid, ignorant things around me anymore. Halfway through my board service, I became more radical. I started to say, "This is not okay. We need to talk about and address these things." I started to speak about race in a completely-different way. I am willing to challenge the *status quo*—and I know that this is my purpose as a board member with access to these decision-making tables.

If progress toward civil rights were like filling up a gas tank, our "tank" wouldn't yet be half-full. We need to accept our privilege and engage in uncomfortable, courageous conversations. We still have generations of work to do. My wife and I just had our first baby, and I find myself thinking a lot about my daughter's future and the world she'll grow up in. I doubt that she'll live to see this country evolve to the point where we truly understand and respect civil rights. Perhaps her kids or grandkids will see that day. It seems our current, divisive President just takes us further from our goal. People now organizing and speaking out give me hope, but we're not even close yet.

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Professionally, I oversee a nationally-recognized leadership development program that caters specifically to those who identify as *Latino* and who work with *Latino* communities in both rural and urban communities throughout the state. We speak about the issues

plaguing our community and how people can be better allies. The program activates new leaders to become the decisionmakers—and provides them with the tools, and most importantly, the access to begin working in their community.

My district includes a large refugee population, and our children come from homes that speak 52 languages. It's difficult to fathom their experiences and hardships. Whether we're talking about Black Lives Matter or immigration issues, we need to bring the right people to the table, to speak of their experiences. This enables us to better work with them and make the best decisions for them. Our actions, however, aim to go beyond performative allyship. We need to ensure that our work addresses systemic causes of racism.

Whether we're talking about Black Lives Matter or immigration issues, we need to bring the right people to the table, to speak of their experiences.

We need to dismantle and rebuild the institutions that treat people in racist ways—beginning with the institutions that have prevented educational equity. Our educational system perpetuates racism in several ways. Foremost, public education is rooted in White supremacy. It's a system built by White people, for White people. Now that our student population is no longer primarily-White, we need to figure out how to navigate this. In Arizona, we see a lot of resources channeled from our public schools, to the charter schools and private schools that serve White families. That's racism.

Public education is rooted in White supremacy. It's a system built by White people, for White people.

We're also challenged by the fact that we need more teachers who look like and can empathize with our students. Too often, our teachers don't reflect our students or understand their experiences. We need to fix that.

As school board members, we enjoy a certain amount of privilege as elected officials. We need to determine how to best use that responsibility to better our community. We need to organize, organize, organize. We need to understand that we have the privilege of access and the ability to truly influence the future of our communities. Being a board member is more than just the elected

office, it is our chance to truly make the necessary changes and instructional differences that our Black and Brown children deserve.

We enjoy a certain amount of privilege as elected officials. We need to determine how to best use that responsibility to better our community.

It makes sense to begin having difficult conversations as the first step toward dismantling systems. We need to talk about the things that affect our students every single day, including housing and law enforcement. Our communities deserve a voice at the table, so we also need to make sure that leaders of color sit at decision-making tables, speaking about our experiences and reminding people that this country was built on the backs of mistreated Brown and Black bodies. When we're not allowed a seat at the table, we need to bring our own folding chair!

"If You Don't Value Public Education, You Don't Value the People of Color Who Depend on It"

Lindsay Love
President, Arizona School Boards Association Black Alliance
Chandler Unified School District Governing Board
Chandler, Arizona

I've always identified as Black. Growing up, it was all I knew. An ongoing debate argues whether we should call ourselves Black or African-American. As the narrator of my story, I'm comfortable saying that I am a Black woman. I don't feel the need to tailor my identity to make White people feel more comfortable. Even though our society unkindly resists when we talk about race, I make it a point to do so.

I don't feel the need to tailor my identity to make White people feel more comfortable.

My parents grew up in Durham, North Carolina. My mom, a light-skinned Black woman, married my dad, a dark Black man. Both of them grew up in the South knowing their identities, which Jim Crow reinforced. When I was a child, they warned me: "You're Black, and, being a Black woman, your experiences will be different from those of your White friends."

I grew up in diverse Silver Spring, Maryland. A Jewish family lived on our block, and our next-door neighbors were a diverse family of a Black man and a White woman and their children. My classmates were Black, Asian, Hispanic and Indigenous. We talked about race. My parents also talked about current events and their childhood experiences, so we always stayed very aware of racism.

When I was nine years old, we moved to conservative, anti-Black Phoenix, Arizona. I went from being in classes with diverse students, to being the only Black girl in my classes. People acted as if they'd never seen someone like me. I quickly learned that there existed no love for Black girls. We did not matter. When I was in the eighth grade, we moved to Chandler, Arizona, where I live today.

People acted as if they'd never seen someone like me.

The microaggressions became hurtful and harmful. As a girl, I appeared on TV—and people insinuated I should lose weight. A classmate called me a gorilla in middle school. My gym teacher insinuated that, because I played basketball with boys, I must be a slut. I would raise my hand to answer questions and never be called on. Teachers blamed me for things that went wrong, and they shamed me for my tone. My technology teacher bullied me and acted kinder to my lighter-skinned, "acceptably-Black" friends. Such experiences remain typical for Black girls. Our bodies, our hair, and the way we express femininity will always be criticized.

Such experiences remain typical for Black girls. Our bodies, our hair, and the way we express femininity will always be criticized.

Frequently, young Black men in Arizona talked about wanting to marry light-skinned Black women or women outside their race. The message for Black girls: If you don't have certain attributes, you are unattractive. Kids tease each other, but when kids talk about Black girls, they fall back on racialized stereotypes of us as unattractive "darkies." As a result, we lost all confidence.

In my family, we simply understood that western society remained very backwards. Its White supremacist lens told us how "civilized" people behaved. We did not measure up. Fortunately, my parents injected me with positive messaging. Dropping out of school never became an option for me. Not all Black girls are so lucky: Many cannot seek support systems in their families, schools and communities. They get pushed out, with no place to go and no one to tell them they are special, worthy and beautiful.

I recognize my own privilege: I grew up lacking nothing in a two-parent household, but I had to learn to get rid of the internalized anti-Blackness that society teaches us to carry. As a social worker, I now recognize the negative messaging about those not "acceptably Black," from poor communities of color, and who haven't assimilated into the predominant White culture.

Black people, especially those with lower incomes, are relegated to historically-redlined communities with lower property values, where their schools receive lower funding, less resources, and where teachers aren't always trained to address the needs of students and their families.

There's strong messaging and policies that keep these communities down—especially in places like Phoenix, where policing and the targeting of Black and Brown bodies put many at risk. In social work, we especially see the way our Black girls are trafficked, looking for the basic needs—like love and shelter—that their communities can't provide them.

Being the youngest of four siblings prepared me for sitting on our school board and facing a conservative community highly critical of its first Black woman school board member. Some members of hate groups target me when I don't vote as they like. They come after me with racist epithets. I recently made a statement about how politeness acts as a tool of White supremacy: People of color are expected to tailor their messages and be "polite." When we speak passionately about our hurt, pain, or experiences of oppression, others accuse us of being racist against White people. People seem so polite until we call out their systems of oppression in a tone they don't like. Then they say, "Go back to Africa, you racist bitch!"

When we speak passionately about our hurt, pain, or experiences of oppression, others accuse us of being racist against White people.

This began happening to Black people at the dawn of time, but now, with the President's rhetoric, we're seeing it like never before. We saw it with George Floyd's murder as protests swelled. We see it in the racist targeting of Black women and Black leaders online. The trauma incurred by our enslaved ancestors is still being passed down, generation after generation, and we do what we need to do to survive. "Turn your music down!" "Pull your pants up!" "Put your hands on the steering wheel, and speak really politely!" We haven't addressed our trauma. We haven't taken the necessary steps to shut this sh** down.

We grew up hearing that we're all part of the human race, but they stack the cards against us because of our race. We must find a way to dismantle institutionalized oppression by organizing and finding power in our collective experience. We need to rise up against racism and classism.

We must find a way to dismantle institutionalized oppression by organizing and finding power in our collective experience.

When I ran for our local school board, I shared the stories of my nephew and two nieces in our school district. They've all been called the N-word. My nephew's teacher blew a dog whistle on him and encouraged his whole class to use the N-word during a lesson. Other Black children are bullied, too. At a 2018 party in our district, I'm told that a guest rapped a White supremacist song about Rosa Parks being a bitch and how glad they were that Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot. How horrific!

When we step into leadership roles, we must be unapologetic and talk about race. People will be pissed off, but we've tailored our messages to White fragility for too long at the expense of change within our communities.

We've tailored our messages to White fragility for too long at the expense of change within our communities.

Our schools did not become broken, as some people assume. They're built on the foundation of White supremacy, which fosters poverty gaps for Black, Hispanic, LGBTQ and low-income kids, while White children and children of privilege graduate, go to college, and succeed. Radical change is required for our schools to work as they should.

As school board members, we should examine our districts' policies. Many of our dress code violations target Black girls. Many of our discipline policies disproportionately affect Black children, who cause no more problems than their White peers. We have an obligation to ensure early childhood education for communities of color. We must make sure our kids have access to healthy foods and healthcare resources—especially during this pandemic. This became a rough summer for Black children: In addition to COVID, they saw the murders of George Floyd killed on camera and Breonna Taylor shot by police while asleep in her bed, and the killing of Ahmaud Arbery by armed citizens. Our Black children fear they can't even be safe in their own houses—let alone jogging in their neighborhoods!

Many people in positions of power don't give a damn about Black, Hispanic or Indigenous kids. They don't care about poor children of color, so they don't adequately fund public education. If you don't value public education, you don't value the people of color who depend on it.

Many school boards still resist embracing equity. While their teachers crave training on working with diverse students, they don't want to take the risk. We need to elect school board members willing to describe the oppressions experienced by our students and ready to fund programming and efforts to support equity and inclusion.

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Expect to be asked by parents and media how much money is your board dedicating to equity, diversity, and inclusion. What kind of trainings are you bringing in? If you're not anti-racism, what are you doing on your board?

"Living a Myth"

Dr. Jayme Mathias
Executive Director, Mexican American School Boards Association
Austin Independent School District Board of Trustees
Austin, Texas

I often joke that I come "from the cornfields of Ohio, to the corn tortillas of Texas." Raised in a very homogenous, rural community, I enjoyed no non-White classmates or friends. I possessed no non-White models or mentors. I had no non-White teachers, until my high school hired Mr. Rodríguez to teach us Spanish my junior and senior year. My world was hardly diverse—and I felt drawn from a young age to leave the cocoon of that farming community and to spread my wings, first in St. Louis, then in D.C., and now in Austin.

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After one year at St. Louis University, I studied Spanish for a summer in Mexico—my first immersion experience in a foreign culture. For 35 years, I've continued speaking, learning, teaching and writing in Spanish. Blessed with an apparently-bilingual name—*Jaime Matías*—I confuse people, who ask, "Are you Mexican?" I often respond, "*Tengo corazón mexicano*" (I have a Mexican heart). After so many years of being immersed in the *Latinx* culture, I admittedly feel more *Latinx* than "White."

As a young "White" boy, I absorbed all the prejudices of those around me. I'll never forget the observation of my maternal grandmother, who sold her farm and moved to the city. The words she used to describe the diverse people she encountered there reflected her limited interactions. Nor will I ever forget the reaction of my paternal grandmother when I took an African-American boyfriend home to Ohio. During a lovely Sunday lunch, my grandmother blurted, "I don't think we've ever had a Black boy in this town." As if that weren't mortifying enough, she then remembered, "Oh, yes, the Boeses used to have a Black stable boy, who lived in their stables!" My boyfriend was confident the Ku Klux

Klan would burn a cross in our yard that night! Like children who are embarrassed by their families, I'm often embarrassed to be part of the "White" family.

My Chinese husband enjoys saying I'm no more "White" than he is "Yellow"—or that any person is "Black" or "Red," *et cetera*. Human beings choose from a very limited box of crayons to categorize their phenotypes! My husband prefers to think we need to pull out the Pink crayon to classify all who believe themselves to be "White." For centuries, far too many Whites—or Pinks, if you prefer—have seen themselves as being superior to others—simply based on a biological characteristic that they/we didn't choose.

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I honor a religious tradition that esteems revolutionaries—of a woman who dreamed of a world that was about to turn (Lk. 1:46-55) and her son who literally turned over tables (Mk. 11:15-18, Mt. 21:12-13). Recent protests hearten me, leaving me to wonder when the "tables" will turn. When will we stop referring to "people of color" and start referring to "Pink" (or "White") people as "people of pallor"? When will we—or our children or grandchildren—achieve Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of a world where people are not labeled in derogatory ways by the color of their skin? When will we begin really empowering those who aren't people of pallor—as I'm choosing to do by stepping off my local school board in November to empower a *Latino* to represent the largely-*Latino* single-member district in which we live? When will we take the "crayons" we hold and begin mixing them, to reflect the true colors of all humanity?

I once believed I was of German descent. My family lived outside a German village and engaged in the apparently-German tradition of eating pork and sauerkraut on New Year's Day. My study of genealogy, however, has led me to conclude we're all "mutts," with precious few "purebreds" or pure crayon colors among us: My ancestors were Germans, Luxembourgers, Belgians, Prussians, Swiss and French. Even if the shades of those "crayons" aren't too dissimilar, I've come to recognize that I'm comprised of more cultures than I once imagined!

As a young man, I came to see how superficial many of the people who formed me seemed, how skin-deep their judgments of others

were. It was as if we were programmed to think that green M&Ms are better than orange or blue M&Ms. How superficial! I was living a myth. I stopped perpetuating such fantasies. As a young adult, my choices of international friends—María, Emmanuel and Roberto among others—proved a personal attempt to peel back layers of implicit biases.

Embarrassingly, privilege prevented me for several years from seeing that race is *not* a biological fact, that it's a means of categorizing and dividing people to assure privilege to those with the power to label. When I began studying the history of the Mexican and Mexican-American community in Austin, Texas, I became aware of disturbing trends. For decades, White vigilantes and Texas Rangers ran off "Mexicans"—*Latinos* who settled in Texas long before it was part of the United States. When Mexican Americans finally received "permission" to settle in the capital city, they found themselves largely confined to renting debilitated shacks in the most undesirable parts of Austin—between the landfill and the red-light district, only to be later displaced to a floodplain!

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The *Latinx* community of Austin suffered a long history of mistreatment and discrimination. Confinement to under-resourced schools assured economically-harsh futures. Income disparities and educational gaps persist, and our "progressive" city has re-segregated. Increasing property values in the city core continue to push low-income families outside of Austin, resulting in the necessary closure of once-segregated schools in historically-underresourced neighborhoods. In the words of our city demographer, the city is quickly becoming "the Monaco on the Colorado [River]," attracting people with the means and desire to purchase small, 85-year-old bungalows at $600 a square foot, to provide the land for their "McMansions" in a once-proud, Mexican-American neighborhood. This trend has decimated our neighborhood public schools and displaced elders to rural areas where they find scant access to so many needed resources and services.

Various breakout sessions at education conferences now feature a YouTube video on the "Unequal Opportunity Race": It's hard to compete in an environment of structural discrimination, where certain persons were held back—literally for centuries—while others accumulated great wealth and resources. As the representative of a historically under-resourced single-member district, these disparities rear their heads on a regular basis: in the dearth of National Merit and Presidential Scholars, of less-experienced administrators and teachers, of disadvantaged sports teams and fine arts programs, and in a multitude of "bubble schools" that go in and out of sanctioning by our state education agency. Every school district has infinite needs and finite resources. Unfortunately those resources often become distributed in ways that don't help us to advance toward the closing of gaps and the achievement of equitable educational outcomes.

In eight years of board service, I've learned that our educational systems are perfectly designed to generate the inequitable results they produce. I've also learned how difficult it can be to count to four or five votes on such issues—the number many of us need on our local school boards to create change. Notwithstanding, we celebrate important advances: our first-ever disparity study, the implementation of equity policies, the dedication of bond funds to historically under-resourced schools and communities, and our hire last year of our first Chief Equity Officer.

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At the state level, I'm heartened by the blossoming collaboration of the Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA) and the Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members (TCBSBM). Born on the heels of the Civil Rights movement, MASBA is celebrating 50 years of closing gaps in our Texas public schools. Regrettably, we've actively collaborated for precious few of those years with our sisters and brothers of the TCBSBM. We're now opening our eyes to the ways in which we might collaborate with other state and national organizations that advocate for equity and the closing of gaps in our nation's public schools. It's taken a while to get the equity locomotive moving, but the momentum now builds!

At the national level, I've been heartened by the great work of CUBE—the Council of Urban Boards of Education—during these past

three years in which I was privileged to serve on its Steering Committee. Its annual conference, equity symposium, and other equity-related events provide tremendous content—and even inspired our first-ever Texas Public School Equity Symposium last year. Let's come together and build on these accomplishments, to continue bringing greater equity to our districts and to the students and families we serve!

"Confront Racism by Cultivating Well-rounded Individuals"

Raymond P. Meza
Director, Mexican American School Boards Association
San Felipe-Del Río CISD Board of Trustees
Del Río, Texas

I self-identify as Hispanic—or, nowadays, we say *Latinx*. All my siblings and I were born in the United States, but our parents immigrated from Mexico.

I experienced so many different race-related inequities, including the segregation of African Americans and Hispanics. I grew up across the street from a school for African-American students, but I didn't see my African-American friends during the day, because they attended their own school. In our neighborhood, they learned Spanish from us, and we learned English from them. We grew up together, we played together, but we couldn't go to school together!

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Whether we were Hispanic or African-American, we stuck together as friends. Our elders thought differently: They labeled our African-American friends as "troublemakers." Anglos called Hispanics lazy and unmotivated. Those were the stereotypes back then. Many of my friends became state troopers and worked in law enforcement. They're law-abiding citizens who, as students, were unfairly mislabeled as troublemakers!

My family and I predominantly spoke Spanish, and, when I entered the sixth grade, teachers separated us into different levels, based on our scores on English-language standardized tests. To further "encourage" speaking English, they punished us for speaking Spanish. They provided no bilingual teaching or bilingual teachers.

In many ways, where you live determines your future success.

In many ways, where you live determines your future success. Here on the Texas border, San Felipe possessed higher rates of poverty and enrolled mostly Hispanics and African Americans, while neighboring Del Río

accommodated the more affluent and White. As a result, our San Felipe-Del Río district had two high schools: one poor, and the other less so.

In high school, I told my college counselor, Ms. Davis, that I wanted to go to college. Responding that I hadn't taken the necessary preparation classes for college, she gave me a brochure for a vocational school. I decided to apply to college on my own.

I was the first person in my family to go to college. My wife and I then moved to San Angelo, where she finished her studies. I became a bilingual teacher in 1978—the only Hispanic teacher in the school where I first taught. One day, several parents gathered in the hallway, and I asked Mr. Kennedy, the principal, if there were parent-teacher conferences. He said, "No, they're checking you out; you're the first bilingual teacher we've hired in this school!" It was the first year of desegregation in San Angelo. Until then I didn't even realize that I was the only Hispanic in the school—besides the cleaning lady.

A lot of my friends are African-American. I know that they are equally capable of earning degrees, having high-paying jobs, and surpassing the expectations of others. They have the ability and capability, and they're good, productive citizens. When I directed our Head Start program, an African American became one of my biggest mentors, and we worked together for the best possible outcomes for the kids we served.

I taught for 14 years, then served as principal for 23 years after that. I now serve on the Board of Directors of the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB). My school district became a member of the Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA) four years ago. More recently, we joined the Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members (TCBSBM). One of our members is African-American, and we weren't a member of the Black Caucus! Students of all races attend our district schools, so we should represent all those students through the organizations we belong to. We became inclusive by joining both MASBA and TCBSBM.

I've seen discrimination. In the 1960s, the Anglo population viewed Blacks as not being on par with them. I saw that in relation to employment: Some positions available to Anglos weren't offered to applicants of other races. African Americans and Hispanics found only the lower-paying jobs. I've also seen when the most qualified Hispanic and African-American candidates weren't offered

appropriate jobs by White hiring committees. That continues to happen. Some of the best people are bypassed because of the color of their skin.

We cannot be silent about other pressing issues. The acts of police brutality and violence that we've recently seen make clear that we, as citizens, are obligated to speak up and change the way governance guides law enforcement. Moreover, we must also say we're not going to tolerate statues honoring individuals involved with slavery.

It upsets me that we still deal with racism. Our President protects the statues of individuals who promoted slavery but ignores the problems of poverty. We have White supremacist groups demanding to hold on to the Confederate flag. Fortunately, today young people of all races want solutions now. They want the statues of slaveholders removed and police brutality eliminated. This gives me hope.

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We are obligated to confront racism. By cultivating well-rounded individuals who don't internalize the biases of previous generations, we can eliminate this problem. Instead of judging others, let's stimulate individual talent and ability, by providing them opportunities and giving them a chance!

"If You're Black, You Don't Get a Pass"

Erika Mitchell
Steering Committee Member, Council of Urban Boards of Education
Atlanta Public Schools Board of Education
Atlanta, Georgia

In the fourth grade I realized I was different—just not *how* different. Playing on the playground, I had a disagreement with a boy whose name I remember to this day. It was the first time that anyone called me a "nigger." It was a "whoa!" moment. I didn't know what that word meant. My parents explained the racial slur. It was the first time I felt physically different because of my skin, my body structure, my facial features, and the texture of my hair.

After that, as you might imagine, I started to look at things differently. I came to recognize indirect messages and racist stereotypes, which were reinforced in TV commercials. A white picket fence undoubtedly belonged to a White family. On TV, Black families lived in apartments, not in homes with green lawns. Those messages impose upon you a sense of who you are and what you are entitled to. I remember seeing those stereotypes and thinking, "I don't want to live in the apartment, like the Black family; I want the white picket fence, like the White family!"

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An excellent example of stereotypes occurs with rap music: Not every Black person listens to rap, nor do we speak the language in those lyrics, which portrays us in a certain way. It's like the television show, "Real Housewives of Atlanta": While visiting the Dominican Republic, someone asked if that's how we really act in Atlanta!

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To reject such stereotypes, it's important that we speak about race and racism. Not all persons of any group act the same way. African Americans in Atlanta vary quite a bit. Looking more closely, we see the

variety. We begin to respect differences. We start to treat people as the individuals they are.

As a young child, I knew that I was "Black." My self-image became more nuanced with time. I've often seen "Black" and "African-American" as interchangeable. Many people use the word Black to label a race of people. We use the term "African American" to denote that we are Black persons of African descent. Those of us who self-identify as Black know that, even though we come from different parts of the world, we are all of African descent. We trace our origins to Africa. A few months ago, I took a DNA test and discovered that I am 46% Nigerian. The exploration of my Nigerian heritage now adds a whole other spin to my identity and Blackness.

In the African-American community, we classify each other by skin tones: light-Brown, dark-Brown, or dark. Among ourselves, we talk about how we don't want to get too dark, because that is considered ugly. We cover up and wear hats, so that our skin doesn't get too dark. My skin tone wasn't light enough for me to play with certain groups of girls. Even within our own community, we discriminate against one another based on the texture of our hair, our height, and our build. We continue to teach girls and boys to see these factors in certain ways.

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Discrimination is real. I attended predominantly-White schools from the second grade on. I had to work hard. I felt I had to be perfect, that I couldn't make any mistakes for risk of being caught up in the system. I remember when several African-American girls tried out for the basketball team in our predominantly-White high school. That opened my eyes: Many of them had great talent and were better than the White girls who were chosen instead. This happens in the workforce, too: Although we qualify, decision makers pass us up. As a young adult, I saw Whites hired and paid more. We can't let this stop us.

More recently, when I traveled to Louisville, Kentucky, with two White colleagues, they didn't have to leave a deposit when we checked into our hotel—but I did! We all used the same corporate

card from the same account. Why did I need to leave a deposit, while my White counterparts didn't? The simple answer: Racism.

If you're Black, you don't get a pass. When you're pulled over, you fear for your life—and for the lives of your wife and kids, if they are with you. It becomes a matter of survival. You find yourself always looking over your shoulder, always trying to be careful, always wondering if you'll be next. It's scary, but that's our reality.

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No child is born a racist. Racism is taught. For this reason, we must find ways to initiate conversations on race and racism. Otherwise, we risk unknowingly and unconsciously saying and doing things that might seem offensive or racist by people of other races.

Systemic racism prevents people from achieving their goals and dreams. We see it in education and the workforce, as well as in the juvenile justice system that locks up so many of our kids. The school-to-prison pipelines destroy many members of racial groups. I choose to be part of the solution—to work to dismantle systems of racism. The Black Lives Matter protests provide a message of resistance, a signal that we'll no longer tolerate being caught in systems of oppression.

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As school board members, we work to make the best decisions for our students and their families. In Atlanta, we serve a student body that is 74.7% African-American. They live in systems that prevent them from having hope, in places where they can be shot and killed. Those racist systems must be dismantled.

Our government created Atlanta Public Schools in 1872 to educate White children, not the children of former slaves, who were not allowed to learn to read or be educated. During the Jim Crow era of segregation in the South, it took Atlanta more than 50 years to open a high school for African-American students in 1924. Black students at the segregated Booker T. Washington High School never enjoyed the same educational opportunities as White students. Instead, they received the used, discarded textbooks from White schools. From

their creation, schools for minorities limited upward mobility, and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, while striking down segregation, did little to change our schools.

We've come a long way, but there remains much more work to do. Subgroups of students continue to deal with disparate outcomes. Some students still suffer higher suspension rates and more Individual Education Plans. To achieve equity and deliver the education students deserve, we must hold ourselves and our administrators responsible. Our oversight makes a difference and can lead to equitable educational experiences. We need to track data and implement policies for academics, mental health, social and emotional learning, and students with special needs. We want to ensure that our curricula speak to issues of race and racism, and of the painful history suffered as a result of systemic racism. If change happens, it'll begin with our students. Teaching them must empower them to shape a world where people are not treated differently based on the color of their skin.

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"Get in Good Trouble"

Francisca Montoya
Chair, Arizona 2030 Project
Arizona *Latino* School Boards Association
Fowler Elementary School District No. 45 Governing Board
Phoenix, Arizona

I identify myself in two ways: as a *Latina* and a *Chicana*. As a child in the 1960s, I saw resistance happen all around me. There was the Civil Rights movement, the LGBTQ movement, the environmental movement, but the *Chicano* movement resonated with me the most. I felt empowered to call myself a *Chicana* and to celebrate my Mexican heritage.

My racial education began with the evening news. As a young girl, I watched citizens marching during the Civil Rights movement. I saw police beat and spray people with fire hoses. Although too young to understand why this happened, I knew that the police behaved unfairly.

When I started school at age six, I didn't speak a word of English, so the school system put me in a classroom of Spanish-speaking students. Instead of math or science, we studied "Americanization," so that we could more quickly be integrated into English-language classes. By the third grade, I became bilingual: speaking Spanish at home and English at school.

I remember one traumatic experience in the third grade, when a mean teacher who always yelled at us for speaking Spanish demanded that we speak English during recess. She sent me—a straight-A student—to the principal's office. The principal, whose wife was my third-grade teacher, sent me back to class, but the incident bothered me. I felt as if I was in trouble. When I came clean to my mother, she challenged me to stand up to that teacher and insist on my right to speak Spanish during our playtime. The next day, I went to school full of bravado, speaking Spanish louder than ever at recess. When the teacher called me over and demanded that I stop, I replied, "My mom told me that recess is *my* time, not yours." Though shocked and angered, the teacher did nothing. Adults taught me all

my life to not talk back to people in authority—but I did, and I grew in confidence!

As a child, I did my best to disprove stereotypes about the academic achievement of Spanish-speaking students. I earned a spot in upper-level classes, but I also realized that I became one of very few *Latinos* in those classes. School classified us by academic achievement, but I wondered what other factors might be at play.

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As I grew up, I became more involved in social causes. César Chávez and the United Farm Workers helped me better understand my ethnicity, as well as the organizing efforts and empowerment that took place in our community. I learned about the racism my parents faced, and the signs on businesses that said, "No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed." Now, our people fought against injustice by exercising their rights!

Even with all the progress we've made, I see racism in our society every day. Brutality by law enforcement continues to be one of the biggest issues we face: Police officers don't always "protect and serve" communities of color. Living in Arizona, I've witnessed Immigration and Customs Enforcement Officers—many of them White—treat undocumented immigrants as subhuman. It stirs up so much anger inside me.

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Our nation's education systems suffer not only from racism, but also from a lack of resources. Our government doesn't prioritize education. Underpaid teachers and underfunded schools compound structural educational shortcomings. Students of color fill our schools, and their faces are not reflected in their teachers and administrators. Consequently, our education systems perpetuate racism.

Nothing changes unless we speak out about the injustices we face. We need to call out racism. We must acknowledge its existence, especially in education, and talk about what must change. As *Latinos* become the majority in many more states, we should ask ourselves

whether we'll govern as we were governed, or whether we'll continue the fight for equality for all races.

As we strive for equitable racial outcomes, I'm reminded of the words of Jesse Jackson: "Keep hope alive!" We won't carry the torch forever, so we must lead with faith, optimism, and inspiration. We must also equip others to step up and continue the push for equality in this country. We must speak up, and, in the famous words of Congressman John Lewis, "get in good trouble."

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"I'm Black and I'm Proud!"

Dr. Joyce Morley
Secretary, Council of Urban Boards of Education
DeKalb County School District Board of Education
Stone Mountain, Georgia

I'm very comfortable talking about race. I didn't have a choice in talking about it while growing up; it was quite evident that my family was Black. And then there were the light-skinned Blacks who were considered much more beautiful than me, and those whose skin color mirrored mine. Because I was a dark-skinned Black, female child, I was reminded of my Blackness by the names I was called by other Blacks when I attended school, as well as the names I was called by the White people I came in contact with. It was evident that we were of a different race and different color, because their skin color didn't look like my skin color. I also recognized at an early age that Whites were treated vastly different from my family and me, and they were treated differently from those who looked like us; they were seen as superior.

I've lived in this skin all my life and I wouldn't change it for the world—it's how God made me. As a result of my experiences, it became quite clear and quite evident that the only way for us, as Blacks, to make change and get anything done was to talk about our Blackness, own it with pride, and take collective action to make the changes we need to make. The reality is, we have been fighting all our lives for positive change, and to have the inalienable rights that have been denied us as Black individuals, Black families, and as a Black race.

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I identify as African-American or Black. I don't refer to myself as a "person of color." It is my belief that when African-Americans or Blacks are identified as "people of color," Whites are absolved from taking responsibility and being accountable for current and past acts of structural and systemic atrocities of racism. They've always given

us the names they wanted us to have, and those names were always derogatory. The terms "African-American" and "Black" were finally names we gave to ourselves as a Black race. Each race, including African Americans and Native Americans face their own past, as well as their current struggles. By calling us "people of color," decisionmakers who support unjust laws and unjust policies can lump us into one group, therefore shortchanging us and denying us the reparations owed us.

I grew up in Florida, across the tracks in what White people called "the colored side of town." Black children walked to school every day, as school buses filled with laughing White children drove past us, making derogatory comments toward us. They were headed to the all-White schools in their all-White neighborhoods, while we attended an all-Black school in our Black neighborhood. Was this discriminatory act a crime? No, it was not considered a crime by the White establishment, because segregation, racism, unfairness, and unjust laws against the Black race were the norms and not the exception. It should've been a crime for White children to have school buses and for Black children to be denied the right to also have school buses; there was no equality and no equity. However, in hindsight, I believe our all-Black schools were the best thing to ever happen for us. Our schools reflected our community. Our teachers lived in our communities. We saw them at church, at community stores, or just around town. My science teacher lived next door to me, and she served as the church musician. Our community wasn't some run-down, destitute area. We enjoyed paved roads, our own gas stations, and our own stores. We owned our own homes with acreage of land. As a matter of fact, I never lived in an apartment until I was an adult. My family co-owned a vegetable farm with my maternal grandmother, uncles, and aunt. We were not sharecroppers. We were happy Black folk, and I never went lacking for anything, even as the fourteenth child in my family, all with the same mother and same father.

Even more so, our teachers cared for us. No child went hungry at school. The community ensured that every child received meals and helped those families that were less fortunate. In all actuality, there weren't many less-fortunate families in my direct community, because we shared and cared, one for another. If a child had 'ashy legs' at school or lacked proper clothing, teachers went out of their way to find whatever that child needed, in order for him/her to look

his/her best. Our teachers never gave up on us; they weren't just teaching us for the present, but also for the future. Out of an act of love and their determination to not lose any of us into the pipeline to prison, our teachers mirrored our parents in love, care, and discipline. And like our parents, their adage was, "If I can't get to your mind, I'll take it out on your behind." Our parents supported the teachers and the teachers supported our parents. It was a true village!

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As a teenager I can remember listening to James Brown sing, "I'm Black and I'm Proud!" For the first time as a race, we seemed to be given permission to embrace our Blackness. From that time on, I've identified as Black, because I believe it is the most authentic name for our most powerful race, and it allows us to love and accept the skin in which we were born, with all of the various hues. While growing up, to be called 'Black' was a negative connotation and anything associated with the color was considered negative, such as the dark, the night, a black lie, a black eye, *et cetera*. However, James Brown seemed to have given us permission to see Black as an asset and not as a liability. As more and more singers, like Stevie Wonder and Curtis Mayfield, began singing about our beautiful Black skin, it was embraced as a positive, instead of a negative. This bold and great identifier was essential as I entered high school during forced busing. I was expected to release my identity as a Black person, along with all of my strengths and abilities.

One of the greatest shams and scams perpetuated against the Black community was the concept of forced busing with the promise of integration, as well as an equal and quality education for all Blacks, aligned with the education of Whites. However, that period in my life was one of the most psychologically-traumatizing and stressful times for me, especially academically. I saw racism at its greatest heights, but I still remained Black and proud.

There isn't too much difference between the year 2020 and the late sixties with respect to the treatment of Blacks by some Whites, especially law enforcement officials and those in positions of power and authority. Sadly, there is still the mistreatment, maltreatment,

and racism by those Whites who identify with the Ku Klux Klan. They have taken off their pointy hats and white robes, replacing them with Brook Brothers suits and Stacey Adams shoes.

When we, as Blacks, entered stores to shop, we were treated indifferently by being watched and followed. This still happens. Our Black males and Black females are becoming endangered species, while being shot down by those White police officers and other White vigilantes who still see being Black as a crime. Although endangered, Black men are not legally protected. The difference between animals ascribed the title of "endangered species" and Black men and women is that animals are protected by law, and Black men and women too often become victims and fatalities of law.

As teenagers in the late sixties, we marched to protest modern-day inequalities and inequities facing Black people. However, in the sixties, we were met with water hoses from fire hydrants, dangerous dogs, and blatant acts of violence against us. There were also many Whites who threw food at us, and the promises of "equal" went out the door. And then there were those Whites who saw the beauty of our Blackness and fought alongside us for equality and equity. However, the preferential treatment shown to White students by many of the White teachers was different from that shown to Black students. Today, young protestors are still marching to right the same inequalities and inequities faced by Blacks over the last 400 years.

Today, young protestors are still marching to right the same inequalities and inequities faced by Blacks over the last 400 years.

During my formative years, the visuals on our television screens didn't look like us, except for Nina Simone, Lena Horne, Bill Cosby, Sidney Poitier, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Huey P. Newton, Diahann Carroll, Angela Davis, the Black Panthers, Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Cicely Tyson, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, and a handful of other Blacks. Often, when they were shown on television, it was in a negative light. I can vividly remember seeing the riots of the 1960s playing out in Black communities, as they continued to fight for our rights and against unjust laws. I can also remember a prominent saying by Jamil Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown), which still holds true today; "If you're White, you're right. If you're Brown, stick around. If you're Black, get back, get back!" Although he is imprisoned today,

his words still resonate as truth. And maybe, just maybe, if someone with power and authority would have listened to and heard Jamil Al-Amin, based on what he was attempting to espouse during that time, instead of castigating him and developing plans to destroy him, all because he was Black and misunderstood, he could be free to positively serve his Black race, as well as America as a whole. It seems as if whatever some Whites don't understand, they seek to destroy and kill. Although Jamil Al-Amin is physically incarcerated, he is still Black, and he is still proud! He's behind man-made jail bars of enslavement, but his Blackness renders him free. As a Black woman, I have learned that, as long as you are free in mind, body, and spirit, physical bars of incarceration cannot hold you back and they cannot hold you down, especially if you can state, "I'm Black, and I'm proud!"

I'm fortunate that I grew up in a home where I wasn't taught hate, bigotry and discrimination. Being a strong, Black female, I met with those characteristics on the corner of racism and sexism. We faced these racist realities outside our homes, outside our neighborhoods, as well as when Whites came across the tracks into our neighborhoods to harm our men and rape our women. One of my brothers served in the army, and he often brought home White and Hispanic friends; everyone was welcome in the Morley household, no matter what race, sex, creed, or color. My parents welcomed everyone and treated everyone the same.

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Being a strong, Black female,
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Out of all the racism I suffered in the South, I was able to have some measure of reprieve by being sent north to finish my high school education. I picked up where I left off at my all-Black, segregated school in the South, prior to forced busing. I was truly in an integrated academic setting, and it was totally different from the racist South. My confidence as a Black female soared even more. I rose academically, no longer hampered by my Blackness, but instead being rewarded and judged, not by the color of my skin, but by the content of my character, my skills, my abilities, and my intelligence. The scholarships I received were indicative of the work I did, and my skin color played no role.

After earning a bachelor degree, a master degree, and two specialist degrees, I matriculated as a doctoral candidate at the University of Rochester. I engaged in years of research for my dissertation focusing on the topic, "Forced Busing, and Integration that Never Took Place." Once again in the late eighties, my Blackness began to impact my upward mobility by the White establishment at the University of Rochester. My dissertation chairperson related that my topic was too controversial, and, as long as I pursued that line of research, I would never graduate. At the last minute, I was forced to change my dissertation topic! They didn't want to read about the truth regarding forced busing and the integration that never took place. They most certainly did not want to hear the truth—raw emotions and facts that would be brought forth through my qualitative research from the mouths of Black children and Black families, stripped from their neighborhood schools to attend schools in White neighborhoods. My research would have brought to life the pain of racism I experienced through forced busing. No matter how much they read, they could never know the pain I experienced—and still experience—while living Black in America. Although I was forced to change my dissertation topic, the strength of my Black parents and Black fore parents allowed me to complete my doctorate, being recognized as the first Black person to earn a doctorate (Ed.D.) in Counseling, Family and Worklife from the University of Rochester.

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while living Black in America.

Even after earning my doctorate, racism continues to raise its ugly head. While serving as a servant-leader back in the South, in DeKalb County, Georgia, I have had my Blackness challenged over and over again, especially from my fellow White board members—a school board that is elected to serve the children and families of the county. Because I am a strong, seasoned, smart, articulate, intelligent, and accomplished Black woman, with a voice they can't silence, I am often feared by some Whites, especially by those who are on the school board with me. They fear me because they can't control or silence me. I have been verbally reminded of their privileged White status and "how much [I am] hated by members of the board." Their acts of attempted control and attempts to silence me have been to no avail. As a result, I have at times been concerned for my safety. This need

for control by the White board members is in line with the control of Blacks on the plantation and the disrespect that comes with it. And since they have not been able to control me, they have managed to pit Blacks against each other and attempted to destroy me. The disrespect by the White board members and the complacency and complicit behaviors by the Black board members are shameful and disappointing. I have wondered, are they "Black and proud" or are they just Black and scared? There have been times when my service on the board has been as if I am in a mini-White-House experience, or I have a role in the movie "Roots." However, I'm still Black, and I'm proud.

I have come to recognize that one of the greatest ways to deny us, as Blacks, is to deny our names. Too often, my name is not used to gain my attention, and the omission of my title, Doctor, is an act of defiance in recognizing and respecting me as a Black female. I was not only given the name Joyce Morley by my parents, which, in itself, says how important and special I am, I worked hard and earned the title of Doctor, to accentuate either the front or the back of my name. However, I remain "Black and proud!"

I call this the "plantation mentality": In order to make their slaves submissive, masters constantly held them in fear. Blacks remained enslaved out of fear of the repercussions for speaking up, speaking out, or for doing anything against the master's will. Giving themselves the name "Master," slave owners also pitted slaves against each other and cause in-fighting. If the slaves fought with each other, they would not be able to organize against the "Master." Sadly, in the year 2020, the same submissive tactics by many Whites occur today, making it difficult for far too many Blacks to get ahead. However, as Blacks, we must be proud enough of our Blackness and stand boldly on the shoulders of our fore parents and ancestors as a united force, to decry, defy, and deny racism against all Blacks, no matter the hue of their skin. We must also do as the late Congressman and Civil Rights icon John Lewis stated, "When you see something not right, unjust, unfair, say something, do something!" It's recognizing that, as Blacks, because many Whites believe our skin color is a threat to their very existence, we must rally together to embrace our color, embrace each other, and stand for what's right, what's just, and what's fair. If the establishment is after me today because I am Black, they will surely be after you tomorrow because you are Black!

Sadly, racist mindsets, hatred, and dark hearts seem to be the norm rather than the exception in the minds and hearts of too many school board members in America, too many educational institutions, too many organizations, and too many corporations today. It's going to take a change of heart and a change in the mindsets of many Whites, and for them to become accountable and responsible for their racist actions, in order for Blacks in America to finally be respected and accepted. However, the greatest respect and acceptance has to come from Blacks in respecting and accepting their own Blackness, standing firmly while stating and showing, "I'm Black, and I'm proud!"

As Blacks, many of us believe that we "have arrived." However, until *all* of us have arrived, none of us has arrived! Unfortunately, too many Blacks have traded their Blackness for a fake, "I made it, and I'm no longer Black any more" card that has no merit and no value. They have taken on the "imposter syndrome." However, it's because of your Blackness that the forces of White supremacy and racism will void your "imposter card," reminding you that you are still Black.

As Blacks, we must come to realize that there are actions large and small that can and will continue the racist acts being put forth by those Whites who love to hate Blacks. As we fight to hold them accountable for their actions and behaviors, we must also hold accountable those Blacks who allow themselves to be misused as scapegoats to help Whites to continue their racist behaviors by aiding and abetting them without saying something or doing something. As a Black person, no matter how many times and no matter what lengths you go through in order to take on the "imposter syndrome," you remain Black, and you should be proud!

Yes, you can serve as the attorney general in Kentucky, carrying your "imposter card" in your wallet, while aiding and abetting the White racist establishment as it murders Breonna Taylor, indicting her for her own death, without indicting either of the three police officers who murdered her, or you can surrender your "imposter card" and come down to reality. You can serve on a school board, carrying your "imposter card" as you aid and abet in the hiring of a superintendent who is not qualified nor experienced, who was interviewed a total of seven hours, by Zoom, to serve your school district with a student population of over 65% Black students and over 85% students of color, with an annual salary of $400,000, to the

detriment of the students and families in the district, or you can surrender your "imposter card" and stop trying to fit in, in order to gain position, power, prominence, and prestige. Just be Black, and do the right thing! At some point, your "imposter card" will expire or be revoked, and you will still be Black!

When you are truly "Black and proud," you will not boldly flash your "imposter card" by enabling the murders of Black men and women, along with those of Black boys and girls. You will stop perpetrating a fraud, acknowledge your Blackness, and stop looking down on your Black sisters and brothers. You will surrender your "imposter card" and then have no problem acknowledging and calling out the names of murdered Black women, men, boys and girls, such as George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, David Smith, Tyrone West, Sean Bell, Freddie Gray, Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Philando Castile, Eric Garner, Amadou Dialo, Jordan Davis, Markeis McGlockton, Walter Scott, Manuel Ellis, Emmett Till, and on and on—too many more to name and list, but we will remember and never forget. They were all "Black and proud!"

When you are "Black and proud," you will request that your White colleagues and acquaintances stand with you against racism. When you are truly "Black and proud," you will not carry your "imposter card" and stand against the truth in the midst of the lies perpetrated by your White colleagues against another Black, in an attempt for you to stand in line for political, financial, economic, and other gains. At some point, your "imposter card" will be revoked and you will still be Black, with no gains at all!

To be "Black and proud" is to recognize your Blackness as an honor.

To be "Black and proud" is to recognize your Blackness as an honor of respect for your creator, and the perfection in which you were made, in the image of God. To be "Black and proud" is to stand boldly in your Blackness, for truth and righteousness, accepting nothing less but the best in the midst of truth, demanding respect, not looking down on your sister or brother unless you are pulling him or her up. To be "Black and proud" means carrying no guilt or shame about your color and your Blackness. It's recognizing the royalty

bestowed on you as a queen or a king, with your children born with the designation of princes or princesses.

To be "Black and proud" means not sitting by idly while your Black mother, your Black sister, your Black spouse, your Black grandmother, your Black aunt, or your Black niece is being disrespected by a White man or another Black man. Malcolm X famously said, "The most neglected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman."

To be "Black and proud" is owning every inch of your Blackness, understanding your past, embracing your past, remembering your past, and using your past, as well as the pain of your past as stepping stones, instead of stumbling blocks. To be "Black and proud" means standing for something and not falling for anything, as well as not taking tradeoffs for you to "fit" where you are not wanted, as you pick up and carry the "imposter card" in your purse or your pocket. To be "Black and proud" means that you will not sell out, to aid and abet those Whites who spew racism, White supremacy, and the demise of Blacks, Browns, and American Indians.

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This country has made some gains in terms of civil rights, thanks to heroes like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Myrlie Evers-Williams, Congressman John Lewis, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Congressman Elijah Cummings, Joseph Lowery, President Barack and Michelle Obama, Supreme Court Judge Thurgood Marshall, and so many more Blacks who paved the way for all of us as Blacks to stand against racism and overcome many of the struggles we faced and still face as a people. The fight didn't end with Congressman John Lewis' death. We still have so much more to do. Voting rights are not yet permanent in America for Blacks, Browns, and Native Americans. Until there are laws and amendments in America that address voter suppression, guaranteeing voting rights for Blacks, gun control,

healthcare, housing, and other economic, human, social, and political issues, we still have much more work to do. Education is a civil right, yet we still see so many examples of Black, Brown, and Native American children not receiving the same quality of education as their White peers. Until all children receive a quality and equitable education, and until all people can attain equitable jobs, live in decent and affordable housing in decent neighborhoods, we will not enjoy equality. Our country needs to be like Nike and "Just Do It!"

Ridding our educational systems, corporations, and other organizations and institutions of racism requires a multi-step process. First, the perpetrators must admit that systemic and structural racism exists. There are many Whites who must come to recognize the existence of systemic and structural racism, and admit that they have participated in the proliferation of the acts of racism. Even if they are not first-line racists, their silence shows their complicity. Courageous and open conversations are a must, with responsibility, accountability, atonement, and a plan for correction.

I see acts of racism every day in the lack of trust from my White board members and their desire to control and silence me and other Black women in the field of education, medicine, law, technology, and just for the mere fact that we are Black and not complicit. I choose to use my God-given skin color, my gifts, including my ability to read, write, speak and lead, in order to advocate for myself, Blacks, Browns, Native Americans, as well as well as the poor and disenfranchised, no matter what color. Being "Black and proud" means forgiving while remembering, glancing in the rearview mirror only for strength from your past pains as a result of your Blackness, as you use your side-view mirrors for awareness and caution, remembering that racism is closer than you think. Being "Black and proud" is remembering slavery, making a clear and bold statement by voting, ensuring that you will *never* be enslaved again. It's seeing your value and your worth, vowing never to cheapen yourself, your color, your race and your values by selling yourself out for material things that will fade away. Being "Black and proud" means using the windshield to behold the future as you move forward, not forgetting your past as you forge ahead, eradicating racism along with all of the other -isms.

I'm more than comfortable talking about race. However, living in Georgia for the past thirty years has proven to be one of the greatest challenges of my life when it comes to race and racism. There seems

to be a code of silence, and one is almost dared to acknowledge and speak about the overt racism that exists. Sadly, in 2020, the light-skinned/dark-skinned phenomenon still exists. I am fully aware and prepared for the racism I receive from those Whites who still have not arrived. To add insult to injury, an even greater challenge has been the hatred, divisiveness, and complicit actions, and crab-in-the-barrel mentality and actions my family and me, along with many others who look like me, have had to face from other Blacks. These are the people who, like me and other Blacks, have struggled and, in many cases, are still struggling, but for some reason, they are still carrying their "imposter cards."

I have met some wonderful people since moving to Georgia, but the seeming fear put forth by too many of my people in choosing to stand for something and not fall for anything has been unbelievable, sometimes overwhelming, and disappointing at times. Although I did not live during the time of legalized slavery, I am constantly looking in the side-view mirrors of my life, recognizing that the guy in the White House who calls himself "President" wants to deny and denounce our Blackness and take us back to slavery. I am clearly aware that he is not alone. Being "Black and proud" means I have spoken up and will continue to speak out against racism, as I affirm my Blackness. I'm not willing to fall for anything, but I will continue to stand for something!

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Being "Black and proud" means recognizing that there is enough of everything for everyone, no matter what race or color. Being "Black and proud" entails every Black applauding and lifting up others for their accomplishments, holding them accountable when wrong, allowing each to fall, falter and fail by helping them up and redirecting them, instead of holding them down. Being "Black and proud" means owning your Blackness in the face of Whiteness, remembering that if you help to dig a ditch for your sister or brother today, you might be digging one for yourself tomorrow! No matter what the situation, I pray every day, asking God for guidance and direction, accepting and utilizing the pain inflicted upon me because of my race and my color as stepping stones, instead of stumbling blocks, not holding on to anger, and not carrying hatred in my heart. No matter what, as stated by Maya Angelou, "Still I rise!" No matter what, I don't plan to stop. "I'm Black, and I'm proud!"

"The Most Powerful Form of Racism"

Martín Quezada
President, Arizona *Latino* School Boards Association
Pendergast Elementary School District Governing Board
Phoenix, Arizona

Any discussion on race and racism becomes inherently uncomfortable. That's why so few of us actually engage. When we do, people often take great offense if we identify practices, policies, and beliefs that are racist in nature or generate racist results. I've had to prepare myself for being comfortable in uncomfortable situations and conversations. Being comfortable with that discomfort is necessary for speaking civilly about race and racism.

Since college, when I studied my people's country, politics and history, I have self-identified as a *Chicano*. That term was created by my people, and, unlike "Hispanic," was not imposed on us by the government. The word *Chicano* is an acknowledgement of our pride in our Indigenous identity. It also incorporates the political activism part of our identity. For those reasons, *Chicano* fits me very well.

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My earliest memories of how people come to be treated differently based on their physical appearance occurred at school. I saw students of certain groups excluded from opportunities to which other students had access. At home, I also witnessed family members victimized by racist interactions in our community. Such experiences initially created a misunderstanding in my mind about what I should look like, where I should come from, or what language my family should speak. I was being fed a false idea of what an "all-American" was or should be. I watched anti-immigrant sentiments create doubt

in the minds of members of my family and friends about the fact that we spoke Spanish at home and that our English should be spoken perfectly, without any accent. As I grew and paid more attention, I watched that intolerance begin to systematically impact low-income communities of color: We become the targets of coded, indirect messaging that associates *Latinos*, *Chicanos* and Black people with poor people and criminals.

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Only later would I experience a cultural awakening and better understand who I am, how the world works, and how race is understood in this country. I began to read and study my history and deconstruct what historically happened to people of color in our nation. I also realized that racist thoughts, beliefs and practices are encouraged even among and between ourselves. We can even be racist against persons like ourselves. It's part of a bigger problem. As *Latinos*, we're also guilty of "anti-Blackness," which is just as racist as if it came from Anglos. It's an intriguing phenomenon when the victims of racism become perpetrators of it as well. Over time, racist policies and procedures imprint upon us in ways we don't even realize, because we've become numb to the racism we experience.

We've become numb to the racism we experience.

I occupy a very unique position as an elected official, both on my local school board and in the state legislature. As a result, I see public policy being created at very high levels. The most racist acts happen at the level of public policy, where politicians enact laws and adopt budgets. Everyone in the room, everyone at the decision-making table, knows there will be inequitable impacts on the community at large. Far too often, communities of color get the bad end of that deal. Many policymakers know that their policies, when implemented, create racist results—but they enact them anyway, as if they don't care. It's the most powerful form of racism. I see it happen every single day, leading me to conclude that public policy constructs the heart of racism. It's depressing. I often feel I'm fighting an uphill battle. Racism evolves, shifts and grows more complex, implicit and systemic. Perpetrators maintain systems with overwhelmingly-racist impacts, all the while believing their acts aren't racist.

Our response to the coronavirus pandemic in Arizona and throughout the world shows the effects of racism and implicit bias in our world. The virus doesn't see race, language, nation or immigration status. Theoretically, it should attack everybody equally. Instead, it's disproportionately affecting people of color. Additionally, our inadequate government response directed resources, testing and healthcare to the people who need it the least, rather than to the communities most affected. Our "targeted" pandemic response left *Latinos* behind.

Our "targeted" pandemic response left Latinos behind.

Today, while communities of color are disproportionately suffering from the impacts of the COVID-19 virus, the Black Lives Matter movement is drawing our attention to the fact that young people of color—and Black people in particular—are disproportionately killed by police officers in our nation. It's also frustrating to see the grossly-racist pushback to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Racism remains active here, and most people hate talking about it. It makes them very uncomfortable. We love our friends in law enforcement, and we like the fact that we can pick up the phone and call the police for help. For many people, it's easier *not* to talk about how law enforcement kills Black people at a higher rate than other groups. It's easier to *not* talk about how school resource officers are criminalizing Black and Brown kids in our schools at higher rates. It's easier to ignore these difficult topics or entirely change the subject of conversation. The only way to solve these issues requires talking about them a lot more. When we don't openly talk about such matters, some people assume such issues don't exist, while others think it's much worse than it really is.

The only way to solve these issues requires talking about them a lot more. When we don't openly talk about such matters, some people assume such issues don't exist, while others think it's much worse than it really is.

My study of the history and politics of racism, as well as my public policymaking experience, led me to conclude that race is absolutely a social construct—but it's a social construct that is very real and very

powerful. Some people push back and insist that we should all be "colorblind," that we shouldn't see race at all. In and of itself, that proposition is racist: It's impossible to erase race from our social minds. It remains—and always will be—a social construct.

Even though we've come very far with respect to race and racism, we face an even longer way still to go. Sure, we abolished slavery—but only to recreate it through the over-policing and over-incarceration of people of color. That generates the same effect. We no longer redline and discriminate so openly in our lending practices, but our affordable housing, healthcare and criminal justice problems achieve the same results: One group of people benefits, while others receive much less. We must take responsibility for the fact that we perpetuate these inequitable systems.

We must take responsibility for the fact that we perpetuate these inequitable systems.

In our parents' and grandparents' day, racism was much simpler and more direct. It was socially acceptable for them to label drinking fountains "White" or "Black." Evolved racism has now become more complex. Now we find other ways to send Black people to one restaurant and White people to another. Our strategies are much more complex, making it more difficult to point to the source of the evil.

Evolved racism has now become more complex. Now we find other ways to send Black people to one restaurant and White people to another.

In our educational systems, we must address racism from the top down, starting with funding. That functions as the most obvious way that policymakers perpetuate racism in our schools. Education funding is different in every state, but I guarantee you that funding flows inequitably to Black and Brown schools in every state. That's absolutely the case in Arizona: Our tax structure directs property taxes to upper-class, wealthy, Anglo communities, leaving poor, low-income, minority communities with far fewer resources. Our property values aren't as high as the property values in White districts, so we get less money.

Racism also perpetuates in the governance of our schools. *Latinos* remain grossly outnumbered on Arizona school boards and grossly less reflective of the total percentage of the population. As a result, people of other races and ethnicities make decisions for our kids—often with racist outcomes. We must be better represented on our school boards. The same proves true with the administrators of our schools. We should have many more *Latino* superintendents and principals than we do. We are underrepresented in the most powerful positions in our districts. Our teacher ranks are not as diverse as they should be. Studies show that our students perform better when those who teach them look like them or come from the same families and neighborhoods. Standardized testing, school choice and high stakes evaluations of schools and teachers—all driven by racism—are especially pernicious and end up hurting kids of color. These resegregate our schools, causing them to look more like schools before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. These results benefit smaller groups of students—usually upper-class, Anglo students—at the expense of poorer students of color.

We are underrepresented in the most powerful positions in our districts.

More than ever, we need to force conversations on race and racism, especially when speaking of public policy, which impacts people of different races in different ways. When we cut counselors from our budgets, this disproportionately impacts Brown and Black students. Even if we're simply debating a math for our district—which seems unrelated to race—we should always ask the question. We need to keep people thinking and talking about race!

Since the death of George Floyd and calls to defund police, school board members have been canceling contracts with school resource officers and looking for new ways to foster safe environments in our schools. This opens conversations on race: how the presence of police officers affects Black students, how a distrust for law enforcement exists, and how our kids are being introduced through them to the criminal justice system. These are often tough votes for school board members, since not everyone in the community understands the arguments on both sides of such issues.

We also need to equip our parents to have difficult conversations on race. We should raise their awareness to the ways in which

curricula impact their children. We should help them to ask whether other Brown kids are getting the same poor results as their children. If so, there's a greater problem that needs to be addressed.

I sometimes wonder why there is such resistance to dealing with issues of race and racism. You'd think that, as a nation, we've arrived at a point where we can have these conversations more openly and work together to find solutions. We're interacting with one another more than ever. Our communities are intermarrying. Still we see resistance to racial equity and progress. It seems as if many people want our racist structures to continue into the future. I also wonder why so many people still do not want us here.

Change doesn't happen overnight, but we're making progress. In 2016, Colin Kaepernick was kicked out of the NFL for taking a knee during the national anthem. Some people thought it was the most disrespectful thing anybody could do, and it cost him his career. With the events of this summer, entire teams are now taking a knee—in multiple sports. People now have a greater understanding of why Kaepernick took a knee back then. Some people still don't completely understand why he did it, and some are very much opposed to it. One man decided to do something controversial, which made people uncomfortable, forcing us to have a conversation on a very difficult subject. We have to do the same with racism.

I'm very much a believer in the model from Ibram X. Kendi's excellent book, *How to Be an Anti-racist*. It's not enough for us to *not* be racist, to *not* do the things that racists do. To combat racism, we must be actively anti-racist, combating racism in every action we take, in every conversation we have, in every vote we cast, and in every proposal we develop. In every action, we need to deconstruct systemic racism. We might say that we aren't racist, but if we're voting for certain policies and politicians, or if we're supporting the *status quo*, which benefits some groups over others, we are contributing to and perpetuating systems. If we do that, we are, at the end of the day, racists. Let's commit ourselves to be active anti-racists!

To combat racism,
we must be actively anti-racist,
combating racism in every action
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and in every proposal
we develop.

"Rocking the Boat"

Jorge Pacheco, Jr.
President, California *Latino* School Boards Association
Oak Grove School District Board of Trustees
San José, California

I'm an Ethnic Studies teacher, so I'm very comfortable talking about race and racism. I teach about race and racism, and systems of power and oppression—not just in the classroom, but also in the boardroom and beyond. Conversations on race and racism make people uncomfortable. They cause cognitive dissonance. But they provide the only means for us to reach effective solutions to solve some of the most pressing issues of today.

Conversations on race and racism make people uncomfortable. They cause cognitive dissonance.

Mine is hardly a cookie-cutter story. I was classified as a special education student and English Learner in the Oak Grove School District, so I left high school very unprepared, not knowing how to effectively read or write. As a senior, I did middle-school math. At one point, I had a 1.7 GPA. I became convinced that I was one of the stupidest people on the planet—not so much because of my grades, more from the feedback I received from teachers and administrators, as well as what I believed about myself.

I started internalizing racism and oppression at an early age. I remember telling my father, when he picked me up after my first day of kindergarten: "Call me 'George,' and stop speaking to me in Spanish!" Without really knowing why, I felt embarrassed and ashamed to have him as my father. I decided that I would no longer be "Junior," "Jorge" or any of the names my family preferred for me. Such early experiences galvanized me to talk about race as an adult, to embed racial literacy into my curriculum as a teacher, and to advance anti-racist policies as a school board member.

As an Indigenous, queer, mixed-race Asian/*Latino*, I struggled to find my place in school and society. I'm not merely *Latino*; I have Korean, Salvadoran and Mayan Indigenous roots. It's impossible for

me to ignore or not talk about race. I recall when I learned as a boy that I am part East Asian. I immediately knew that I wanted to be more East Asian than *Latino*. I was embarrassed and ashamed of my *Latino* identity, which I attempted to erase. I didn't know what racism was, but I knew that East Asian and White kids were treated better than *Latino* kids. They asked different questions; they were seen as smarter and more capable than *Latinos*. Teachers considered *Latinos* stupid class clowns who didn't want to learn. I understood that people treated students differently because of their names, the languages they spoke, or the color of their skin.

The way I saw and treated myself was largely shaped by peers and teachers, by the things I saw on TV, by my lack of mentors, and by the lack of education I received on race and racism. I saw myself as ugly and without a future. As a result, I performed poorly in almost every class and in every grade. Without wanting to seem hyperbolic, it almost cost me my life. Had I not raised my grade to a D-minus in geometry as a senior in high school, I wouldn't be writing these words today—and I certainly wouldn't be a teacher or school board member.

In college, I studied critical race theory and learned about power and prejudice. I learned how race is a construct rooted in anthropology, with early, racist anthropologists classifying humans into now-famous categories of race.

Supporters elected me to serve the same district that raised and educated me. I'm *not* a success story of my district. I'm an example of how my district failed kids. As a teacher, I now understand that, if one of my students fails, that's on me. Their success and failure are 100% my responsibility.

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Shockingly, despite the fact that my school district is 50% *Latino*, I am the *only Latino* ever elected to our school board in the Bay Area. Really, though, this does not surprise me, considering the racial divides in our politics. I see it as my responsibility to help decolonize our structures, governance team, policies, procedures and protocols. Every time I'm in our boardroom, I vigorously and aggressively push for diversity and inclusion, to make sure we close our achievement and opportunity gaps.

Even in pre-K and kindergarten, our kids need to learn about race and racism. Implicit bias is already present in their lives by that age, especially for our Black, Brown and Indigenous kids. They start divesting from school and education. Many of them end up homeless or in prison. These situations cost not only them and their families, but our whole society. If they become criminalized, they face higher suspension and expulsion rates. All these factors severely impact their futures as well as our own.

Our Black, Brown and Indigenous kids struggle against a massive divide—the achievement gap—with White and East Asian kids. One reason is our Eurocentric curriculum, which marginalizes voices of color and leads our students to believe that their histories don't matter. That erasure of stories of communities of color by gentrification continues, making some stories invisible.

COVID-19 exposed inequities. Richer students can access devices and high-speed internet, while poorer students cannot. The digital divide is wide for our Black, Brown and Indigenous students. School board members possess the ability to bridge this divide with anti-racist policies, and, if we are able to do this, we will create societal change for generations to come.

We need brave school board members willing to engage in consistent conversations on race and racism and who will publicly and explicitly denounce White supremacy in every way, shape and form. We need leaders who will create and implement anti-racist policies that benefit our students, our employees and our communities. We need to decolonize and liberate our kids from structures that hold them back and prevent them from reaching their potential.

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When I teach about race, racism and White supremacy, I make clear to my students that we are fighting for racial justice and against White supremacy. We're not fighting White people. We are working to dismantle institutionalized racism in our banking, healthcare and educational systems. We are working to elect to public office people of color who experience racism on a daily basis and who can transform those experiences into public policy solutions. That's the

reason I decided to run for our local school board against a 24-year incumbent who was in office since I was in kindergarten.

I encourage districts to create their own committees for diversity, equity and inclusion, with districtwide conversations on tackling equity issues. I support diversifying our teacher pipeline by hiring more teachers of color who reflect the faces of our students. We also need to implement Ethnic Studies and implicit bias training nationwide. We need young people of color—especially women—to lead this charge, push forward the conversation, and craft better policies and laws.

In California, we're pushing to create an Ethnic Studies high school graduation requirement, and we're looking forward to our State Board of Education's adoption of an Ethnic Studies curriculum in March 2021, the first in the nation. We now need to see more inclusion of LGBTQ and Arab-American history across all content areas in our schools. Anti-Arab and Islamophobic oppression in our educational system exists and grows, which is why we need to push for Arab American Studies in all our schools as well.

As an activist for Ethnic Studies at the local and state levels, I deal with racism every day. People push back, questioning why we need to talk about race or why we need to fund equity efforts. They also push back because I'm a young, queer, Brown, Indigenous school board member who rocks the boat at every meeting. As one of two school board members of color on our board, I consistently fight to prevent the defunding and de-staffing of programs that support English Language Learners and help them achieve a level playing field with native speakers. I was very proud in December 2019 when our board became the first K-8 district in California to codify and institutionalize Ethnic Studies—even though it became a fight ending in threats by some to ensure that it wouldn't subsequently be funded.

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People of color—and their allies—have to advocate consistently. People resist our attempts to discuss race, racism, diversity, equity and inclusion. It's frustrating. As recently as June, we passed a

strongly-worded resolution in support of Black Lives Matter and against White supremacy. We called out examples of racism, including the fact that people demanded we fire or cut the wages of our entire executive administrative team of color.

I will no longer be complacent. I will call out racism. We've lost a lot of ground under our current U.S. President and his Secretary of Education. They have not supported public education or our LGBTQIA+ and undocumented students.

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be complacent.
I will call out racism.

I wonder if I will see the day when racism and White supremacy are defeated, when our elected offices reflect our populations, and when we see strong, anti-racist cultural waves impacting all parts of our country. If I leave any legacy, I hope it includes my helping us to achieve that one day.

A difficult journey lies ahead, but we all want to create the best-possible world for our kids, grandkids, and the next seven generations. Let's take on this challenge and create an equitable world for them. Let's make this world a liberated and just place!

"We Must Walk the Walk"

Mónica Gallardo Pimentel
Treasurer, Arizona *Latino* School Boards Association
Glendale Elementary School District Governing Board
Phoenix, Arizona

At a very young age, I first asked my parents questions about demographics, particularly since the only boxes to check on school questionnaires offered White, Black, Native American or Asian. Not self-identifying as any of those, I learned the difference between race and ethnicity. For decades, Mexican Americans have been considered "White"—something I never liked, but that's technically what I am. My ethnicity, though, is Mexican-American, and I consider myself Mexican-American or *Latina*. Only recently, I embraced the term *Chicana*—a term less liked by my father, due to the radical connotations of that word in the 1960s.

My dad is very dark-skinned, and my mom is very fair-skinned, so all my siblings and I have very different complexions. I recall one instance when a person didn't believe that my dad was really my father—because I'm as fair as my mom.

I grew up in a predominantly-White neighborhood, and a very large Black family—the Davis family—lived directly across the street from us. As a young child, I didn't know my friends as Black or White; I knew them as friends, and it was great having so many kids to play with! Lori Davis was my age, and we always went to the park, where we skated and rode bikes together. Race wasn't an issue until we went to school. I made a new friend at school, and I remember I took Lori with me to play at my new friend's house. When we got to her house, her dad told her that she couldn't play with us because we weren't the same. Being so young, I didn't understand what that meant. His words made no sense to me. We were just little girls who enjoyed playing together, and it made me sad to think that we couldn't. It was only when I got older that I realized he meant color. Regardless, Lori remained my best friend, and we continued riding our bikes, skating and playing at the park, doing all the things kids do.

When I was very young, my parents determined that we would not learn Spanish. My father's first language was Spanish, and he failed kindergarten because he didn't speak English. Shamed and embarrassed, he swore that his kids would never learn Spanish or speak English with an accent. He rationalized that we would never be picked on by classmates or punished and embarrassed by teachers. As a result, my friend's mother, who spoke no English, would become upset with me for not knowing Spanish. It was a lose-lose situation. Ironically, when I did study Spanish in high school, my mom made fun of me for speaking Spanish like a White girl! Even today, I am a Mexican-American woman who speaks very little Spanish.

I'll never forget the first day of my freshman year in high school. My dad was home that morning, which was unusual since he was a business owner who often left home super-early in the morning and returned late at night. As a freshman now, I wanted to look cute for the first day of school. As I prepared to leave the house, my dad stopped me. "Don't bring home any Black boys," he said. I was stunned. He continued, "And don't bring home any Mexican boys either!" That first day of my freshman year was the first time I gained insight into my dad's unconscious, implicit biases against Black boys. It bothered me for years. Fifteen years later, when I finally asked him why he said that, he reluctantly explained that, when he was in high school, it was his experience that non-Black girls were beaten by the Black boys they dated. I remember warning him not to generalize about all Black boys based on the actions of a few. Mexican, White, Black and Asian boys can commit physical abuse—and, in all instances, it's wrong.

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To this day, I don't like to make generalizations about groups. We try to categorize people, only to later discover that not all women or *Latinas* or people with dark hair, for example, are the same. Our President committed the most egregious generalization when he suggested in 2016 that all Mexicans are "drug dealers, criminals and rapists." We can't be lumped together like that, especially in such a negative manner. We are all individuals, with our own individual backgrounds and unique stories. I'll admit that generalizations still bother me, and it's something I've tried to teach my sons to avoid.

Many people aren't willing to discuss implicit bias, which manifests itself in jokes about race. It used to seem harmless telling jokes about different ethnicities and, to this day, I'm ashamed of the jokes I told when I was young about different ethnicities. I now recognize that such jokes were harmful, played into negative stereotypes, and weren't funny at all.

I've always been intrigued by the generalization that Brown people steal. I've been followed in stores and asked if I was going to purchase something—with the suggestion that I needed to move on if I didn't intend to. Similarly, when my son was about ten years old, he and I were visiting a Hallmark store, where a woman accused him of thinking of stealing a Harry Potter figurine. A Brown boy was *thinking* of stealing—simply because he was looking at the item? I was infuriated. I made a big deal out of telling my son, rather loudly, that we were leaving because someone thought he wanted to steal something. When we left, I apologized to him for leaving the way we did. I had to explain to him what was really going on and that he did nothing wrong. In thinking back on the situation, I'm not sure he understood the gravity of the situation at that time. But as a grown man today, he not only understands it; he remembers it.

A similar story made such an impact on me that I remember it years later. Back in the 1990s, my friend and her husband were driving from California to Chicago. They stopped for the night in Amarillo, Texas, where they were told by the hotel staff that the hotel's vacancy sign was broken and that they didn't have any available rooms. While they were figuring out what to do, a White couple walked into the hotel without a reservation and secured a room. Furious, my friend confronted the clerk, who replied, "We're not allowed to serve people like you." She probed, "What do you mean, 'people like me'?" "We're not allowed to have Black people in our hotel," he said. My friend says it was that experience that catapulted her to study law and become an attorney—to fight bias. Her story continues to shock me because the racism she and her husband encountered was so blatant. For them, it was nothing new. Growing up in Arizona, I never had such experiences—which is ironic, since Arizona is so racist now.

Since 2016, it has been appalling to see how much racism is still part of the fabric of this country. I didn't think that racism had entirely disappeared from our nation, but it was shocking to realize that racism simply went into hiding and seemed to be just under the surface. Polarization characterizes our country. Those who support Black Lives Matter tend to be characterized as being racist against White people, which is the furthest from the truth. Our President's characterization of Mexicans ignited hatred toward us by some. I cannot express how many times we hear, "go back to Mexico" or "go back to where you came from." We have always been here! I'm always quick to point out that half of my family didn't cross the border; the border crossed us! We live in land that once belonged to Mexico. Not everyone's ancestors crossed the *Río Grande* to get here. But it should be noted that, even when people do immigrate to the United States, the so-called "Land of Opportunity," they simply want a better life and better opportunities for themselves and their families. Isn't that what we all want? Isn't that what this country was founded on?

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Half of my family didn't cross the border; the border crossed us!

I'll admit that I've even lost longtime friends during these last few years: Emboldened by the racist attitudes of our President, they've shared words and views that have permanently harmed our relationship. I've even had to correct a White man who married into our Mexican family, for referring to undocumented persons as "illegals." I'm hopeful that such words and attitudes will again subside when this President is voted out of office. Then, hopefully, all the blatant racism we've seen during these four years will start to clear up.

I sometimes wonder why we do things to devalue others. I've tried to teach my sons not to judge others by their skin color—all the while knowing that they've been judged by others for this. We live in Maricopa County, where Sheriff Joe Arpaio was on a mission to deport everyone with dark skin and a Spanish surname. At that time, my dark-skinned son, who at the time, was only 15 years old, was riding in a car with two fair-skinned girls, when they were pulled

over by the police, who ordered him out of the car and threatened him with deportation! They demanded that he provide them with identification and, when he gave them his high school ID, that wasn't good enough, since his birthdate was not on it. He was incredibly shaken and upset by the incident. He said he felt like garbage, and that everything I taught him was devalued by the experience. Like the rest of us, teachers and police officers need to be reminded never to judge a book by its cover.

For years, our students have not been taught their history. They've been taught White history. The true history of Blacks, *Latinos*, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans and their positive contributions to our society and everyday life remains largely absent from our classrooms. I never learned about the struggles of Mexican Americans in Arizona. We breezed over the history of segregation in our state, only learning about the "big stories" in the Southeast.

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School funding in Arizona is not equitably distributed, with tax credits going to specific schools, and, as recently as the 1980s, in different parts of our state, we were still busing White and Black students differently. While it may not be as evident today, Arizona's educational systems continue to push distinctions of race and class.

In Arizona, English Language Learners are treated as being less intelligent than native-English speakers. It's as if our government and education system overlook the fact that these kids already speak one language and that they are now learning a very difficult, second language. These kids are smarter than we are! As educators, we also should ask ourselves how we're serving students who don't speak English or Spanish. In my district alone, our students speak more than 50 languages at home! It's not enough to only accommodate English and Spanish speakers, but I'm proud that my district provides dual-language classes to our students and our parents. Why can't we, as a state, do that with all of our families?

Change will never happen in this world unless we willing to confront and call out evil. Just last weekend, an elder in our family used the N-word. The rest of us looked at him and said, "You can't use that word. It's not okay." As if to justify it, he replied, "I'm just telling a story." I pushed back: "That word is never okay." Here in

Arizona, a university professor who used the N-word in his classroom ran for public office; after everything that I've taught my kids, I just can't vote for such a person. We have to confront such people on social media, too. People who become bullies behind a keyboard must be called out. In Scottsdale, a city council member is referring to COVID-19 as the China virus. After the death of George Floyd, he opposed a local face mask ordinance by putting on a mask at a press conference and repeating, "I can't breathe." Such remarks are racist and insensitive. We must call them out. We need to help people understand the harm their words and actions cause. We must walk the walk!

We need to help people understand the harm their words and actions cause. We must walk the walk!

I'm part of a group chat with some 30 other progressive school board members. We're banding together, having conversations, and talking about how we can support one another on our respective boards and call out the racism in our communities. We currently have a Black school board member in Chandler who's being harassed on social media and though email and text. The community is calling her racist because she points out White privilege. As school board members, we need to work together—not just within our local boards, but also in our regions.

I wonder when people will open their eyes and realize how racist they are. I wonder how some people can be so insensitive that they don't realize, or care, how they condone racism and pass it to their children and grandchildren. I wonder whether we'll be in a better place 50 years from now. It's been over 50 years since Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated: How far have we really come since then?

I wish I could just fix it all. I wish I could remove the biases of all humanity. Even within our own culture, I wish that Mexicans and Mexican Americans could get along—that we wouldn't look down on them, and that they wouldn't make fun of us for the way we speak Spanish. Let's open our eyes and help others to open theirs, so that we can see and confront racism!

"Race Isn't Rocket Science; It's Much Harder Than Rocket Science"

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

I'm very comfortable talking about race. My thoughts have progressed over the years, and I've learned how to engage in conversations about the social construct of race. The more I learn, the more I know I'm not wrong. I'm also at a point where I don't want to internalize anymore. I've allowed internalizing to have enough power over portions of my life, primarily coming from fear and concern, which usually leads to more hurt or pain. If conversations about race produced muscle, my "muscle" would be pretty strong. I now feel more empowered, and I operate from a liberated state of mind.

I don't self-identify in terms of race, because race is a social construct. Previous racial identifications didn't come from me or my community; neither did such labels further our racial classification. Ethnically and culturally, though, I'm of Mexican descent, from the Indigenous Purépecha people.

I don't self-identify in terms of race, because race is a social construct.

As a boy, I received direct and indirect messages from my family, friends and community that influenced my own stereotypes and implicit biases with respect to race. I also learned about race from my own family and my religion. I grew up with images of a White Jesus and of White heroes and sheroes—a complete disconnect from the Brown people in my school and community. Even within the *Latinx* community, White images dictated the majority of our reality. Our schools were named for White people—slave owners in some cases. Socialized and conditioned by those images, I developed implicit biases and negative views of people of color. I now understand this

occurred because the issue of race was—and is—so pervasive. It's exactly how racism is designed to work.

One of my earliest memories about racial differences dates to my third-grade experience in public school. I had an altercation with two Black brothers, and I had to explain to my parents what happened. My parents immediately asked about their skin color. Sure, I had noticed that, but I didn't realize I had already begun to identify people based on their skin color. After that, I began listening to and internalizing my parents' perspectives on the Black community. My earliest memories about racial differences then became directed at the Black community.

I later understood I had been fooled into thinking certain ways about skin color. I felt misguided and manipulated. I realized I never learned about the beauty of Black people and their origins in Africa. I was taught that immigrants were humble and submissive. In the classroom, I learned that "White is right." White was pure and better. Whites figured it all out. Blacks were criminals, freeloaders, and lazy.

In the classroom, I learned that "White is right." White was pure and better.

Fast-forwarding from my early social conditioning, to the discovery of my implicit biases, I've learned from amazing human beings of all colors. I found that our Brown community formed here in Texas long before anyone else. I noticed common traits between the Black and Brown communities. I learned of the evidence that Africans arrived on this continent before White Europeans. I saw their images engraved in the temples we now know as pyramids, when the Black community held power. Their major influence in our world began to tear away at my own early social conditioning and implicit biases. Black people—the original people—were always active in history, including in the Bible! According to stories, the magi—Jesus' first visitors—included a Black man. Alexander the Great was actually "Alexander the Terrible," conquering people, robbing them of their identity, history, and culture, and burning the libraries and histories of Africa. The Spaniards similarly destroyed the cultures of

Indigenous peoples on this continent. What I've learned about other races in our world shifted dramatically as I've accessed materials not traditionally found in K-12 school systems.

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Some of the most blatant acts of racism today happen under the guise of COVID-19. The data absolutely show that Brown and Black communities suffer the harshest impact and without significant access to health care. Privileged policymakers now push to reopen schools, threatening them with funding cuts.

These events validate that there's nothing wrong with me, and that what I see is, in fact, what takes place. Because of this, I feel called to awaken others. Many people are "asleep"—probably by design. They missed education about their own history or the significance of the people of their race and ethnicity—by design. This selective memory and omission of education are not their fault. I feel a sense of responsibility to awaken others, as described by W.E.B. Du Bois. He described the "Talented Tenth," which suggests that 10% of people are conscious and have a responsibility to awaken the other 90%.

Once I discovered who I was, once I learned about my history and heritage, I recognized my truth. I became less offended by other people's "truths." My greatest mentor, Rickie Clark, says, "You can't love the fruit if you don't love the root." He teaches that Black people fear connection to Africa because they dread the negative connotations associated with their skin color. Rickie doesn't like the term "African American"; he chooses instead to speak of "*Afrikaans* born in America." He asks, "If a German shepherd is born on the moon, do you call it a moon dog?" Of course not! German shepherds were originally bred in Germany, and they're still dogs of German descent. The Chinese originated from China, Mexicans from Mexico, and Russians from Russia. Rickie argues that an African born in America remains African. If a Black man, like Rickie, could find his way back to his motherland and his heritage, I should

"You can't love the fruit if you don't love the root."
—Rickie Clark

be able to do so as well. Like so many other amazing people, Rickie taught me to "love the root"!

As a Brown man overseeing a school district, I continue to confront racism and implicit bias. The microaggressions and racist comments manifest themselves in emails and social media posts—but once I discovered my own truth, I became less offended by other people's "truths." Ridiculously-racist remarks continue to trigger me, but my responses are now better calculated and much more focused on taking care of the real problem. This, in turn, protects my mental and physical well-being.

I first came to the realization that race is a social construct from my schooling and from the internet. Race was originally designed to describe lineage and nothing more. In the early settlement of this country, several of our "founding fathers" accepted and promoted a system that could justify the slavery and genocide of Indigenous people. According to their "Christian" mindset, they needed a construct that would justify the enslavement and killing of certain races. They attached social structures to race, dehumanizing both Black and Indigenous peoples already inhabiting the continent. The world makes a lot more sense when you can put those pieces together.

Race was originally designed to describe lineage and nothing more.

We haven't yet come far enough in our quest for civil rights. We have laws and policies that benefit people of color, but, during the current pandemic, we saw how quickly those laws and policies can be undone.

Black students are under attack. Brown children are in cages at the border. Black people still get targeted and killed by some in law enforcement. Women are still suffering disrespect at the highest levels. To say outright that we've come a long way would be disingenuous. We have a long way to go! This journey requires more conscious people of color in positions of power. It's also going to require empowering conscious people in all walks of life. I don't want more White *allies*; I need White *co-conspirators*! We also need people within our own heritage and communities of color to be conscious, to be great leaders, and to be unapologetic

This journey requires more conscious people of color in positions of power.

about fighting for the most marginalized and oppressed groups of people in our country.

When I think of the ways our educational system perpetuates racism today, I start by asking this question: Who are five White people who made this country what it is? Young people can easily name Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Teddy Roosevelt. Then I'll ask them to name four Black people who've made this country what it is—not counting sports or musical artists. They'll name Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks. Then I ask them to name four Brown, *Chicano*, *Chicana*, or *Latino* people. Silence. Sometimes, I might hear names like César Chávez or maybe Dolores Huerta. Then, crickets. That's when I pull back the curtain of systemic racism in education. The majority of our Brown students in Texas can't name five *Latinx* heroes and sheroes! It's an embarrassing activity—especially when you do it with superintendents and school board members, who are supposed to be our educational leaders. That activity shows me who's "asleep." Try it sometime: Ask people for five Asian-American heroes and sheroes. It's absolutely not true that there aren't any. Ask for five Muslim-American leaders, or five Indigenous leaders. Our whole system is schooled towards Whiteness, and it definitely doesn't empower all people. Images dictate our reality.

When it comes to equitable educational outcomes, we haven't even reached the 1% mark yet. Much more work needs to be done. Most districts in our country don't even set an equity policy, much less a policy about race. Until we change our educational policy, until our laws change on the educational front, it's an uphill battle. Things will change only when trustees and superintendents stop sitting on the sidelines for the sake of "getting along." Until they push for equity, our school systems will continue to marginalize children of color. And we won't recognize these outcomes until we engage in meaningful conversations about the social construct of race and what racial equality really looks like.

Race isn't rocket science; it's much harder than rocket science! First and foremost, we need to begin with language, to effectively confront racism. We don't teach about the social construct of race in K-12 school systems, whether public, private or charter. That's by design, and students generally don't come out of school knowing how to talk about the most explosive topic in our country. Our school systems

need an anti-racist curriculum and an overview of how the social construct of race was formed. These steps alone will help us establish a common language. If you want to learn how to read a book, you begin with the ABC's and how to pronounce letters; then you advance to sentences and paragraphs. We might use the same analogy for introducing change into our educational system: If we want to talk about race, we must first learn the vocabulary.

Before you tackle race as a school board member, you need to determine if you've been "asleep." If so, and if you want to "get woke," read and educate yourself! You have enough information and technology at your disposal to find better answers and counter narratives. Translate everything you learn into policy. The most important responsibility of a school board member is to pass good, effective policy. Consider a racial and ethnic equity policy that serves as an umbrella for ethnic studies and also for teaching children of color their history, establishing better hiring practices that encourage people of color, encouraging professional development, and promoting culturally-responsive parental engagement.

Consider, too, the business practices of your district: Who gets the money, and how are contracts dispersed? We must diversify our business practices to truly transform our communities. The monies we spend can also contribute to the closing of the wealth gap. Become conscious and aware, then translate that awareness into action through policymaking! As a board, set the vision and establish the parameters for your superintendent, who is tasked with the responsibility of putting your ideas into action.

If we hope to ever overcome the racial caste system in our nation and achieve true racial justice, we need to start by becoming conscious. We need to understand that the social construct of races is just that—a social construct. The concept of race was designed to pit us against one another. We also need a multi-racial, multi-generational effort to push our systems in the right direction, the direction of anti-racist practices. This doesn't mean that there's no space for White people; there absolutely is space for White people, as much as there's space for every human being under the sun!

The concept of race was designed to pit us against one another.

I'm optimistic. During this pandemic, we've seen a significant resurgence of awareness and a demonstration of higher levels of consciousness—and not only among young people. The protests that have taken place over several weeks have brought together people from all walks of life who desire social change now. Those protests have been a source of validation, that the work of so many hearts and minds toiling through the years toward an anti-racist society is now bearing fruit in people who are now "woke." Together, let's chase down the folks who are "asleep," and let's "wake" them!

#*AsíDerechito*

"Racism is Often Camouflaged"

Marina Ramos
Director, California *Latino* School Boards Association
John Swett Unified School District Governing Board
Rodeo, California

I identify as *Latina*, as Hispanic. Born and raised in El Salvador, I immigrated to the United States in 1979, at 15 years old. The language barrier was difficult, and many of us, as new immigrants, weren't able to communicate with those around us. This led to some traumatic experiences with African-American students, who thought that we didn't want to speak with them because of the color of their skin. When they spoke to us, we didn't possess the language skills to respond. We didn't encounter such diversity in El Salvador, so many of us thought those students only wanted to hurt us. Now I recognize that some of my own biases with respect to race are rooted in those high school experiences.

Many of my teachers and administrators shaped the way I think about race. They included Americans, *Latinos* and African Americans, and they all taught us about diversity and the need to respect others in such a diverse environment.

After I graduated from high school, it shocked me to discover how few immigrant students pursue higher education. I and one other *Latino* in our class of 30 students did so. Now I see that our high school counselors held us back, saying, "Take this general class," or "You don't need to take that math class." While White students talked about going to college, *Latinos* with the same potential lacked someone to guide them through that process. Instead, school advisors labeled them and closed doors.

It shocked me to discover how few immigrant students pursue higher education.

After graduating from high school, I attended San Francisco City College, then Contra Costa College, before transferring to Hayward State University, where I earned my degree in sociology. All along, I experienced a system that labeled different groups and categories. This system labeled me an "English Learner," needing to focus on

language skills during much of my high school and college years. *Latinos* seemed to be treated differently than Japanese students, who only stayed in ESL classes for six months. We carry such labels, often for life, and I still marvel at the way White people react to my accent.

My twin sister struggled to learn English. She still prefers to speak Spanish. Despite the fact that her high school academic counselor dismissed her, she went on to earn her graduate degree in education. With the right support and resources, we can all be successful!

My internship in social phonology in Richmond, California opened my eyes: I witnessed families living in far worse conditions than I could imagine. It would have been easy to stereotype such people, but I began to see the many variables that contributed to the conditions of people. We're not all raised the same way or with economic protection.

I often identify with the struggles of *Latino* immigrants. This helps me to be a better advocate for immigrant children. I also know that other communities struggle as well. It's often heartbreaking to see the difficulties of African Americans, struggling with long-neglected needs. I feel their pain in their demands for justice and the elimination of murders by police.

In the more than 40 years I've lived here in the United States, I have not seen such violence against the African-American community as we've witnessed this summer. Perhaps it happened in the past, but not in the open, or it wasn't caught in camera. It's too much to bear. My heart pounds when I hear of the treatment of African-American children in our schools and streets, and the way they fear racial profiling. I never think about my child going out and never coming back. It's difficult to listen to the fear of mothers who don't know if their children will safely return home, or whether they're seeing their son for the last time when he walks to a nearby store. This information stirs me to advocate for policy change. As a result, I've joined a group advocating for changes to law enforcement offices in several cities.

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I'm also advocating for change in our school district. We've had several open positions, and it sometimes seems as if our hiring process deems *Latino* and African-American applicants as not qualified. This contributes to a lack of equity. *Latino* teachers are scare in our district, which is 37% *Latino*. Several African Americans applied for our last available principal position—a good-paying job – but none were deemed qualified. Such decisions seem indicators of systemic racism. If we don't give people opportunities, we perpetuate inequity.

Racism often appears camouflaged. Some school board members only wear the appearance of "fairness."

We've come a long way with respect to women's rights and voting rights, but the awful gap in equality remains. Racism often appears camouflaged. Some school board members only wear the appearance of "fairness." Some say they support our African-American students—but then they fail to allow our students to study African-American history. In effect, our children become spectators to the "game" of systemic racism!

"Are We Just Going to Talk About It, or Are We Going to Do Something?"

Armando "Mando" Rodríguez
Chair, National Hispanic Council
Canutillo Independent School District Board of Trustees
Canutillo, Texas

I self-identify as both Hispanic and *Latino*. My dad's side of the family comes from Puerto Rico, and my mom's from Chihuahua, Mexico, so I try my best to honor the heritages of my parents. Sadly, it hasn't always been easy to honor our Hispanic culture: While I grew up, we didn't celebrate our Hispanic heritage in school, and not many Puerto Rican or Mexican leaders appeared in our textbooks.

We all remember stories about our early experiences of race and racism. As a child with a dark complexion, I wanted to fit in so badly. One day, I asked my teacher how to make my skin lighter—and she told me to take a bath in milk or bleach! When we traveled outside our comfort zone in El Paso—where the majority of the population is Hispanic—we suffered the taunts of others. I also remember traveling to a sports championship in the Texas panhandle, where one man addressed us with racial slurs.

By high school, I was more clearly seeing how people face different treatment because of their race and/or ethnicity. From the time that we were young, some of our teachers and counselors told us that we weren't going to college, and that we should look at other options, like trade school or the military. Against their advice, I went to college, where I heard for the first time about the Mexican and Puerto Rican heroes I never saw in high school textbooks—and I learned about their impact on our community. This helped me understand my history and to appreciate my own culture.

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When we begin to understand our own heritage, we open ourselves to more people and we grow in our appreciation of other cultures and their struggles. It is essential that we understand such struggles so we can address racism and inequality.

One incident that stands out for me occurred during my service to our local school board. We were learning that students who earn at least 15 dual-credit hours are more likely to pursue higher education, but that many students who attend college don't earn their degrees. One colleague, who is responsible for educating young Hispanic children, responded, "That's not so bad: We still need plumbers and other laborers!" I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I wanted to explode in anger, but I stayed quiet. Her words continue to resonate in my mind. I wonder how she would react if someone were to tell her that only one of her children can pursue higher education and that the others should become laborers.

I recall another instance of an administrator who didn't support dual-language programs in our district, where enrollment is 80% Hispanic. Such programs promote cross-cultural understanding and cognitive development. Research shows that bilingual children can sometimes surpass monolingual children in terms of academic achievement. It's difficult not to judge such people, but I've always said: "You can't judge until you understand, because once you understand, you probably won't judge."

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My district has high standards for equitable educational outcomes, and we hold every person at every level to these standards. Nonetheless, we have a long way to go in terms of equal educational outcomes. Following the deaths of George Floyd and Vanessa Guillen, our country is at a turning point. The question is: Are we just going to talk about it, or are we going to do something?

Last year, our district attended a conference presented by the Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA). For the first time, we felt like we had a space to discuss various issues facing our district. We came back from that conference ready to make a change. One of our first steps was to examine the inclusion of Mexican-American and *Latino* people in our curriculum and textbooks, so that

Hispanic children will have a better sense of their history and of their ancestors. We also fought for *mariachi* to become a school-sanctioned activity, to promote more cross-cultural understanding in our district.

At the state level, the Texas Association of School Boards is adding a new team member whose primary focus will be to promote diversity and inclusion. At the national level, the National School Boards Association is looking at programs that examine institutional racism in public education. These conversations—though not always comfortable—are vital if we're going to realize change in our communities.

For too long, many elected officials have worked in silos. It's time for us to come together, build a better society, and work to address the issues facing our communities. Perhaps this book provides a good start, helping us to gather information, face issues, and come to know each other better. This may help us figure out the best way to support our students.

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Race currently sits at the forefront of our nation's collective mind. Still, some people harbor stereotypes that justify their belief in White superiority. It's difficult to create changes in the mindsets of individuals. We must find ways to help people recognize the ways in which many systems work against people of color. We need to expose them to people of other cultures. We need to have conversations on the inequities caused by race, so that we will all develop a better understanding of the dynamic that currently plays out in our country. For too long, people have judged others without understanding them. Let's provide people a deeper understanding of others, so that we will be less likely to judge others and more likely to work together to address inequities in our communities and schools!

"This Long Fight"

Yolanda Rodríguez-Peña
Director, California *Latino* School Boards Association
Azusa Unified School District Board of Education
Azusa, California

As a former gang member who became pregnant by age 16, many told me that I likely wouldn't graduate or succeed in life. I attended a predominantly-White high school in Rosemead, California. I didn't earn good grades, and my father blamed all wrongs on my school, "because they're racist Whites." Perhaps, in some ways, they were. I remember Alfonso, a Spanish-speaking student who sat behind me in the eighth grade. When our teacher announced, "I do not want anyone speaking Spanish in my classroom," Alfonso asked the student behind him, "*¿Qué dijo?*" (What did he say?), and the teacher walked across the room and slapped him! Fifty years ago, no repercussions existed for such traumatic acts by those in authority. At age 16, my future husband lost a tooth when the arresting White officer slammed him into a wall. Such events caused many of us to participate in the walkouts and marches of the *Chicano* movement in 1968, where we demanded justice and equality.

I graduated, largely due to help from a high school counselor—a total stranger who, after watching me, noted my potential and pointed out my attitude to me. Seeing myself from a different perspective, I began to carry myself differently, I made new friends, and I was accepted into a college nursing program.

I'm now 70 years old. After working in our school district for 40 years, I became a school board member in 2011. A longtime activist and advocate for students of color, I can now use my vote to make a difference for the education of our students. Having once been an "at-risk" student myself, I don't want to see students thrown out of school for doing something wrong. I want them to be treated better than I was. I want them to receive the best possible education—and counseling, if needed.

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As school board members, we can ensure that all people in our school systems are treated better. As a gang member, I became involved in plenty of fights. Physically abused by my father, I beat up other kids. Violence influenced all I knew. Many of our students come from similarly-hard backgrounds and are unaware of the effect of their words and actions. We hold the opportunity to make a difference in their lives, just as that high school counselor did in my mine.

There's so much we can do as school board members. We can model acceptance of students and employees from other cultures. We can channel funding toward workshops and trainings on systemic racism for teachers, staff members, students and parents. We can also make sure our students learn accurate history. During recent school board meetings, we talked about our students' textbooks. Many of our textbooks tell us what White men wanted us to learn about such people as Christopher Columbus. As a result, our students haven't received an accurate picture of who he was—or of who *we* are.

In many ways, it seems we've gone backwards and are in the 1960s again. 52 years after the *Chicano* movement, now with the death of George Floyd, we're still marching for the same reasons. Racism still exists, and we need to continue educating our community. In my district, many non-*Latino* teachers resisted the implementation of ethnic studies. They say we're being too radical, that we're changing the system. That's exactly what anti-racism does.

After suffering racism for 70 years, I've come to believe it's time for us to be more radical. Social media lit up the other day because I carried a Che Guevara purse. "She's a radical, communist revolutionary," they said." Until racism has vanished, we *should* be revolutionaries.

Until racism has vanished, we should be revolutionaries.

My motto is to be a voice for our students, their parents, and all who serve them. More than ever, we need to raise our voices. We can't continue to allow people to behave like racists. We need to speak up and stand united. That's the only way we'll make a difference in this long fight. Let's move forward and stay strong!

"We've Got to Step Up to the Plate and Tackle the Issues"

Miguel "Mike" Rosales
Director, Mexican American School Boards Association
Ysleta Independent School District Board of Trustees
El Paso, Texas

Sometimes I get exasperated. Now in the fourth quarter of my life, I've been around long enough to understand that "equal opportunity" proved to be nothing but a lie. In this country, we sell the concept, while we continue to judge people by the color of their skin, their culture, their looks and their backgrounds. Consider the film industry: *Latinos* are often depicted as gangsters and drug dealers. Our women still too often portray low-income workers. Our men are seldom the police chiefs. We don't see depictions of average, college-educated *Latinos* with their families. In short, old stereotypes survive.

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As *Latinos*, we were seldom mentored. As a result, very few of us found opportunities to work in the "corner offices" of executive-level positions. We don't have friends who pick us up and "talk shop," as many Whites do to one another. Some of us may be a little "rough around the edges." Few of us can name someone in a position of power who said, "Let me help you!"

We, *Latinos*, are partly to blame, because we don't adequately help each other. Instead, we often put one another down. We also don't exercise our civic duty; we don't vote, even when we enjoy the opportunity to be the largest racial group voting in this U.S. presidential election. We have 5.6 million eligible *Latino* voters in Texas. I remember when Tony Sánchez lost his bid in 2002 to become Texas' first *Latino* governor. Why? *Latinos* didn't vote. At the time, we said, "Give us ten more years." Needless to say, nearly 20 years later, we have yet to see *Latino* leadership at the highest levels in this state. We need to make this happen more quickly. We have educated

Latinos who can do the job; if we were to get out the vote, Texas would change. We must awaken to our power!

Even among ourselves, we fall prey to biases and stereotypes. I hear White and light-skinned *Latinos* suggest that dark-skinned *Latinos* are less intelligent. It's an expressed need to feel superior.

I work for a large organization. After the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, our leadership said, "We're going to make changes." I replied, "Take a snapshot of the leadership of this great organization, and tell me what you see." It took our company 49 years to come to this, but I'm happy to report that two weeks later, they named a diversity officer!

As school board members, we bear a tremendous responsibility. We've got to step up to the plate and tackle the issues that impact our children. We've made some progress, but we can no longer be afraid to address the real, underlying problems.

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I understand that some school boards don't bother to interview superintendent candidates. They've already made their decision, and they go with the pick of the "good ol' boys," denying *Latinos*—or diversity—an opportunity. These are certainly not easy, comfortable conversations.

Many of the conversations on our own experiences of school aren't comfortable conversations, either. When I first went to school, I didn't know any English. I'll never forget one afternoon when my teacher pulled my ear and got on my case—simply because I was speaking the only language I knew! She was really pissed off about that. I realized then that we were "under management," so to speak, and that they would swat us every time we spoke the only language we knew.

As I grew older, I went to a high school in the middle of a predominantly-Jewish neighborhood, where the homes were bigger and better. As time went on, many of us, *Latinos*, had Jewish friends.

As a young man, I didn't like school. I was ill-prepared for it, and they put us into groups, like cattle. We didn't have homework, so my grade point average was horrible. As a result, the only postsecondary institution that would accept me was Texas Western College. I paid

the price and ate a lot of "humble pie" in remedial classes. After five years, I finally earned my degree. I felt like I vanquished a monster!

I then joined the Army, which tremendously opened my mind, since I interacted with Whites, African Americans and Puerto Ricans. When I became an officer, I finally learned manners; I never before asked, "May I?" or "Will you excuse me?" When I was stationed in Alabama, we celebrated the retirement of an older African-American gentleman who shared stories of how his Black unit was forced to march, regardless of how hot or cold it was. After military parades, the White guys boarded their bus back to their village, while the African Americans were forced to march back. This was in the late 1940s. The lesson is clear: If we don't jump on the bandwagon, we're going to continue to be left behind. Blacks analyzed and organized. They're not going back. I don't blame them. As *Latinos*, we need to organize, too. We have to keep going forward. We can't go back.

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After the military, I entered the business world and got involved in my community. When we saw the nonsense of the White chamber of commerce, which didn't pay attention to *Latinos*, we created our own chamber of commerce.

In the work world, it became really frustrating to see people named to management positions simply because of the color of their skin. Those opportunities didn't go to *Latinos* or African Americans. They went to White males and females. I resented having to work for one such person for six years. He was as dumb as a doorknob. I had much more experience than he did—but he was White. He consulted the company vice president on everything, and I got to the point that I told him, "Just make a decision. They don't fire White guys. They'll fire Black and Brown guys, but they don't fire guys like you!"

I'm pretty dark, so of course I've experienced discrimination in my life. I remember that on a trip to Austin, we stopped to play nine holes of golf. We were all *Mexicanos*. We were told that they didn't have any golf carts. Sure enough, one of our light-skinned *Mexicanos*, who was

half-White and half-Mexican, arrived late—and was given a cart, because they thought he was Anglo! That's reality.

Fortunately, we've come a long way. My father told stories of the poll tax here in Texas: You had to buy the right to vote! You can imagine how that discouraged *Latinos* and non-Whites from voting.

You've probably heard of the Texas Rangers: They assassinated *Mexicanos* here in the *Porvenir* Massacre of 1918 and mounted raids against them for years. I've never been comfortable with the fact that we've named a major league baseball team after them. We have glorified the Texas Rangers, as if to say that the people they killed didn't mean anything. Yes, Confederate monuments must come down—but we also have to find a new name for that team!

At my age, you can likely understand why I'm exasperated. It's well past time for us to organize and take back the ballot. It's time for us to step up to the plate and tackle the issue of racism!

"Minorities Don't Get Second Chances"

Mariana Sandoval
Arizona *Latino* School Boards Association
Agua Fría Union High School District Governing Board
Avondale, Arizona

My identity largely comes from my mother: I am the daughter of a single mom, a Mexican immigrant. Before my mother passed away, she became a U.S. citizen, and it was a proud moment for all of us. I grew up in Los Angeles, in a *barrio* that was predominantly Brown/Black, where interactions with law enforcement were not always positive. In my early teen years, I came to realize how the police treated my friends of different races differently. I learned we must work extra hard and not make any mistakes—because minorities don't get second chances.

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My mom reminded us that we were not privileged—neither in race nor wealth. She tried to protect us, but her words also instilled in us a fear of law enforcement and its treatment of minorities. A speeding car once hit my younger brother while he skateboarded in our neighborhood, but my mother didn't want to "make a big deal" out of it. The driver was an African-American man, and my mother did not want to bring attention to the incident. She didn't want us to be labeled troublemakers. I didn't understand these dynamics at the time, but I now realize that she didn't yet possess a legal immigration status.

I always felt accepted at home and in my predominantly-*Latino* schools. I don't recall any blatant acts of racism against me. My husband and children, though, have their share of stories. We moved from California to Arizona, where Sheriff Joe Arpaio racially profiled my husband and my brother. Here in Arizona, my boys have been told to "go back to Puerto Rico." At school, they have been called "beaners" and "illegals." These acts sadden and anger me.

We need to educate non-*Latinos,* many of whom were taught to hate others. We need to open lines of communication with them and help them understand that you can't judge an entire race based on bad experiences with individuals of that race. We're not all criminals and rapists. Regardless of our races and ethnicities, we have more in common with one another than we think.

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We've certainly made some small progress since the Civil Rights era, but it seems our current Administration takes steps backward every day. We have a lot of work to do and will have a lot to clean up after this reign ends.

I now recognize that people label our schools because of the neighborhoods in which they are located. Neighborhoods with higher home values tend to be predominantly-White and wealthy, while the "bad schools" can most often be found in poor, minority neighborhoods. Nearly 70 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, even if inadvertently, we continue to segregate students in our schools! In Arizona, the funding of our public schools is based on property taxes, so schools in affluent neighborhoods receive more funding, while schools in poor neighborhoods—often with much higher numbers of minority children—receive less funding to meet their greater needs.

As school board members, we must learn to recognize examples of structural inequity. For instance, our districts create problems by charging student fees, so that only the most affluent students can afford to participate in sports, band camps and cheer camps. We need to ensure that our teachers and PTO leaders reflect the populations they serve. We also have much work to do to close achievement gaps and share an equitable education with all students.

We should mandate implicit bias training, enact anti-racist policies, and enact restorative justice practices. We also must remove student resource officers from our schools: They don't enhance the learning environment, and they contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline, which primarily affects students of color.

We might begin by educating folks about racism and by bringing attention to racists acts. We need to dismantle all systems that

perpetuate racism—even those methods of racial control that remain legal and are perceived by non-minorities to be non-discriminatory.

I sometimes wonder how people can hold so much hatred in their hearts. I wonder how they can seem so evil and ignorant. I cling to the hope, though, that not all people are racist. There are a number of "good eggs" out there, giving us a reason to hope in humanity.

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I remain hopeful that one day my eyes may see a world without racism—and with more unity and love. In the meantime, because minorities often don't have "a seat at the table," I'm not shy about bringing my own chair!

"So That Every Child Crosses the Finish Line at the Same Time"

Rhonda Skillern-Jones
Past President, Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members
Houston Community College Board of Trustees
Houston, Texas

As an African-American woman, born and raised in this country, I became acutely aware of issues of race and racism from a very young age. Many of my peers talk easily about race and racism because we've been pushed in spaces and places and made to feel uncomfortable. We become able to push back because it is incumbent upon us to speak out on these issues. We recognize that nothing will change, if we don't. Silence and complacency don't move the needle. So our duty and civic responsibility requires our voices. We have to be the change we want to see!

I am absolutely 100% sure that I am African-American. That's how I identify myself, and that is my heritage. My mother reflects her mixed heritage, but my father is Black. I go with the majority of what I am: African descent. That's also how the world sees me: My physical attributes indicate that I am African-American.

I grew up in Houston, where there was very slow integration of schools, as detailed in the 1999 book, *Make Haste Slowly: Moderates, Conservatives, and School Desegregation in Houston*. In 1954, the Supreme court found segregation to be unconstitutional. When officials mandated Houston schools to integrate, they delayed for five years. They did so with trickery and all kinds of shenanigans. I came along when "integration" had just started. In reality, integration was a farce. We never truly *integrated*; we *desegregated*. Instead of mixing Black kids into White schools and White kids into Black schools, Houston essentially took the brightest African-American kids, as measured by tests, and placed them into White schools. They placed no White kids into Black schools.

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I found myself at River Oaks Elementary, which was primarily White. I think there may have been five or six African Americans in my entire grade level, but only one other in my class. Being that young, we did not realize our purpose within that school. I had not been taught ethnic awareness at home. I didn't have any implicit biases of which I was aware back then. I went into my classroom thinking that all other students thought like me. I quickly discovered that was not the case when White parents objected to my presence in their children's classroom. My White peers didn't want to sit near me or play with me; they were obviously coached by the hurtful, harmful words of their parents.

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I became keenly aware of the way that race influenced how people saw me: I knew that I had not done anything wrong, but I remember how shocked I was to learn at six years old that my skin and hair were different. For the first time, I began to recognize instances of social and economic injustice.

River Oaks Elementary, the school I was bused to, had many more resources than the previous school I attended. When I came home, I realized that my neighborhood peers didn't have the same experiences. In the 1960s, they didn't have a mainframe computer in their school, like we did. River Oaks, located in the most economically-viable neighborhood in Houston, rife with old money and generational wealth, presented a range of options. As a result, it became evident to me that people of color did not possess the same things that my White peers did.

Fortunately, my very strong, supportive parents spoke frankly. When I was confused by the reactions of my peers and their parents, or when I wondered "What did I do?" or "Why don't they like me?", my parents explained that I was not the cause. My peers and their parents were wrong. They personified the problem. My parents helped me function in that environment. My mother worked for the school district and was high enough to mitigate some of the damage through conversations with the superintendent, who considered himself very supportive of "integration." My father, a deacon in our church, indoctrinated his "flock" to believe that God loves us, even

when other people do not. According to scripture, we need to forgive others for doing wrong.

My parents likely took the situation much harder than I did. With a militant voice, my dad would tell me, "You can take this! You're better and stronger than they are. They don't like you because you're not as fragile as they are, and they envy that!" He would equip me with "comebacks." When my peers talked about my skin, he suggested I retort, "Is that why you all lie in the sun and try to be brown, like me?" I learned that most people aren't equipped with more than the initial insult they hurl; they're not able to follow through on their insults!

As an adult, I realize the extent to which kids become influenced by their parents and other adults and shaped by the comments they hear at home. Kids are not born racist. They simply repeat the words said to them, but they're not equipped to defend those words.

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My parents also pushed me academically. When I aced a test, my dad would say, "Do you know why you received a 100? Because you're superior!" When I received a 95 and a White peer received an 87, I would say to myself, "My daddy's right: I'm better!" While such words don't sound politically correct today, they became our coping mechanism, our way of feeling better about ourselves, and our way of functioning in that environment.

My parents were very invested in my education. Both my parents fought to be room parents in a school where the White parents didn't want African-American parents in their children's classrooms. At one point, my dad even guilted the White parents into electing him PTA president!

It sounds stereotypical, but I also excelled athletically. My parents, though, didn't allow my siblings or me to rely on our looks or athletic ability. When White parents complimented my athletic ability, my mother always countered, "Oh, but you should see her grades: She's amazingly smart and intelligent, too!" When they said I was lovely, she replied, "Yes, *and* she's smart!" My mother would tell me, "You know you are a beautiful girl, but when the mortgage company wants its payment, it won't take your beauty; you'll have to use your brain to earn money!" I'm grateful that I found examples in my life of

people who genuinely cared for all humans. As a result, I never thought all people void of color are inherently bad. I knew that only some were bad. I'm grateful for that.

Because I attended majority-White schools, teachers never taught anything about my own people. I learned a "whitewashed" history that glossed over slavery and didn't teach me my history—or the many things I could be proud of as an African American. It also left my White peers without the tools to examine and defuse their own implicit biases. A more robust curriculum with respect to people of color would benefit kids of all colors, as well as White students. All kids would see the value in ancestry and history, including that of kids of color. They would come to recognize the value of the lives of boys of color. We need to teach our kids about the ways in which African Americans contributed to the building of this country. Our flawed curriculum imposes certain biases on our students: We're still teaching kids that Columbus discovered America—when we know better. Our curriculum suggests that Africans shared voluntary servitude, and that Whites were nice enough to let us go. We need to teach our children the entire, ugly history of slavery and our struggle to get out of it.

We need to teach our children the entire, ugly history of slavery and our struggle to get out of it.

To correctly teach these topics within an accurate historical perspective, we wouldn't see events like the current backlash around taking down Confederate statues and changing the names of spaces named for Confederates. When I served as President of the Houston ISD Board of Trustees, I knew better: I knew that African-American children, indeed *all* children of color, should not be educated in buildings named for people who believed that our children didn't deserve such education. Because of my position on these matters, I received hate mail from across the country, calling me the N-word and telling me to go back to Africa. I saw related comments on social media. I concluded that people are angry because they've never been taught the true history of the Confederacy. They don't want to acknowledge that perhaps their ancestors participated in something so violent and vicious—and that they lost! They don't want to acknowledge that their lineage includes something so pervasively hateful—or that they themselves keep that hatred alive.

I don't know what reparations should look like, but I do believe that some acknowledgement and a way to make amends must begin before we can effectively move on. If you offend someone publicly, it's your responsibility to publicly apologize. As African Americans, we live in a persistent state of deficit. We've spent the last 400 years trying to catch up. If we received the same tools, opportunities, recognition and respect—if we were given the same "playing field"—we could achieve. Instead, Whites seem to fear equality and the erosion of their privilege. These emotions, coupled with a readiness to minimize our efforts and achievements, hold us all back.

After 13 years at predominantly-White schools, I attended Texas Southern University, a historically-Black institution where my African-American professors poured into me a knowledge of who we are and where we come from. They taught us about the Tuskegee Airmen and the rich history of our struggle. They also debunked our biases about who we are and what we're able to accomplish. That experience opened my eyes to how smart, active and achieving we are—and to how we have to work twice as hard to get half as far.

One of the most blatant acts of racism I've seen was committed against one of my five children. At a primarily-White school, a student void of color spit on my nine-year-old son, who didn't retaliate, despite being a black belt in karate. I was viciously angry; we had previously asked his teacher to monitor that boy for four documented instances of bullying. angry. I told my son to react as if his life were threatened, if he ever found himself in that situation again. The next day, an administrator called me to the school office: My son had broken a student's nose. At my instruction, my son retaliated—and I was ready to take him for ice cream! School administrators threatened to call the police. I responded, "You will not make my son believe that he will ever be locked up. You will not criminalize him for defending himself. The same standard of non-action that you applied to the other boy's bullying, name-calling and spitting, will be the same standard you use for my child. We will not be bullied or treated any differently than anyone else. We will not put my son into an inherently-biased situation simply because his skin is black." What a horrific experience for a nine-year-old to witness!

These incidents continue: 19 years later, a classmate told my middle-school son that he didn't want to sit beside him—"because you probably smell like fried chicken and watermelon." These are not isolated incidents; systemic racism *is* real. When the lives of African-American men and women are taken by law enforcement, in the case of George Floyd, and by citizens, in the case of Ahmaud Arbery, we must acknowledge that racism not only exists; it remains prevalent and life-threatening. We must learn from current events and see that the highest office in our land is now being used to divide people and perpetuate systemic racism!

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None of us can go through life without implicit biases. I'm not proud, but, if I were honest, I'd admit that I have very strong biases about supporters of our current President. I don't care to be friends with them, or to have conversations with people who support such an evil, delusional, divisive person. I have biases about the people who support such a person. It's an extreme example, but it's my truth. I remember a time in my life when I was less vocal about such issues. I'm done being polite and reserved when others are unwilling to be so. It's time for us to be honest and open as well.

In this country, race determines your zip code, and your economic and educational levels. It determines your health and mortality rate. Many people profit from the social construct of race: educational systems that don't give our kids the education they deserve, penal systems that disproportionately imprison our community, the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries that don't provide the treatments we need, and the White-owned companies that generate dollars from our labor. Such factors determine the totality of our lives.

I'm very concerned by the racism perpetrated by our educational systems. The inequities in our systems exacerbate disadvantage: Not all kids start from the same point and have the same needs. Our educational system in Houston, for instance, is built for the "haves," not the "have-nots." Separate-and-not-equal Black and Brown schools are filled with Black and Brown children who do not receive the same educational resources and human capital as their peers.

Charter schools profit from the miseducation of Black and Brown children, who are used as widgets for generating revenues. We share a "whitewashed" curriculum with our students, who suffer the digital divide. Achievement gaps persist between White children and children of color. Our children deserve to be thrown more than bones and scraps.

Our children deserve to be thrown more than bones and scraps.

Some people say, "You had a Black President!" Sure, we took a step forward, but we're far from the finish line. We need to deconstruct and reconstruct our educational systems, so that every child crosses the finish line at the same time. We can no longer put a few Band-Aids on something that requires surgery. We need to perform a deep dive into the causes and eradicate them.

Some people say, "You had a Black President!" Sure, we took a step forward, but we're far from the finish line.

Every school board should develop a department for equity, diversity and inclusion. We need to review all our policies, looking at them through the lens of equity, diversity and inclusion. We need to focus on human capital for the correction of gaps. We need systemwide workshops and trainings. We need to review our programming and facilities. We must hire superintendents who honor such a vision.

We stand at a pivotal moment in our nation's history. We hold the opportunity to harness the energy of young people demanding change. We can craft policies and laws that ensure continual forward movement. We can change history by taking bold steps toward the eradication of racism. It's incumbent upon all of us who serve in public office, to use our platform and our voting power to ensure that we create change now!

"Racism is Here, and It's Not Going Anywhere"

Josie Smith-Wright
Executive Director, Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members
Gonzales Independent School District Board of Trustees
Gonzales, Texas

I self-identify as African-American. I'm 59, so I've been through Negro, Colored, Black and African-American.

Being the second youngest of thirteen children, my dad dropped out of school in the third grade. My mom descended from slaves. Her father served in the military; then he became a postman. He was a light-skinned *mulatto*, of mixed White and Black ancestry, but he considered himself Black. Racism existed even in my own family: My mother's father never appreciated the fact that my mother married a dark-skinned man, and, after my father's death, his family no longer spoke with my mother.

When my siblings and I were children, my dad reminded us that we would be treated differently because of the color of our skin. We thought of our family as a rainbow coalition, but my dad told us we are Black. He taught us not to cast our eyes down when others looked at us. Instead, he taught us to walk around with books on our heads, so that our posture would be straight, and we could always look straight ahead.

I didn't notice racism so much as a child. At age seven, I first heard the N-word from the lips of a dear friend. It struck me that he must have been taught such a word. As an eighth-grader in 1973, I saw my integrated middle school in Gonzales, Texas name its first Black cheerleader.

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In my mid-30s, I moved to a small town in East Texas, where I noticed how differently Whites treated Blacks. Blacks in East Texas cast their eyes down in the presence of White people. Small towns and cities hold very different ideas on equity and equality. I

interviewed for jobs that were given to less-qualified White people. Caucasians don't struggle to get jobs in the same way we do.

My dad raised us to be fighters, and I've needed to fight for my children. When my daughter became a high school freshman more than 15 years ago, students elected her to be the duchess at her homecoming. Certain people did not want her to be the duchess, so they held that election three times. I also needed to fight for her to be part of the National Honor Society, even though she earned the grades for it. I could go on and on and on and on with other examples. Now, as a school board member, I find myself fighting for the kids of our community. I'm the only African American on our board, and everything becomes a struggle, so I try to choose my battles wisely.

As school board members, we must look at our policies and procedures, to see how they keep Blacks out. We had a policy, for instance, that students couldn't be part of the National Honor Society, regardless of their grades, if they were sent to in-school suspension even once. Those little things keep Blacks out of the National Honor Society. Once Black students enter the Honor Society, they get dismissed for not completing community service hours—but this doesn't equally apply to White students. It depends on the person in charge of the organization. African-American students are also excluded from our dual-language programs.

One of the most blatant acts of racism I've experienced occurred when police arrested my son and accused him of shooting another man. We paid to bail him out of jail when he was innocent—which was attested to when the victim of the shooting cleared him the next day. The damage was already done, though. The newspaper cast my son as a criminal, with no apology when he was exonerated. Acts of racism, like this, really anger me.

I work the polls here in Gonzales, where minorities are assumed to be Democrats. During a recent primary for our county sheriff, poll workers told any minority who walked in and wanted to vote in the Republican primary, "Go, vote for the Democrats." I would intervene and ask each person, "Who do *you* want to vote for?" On another occasion, an older White man made a comment about hanging an election judge. I used it as an opportunity to teach poll workers how to respond to such racial remarks. With our current President, incidents like this happen every day now. He encourages people to

say things they wouldn't otherwise say. Racism now moves out in the open.

With our current President, incidents like this happen every day now. He encourages people to say things they wouldn't otherwise say. Racism now moves out in the open.

We're allowed to vote, and our kids are allowed to attend the same schools as White kids—but everything requires a fight. It's even a fight to teach our kids about racism. Our education system brushes over it, not taking advantage of such learning opportunities as present conversations on Confederate flags and statues.

When people suggest that Black school members are only going to look after the needs of Black people, I wonder: Are White school board members only interested in White kids? Shouldn't we *all* be for *all* students?

We need to change mindsets, which is difficult because we say and do the same things until something new comes into our household. I've seen it: When a White person's child marries a Black person and gives birth to a Black baby, their mindset changes. It's something they didn't experience until it came into their house. They can no longer pussyfoot around the issue, as my father used to say. They can longer say, "I don't see color"—which appears as the first sign of racism. Every morning, when I look in the mirror, I see Black Josie. When I sit across from a person, I see White John or White Sue. Don't tell me you don't see color. We all bleed red, and we all eat through our mouths, but instead of looking at what we hold in common, we focus on what makes people different—things like skin tone.

We live in a competitive culture, so we've grown accustomed to thinking in terms of winners and losers, and of comparing ourselves to others. We say, "I'm faster" or "I'm a better basketball player." We focus on ourselves and improving our own condition, rather than helping those who aren't as "good." We may be the best, but we're not making others better. We need to help *all* people to improve.

We may be the best, but we're not making others better. We need to help all people to improve.

I'm not sure that racism can be overcome. Racism has gone on forever. Racism is deeply rooted,

and it's not going anywhere. Let's educate our children on how to navigate race and racism—and how to get along. Dr. King suggested that if we can learn to get along, there will be change. The essential question remains: Can we get along?

"The Only Way to Fix Intolerance of Diversity is through Education"

Marque Snow
Steering Committee Member, Council of Urban Boards of Education
Omaha Public Schools Board of Education
Omaha, Nebraska

I'm never comfortable talking about race and racism. In my opinion, these conversations should make everyone in the room uncomfortable because we're talking about what's really going on. We're sharing our stories and perceptions. I've shared my experiences for the past eight years as a school board member—and it's never comfortable. Nor should such conversations be comfortable for those who have never experienced or recognized racism.

I self-identify as African-American. I came to that self-identity like many others: not because of what's written in history books, but because many of us accepted "historians" in our families, who told us about our ancestors. They shared with us the story of how we got here. My grandfather broke it down this way: We descend from captured and enslaved Africans, who then became enslaved African Americans. Our heritage begins in Africa, and we became American citizens.

Earlier today, I spoke with an individual about the assumptions we make about people as a result of their skin color. I'll share with you three stories: one from elementary school, one from college, and one from my service as a school board member.

The vivid memory of one childhood experience in particular continues to shape me today. I, a skinny, nine-year-old knucklehead, was hanging out at the recreation center one day when another nine-year-old African American approached me, saying, "What the f*** you looking at? I'll f*** you up." The staff member looked at me, looked at him—then walked away! That adult had the opportunity to intervene and address a tense situation between two nine-year-olds. I never want to be in a situation with the opportunity to help someone but instead choose to walk away. In my role as a school board member today, I'm still fighting for that little kid. A lot of little kids

still go to our schools, and the adults aren't standing up for them in so many ways. It's wrong. Our kids need adults who will stick up for them, empower them, and help them strive to do better. If we don't do that, we contribute to a society that continues to harm.

I never want to be in a situation with the opportunity to help someone but instead choose to walk away.

During my first year at the University of South Dakota, I pushed back against the racist stereotypes of student reporters on the university paper. Trying to confirm their prejudices, they asked Black students which sports they played. I told them not to assume that all Black people in college play sports. We need to approach people without preconceptions and allow them to share their stories.

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Some school board members are appointed, but the public elected me to represent a Black, more-diverse district of the city. For some reason, every time I challenge the *status quo*, speak out against our superintendent, or attempt to promote equity, the newspaper never prints my stock photo. Editors will publish the stock photos of our superintendent or board president—clean-cut White guys—but they continue to use an old, less-professional photo of me, where I'm unshaven, bearded, and not wearing a tie. Pictures are powerful, and, even before they read the article, people form opinions about me based on that photo! A White teacher enlarged my stock photo and showed it at a board meeting, to call this out, and she received an apology from the newspaper.

Black men are treated differently because of their skin color. Others assume us to be angry and aggressive. People hold preconceptions about us, and some of those link to athletics. When I joined our school board, our district had a requirement that students need a 1.0 grade-point average to participate in sports. I got a colleague and our board president to support changing this requirement to a grade-point average of 2.0. You wouldn't believe the pushback! All sorts of people—Whites, Blacks, businesspeople, state officeholders, and people outside our community—said, "You're hurting our students more than helping them: These kids only come to school to play

sports!" I argued that we commit injustice and set these kids up for failure. Less than 1% of high school athletes continue to play in college, and an even smaller fraction go on to play professionally. Adults lower their standards for kids when they fit the disconnected mold of the basketball players they idolize. The season before we changed that requirement, one of our star football players had a 1.4 GPA; the old requirement gave him a false idea of who he was. By raising the requirement, we empowered him to improve scholastically like nothing else! With mandated tutoring now for student athletes, the message is, "We'll help you be the best man or woman you can be, and you'll still be an athlete." As you can imagine, this mandated a shift in the allocation of funds.

Every day, I learn something new about my race and other races. I've come to accept such concepts as LGBTQIA persons of color. The only way to fix intolerance of diversity is through education. Adults are less able to quickly change, but we need to ensure that we don't share our prejudices and issues with our children.

Another school board member, whom I met through the National School Boards Association, once suggested that I'm "not Black enough." Such reverse-profiling and the interactions that may lead to it are just as racist as profiling. It's something we need to work on as a community.

Other groups suffer from racism, too. The *Latino* population of this country grew significantly. Here in Omaha, we witness a growing Korean population. We need to listen to their uncomfortable stories as well. Their struggle differs from the African-American struggle, but they deserve that we listen to them. Even students who recently come from Africa experiences events very different from that of American-born Africans. We can't presume that all students see our school systems in the same way.

We can't presume that all students see our school systems in the same way.

My grandparents most shaped the way I think about race and racism. My grandfather told the most interesting stories. My grandmother, who died at age 95, cultivated two "voices": She spoke to family in one way but used her "White voice" on the phone. She tried to mask her voice, so that people wouldn't make automatic assumptions about her because she "sounded Black." Mimicking a

banker, she once told us, "She sounds Black, so I don't know if I can give her a loan!"

My grandparents lived in a small town in Ohio, and they would warn us not to drive around at night with out-of-state license plates. When my grandfather said, "You can't trust people," I knew he was speaking from experience.

Outside my home, perhaps the person who influenced me most was one of the lesser-known icons of our race: William Monroe Trotter. Before W.E.B. Du Bois founded the NAACP, he and Trotter co-founded the Niagara Movement at a time when Woodrow Wilson tried to resegregate D.C. This infuriated Trotter. The story is told that he marched down to the White House, kicked open the door to the Oval Office, and "lost his head" with the President. His courage mirrored that of Frederick Douglass, who received an invitation to the White House from Lincoln. They paved the way for others. Security escorted Trotter from the premises, making an educated Black man the first person banned from the White House! As a result of incidents like that, the African-American vote increased and changed from Republican to Democrat. Like Trotter, we must take courageous steps to pave the way for others. We hold obligations to take a look at all the other people "in the room"—especially those "at the table"—to move them in the direction of combating racism and bigotry.

I recently experienced racism when I applied for a position in town. They said they sought a person of color to lead the organization, since the clientele is primarily people of color. They hired a White woman. Several people noted that more qualified people didn't get the job—because the board of the organization is all White! When it came time for them to make a decision, their implicit bias impelled them to assume she was the best candidate. That board was just "talking the talk." They weren't "walking the walk." It felt like a bait-and-switch. Even worse, that decisionmaker already decided to tear down public housing and not replace it, which will affect our community. That type of racism affects entire cities.

We all know
that not everyone is equal
in the eyes of the law.

We all know that not everyone is equal in the eyes of the law. All who truly believe that Black Lives Matter must call out that untruth for what it is.

The movement and marches will continue until we become better as a society.

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Our educational system perpetuates racism even today. We just hired our first non-White, female superintendent in the 163-year history of Omaha Public Schools. One board member suggested that I became interested in hiring her only because she is Black. I pointed out that we still have straight, White men representing a district that is 75% non-White. Our kids of color struggle the most. We need people who understand and believe in them. Our new superintendent, Dr. Cheryl Logan, who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, speaks fluent Spanish and American Sign Language. Unlike our former superintendent, she earned her doctorate and gained experience in large urban districts. She has managed more schools than half our administrators combined! Dr. Logan proves that highly-educated people of color in this country willingly step up to the need of educating our kids!

We must challenge those in power, in the same way as those who've gone before us. Those in power don't reach out to those disenfranchised. Lyndon B. Johnson didn't say, "Let's go talk to Martin Luther King or John Lewis about civil rights." Instead, they worked to create the conditions for the possibility of a conversation about the Civil Rights Act. In many places, the growing *Latino* population doesn't enjoy the representation it deserves. We must create the conditions for that possibility! In our district, 40% of our students are *Latino*, and one of our first *Latino* school board members was appointed in 2014. Now no *Latino* representative serves on our school board. They aren't allowed "a seat at the table."

I like to think that we're finally arriving at the point where the majority of people recognize the lack of diversity as an issue, as a problem that must be corrected. We must empower all communities to participate and assure them a say in the process, so that our plans and budgets can recognize and direct funding to their needs. After I joined our board, we directed $852 million to upgrade our predominantly African-American schools in North Omaha. We created a magnet in our all-Black school, which caused White families to choose its robotics and engineering programs, which now serve

primarily White students, while many in our community don't even know that we offer an engineering magnet program for the Black community. We need Black engineers from that Black school! In other parts of our district, our predominantly-*Latino* schools are overpopulated with an unused music magnet program. Meanwhile, the schools in our White communities seem to enjoy perfect settings and resources.

It's a struggle to bring money and resources to our communities. We sometimes build schools without being mindful of the ways in which we must support Black-, *Latino*- and female-owned construction companies and businesses. We give tax incentives to large corporations without demanding that they hire our community members. I challenge anyone who suggests that we can't find people in our community who want to work for the $15 million that we're giving those corporations in tax breaks. As school board members, we can take charge of such EEO or discretionary decisions to make sure that the companies receiving contracts from our districts will have contractors who fit those descriptions, so those funds go to the families and taxpayers in our districts. When we give the families in our districts more disposable income, that will make their homes more secure, and their children's scores will increase.

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Some school board members think that policy is all-important. In my experience, policy doesn't impact our students in the same way as do empowered, proactive superintendents who can change the culture in our districts. We need superintendents who are "on the same page" with respect to racism. We need superintendents who believe in the importance of attracting people of color into the teaching profession.

We need superintendents who are "on the same page" with respect to racism.

We also need to find ways to push back against the damaging "gentlemen's agreements" that have increased over time. We need to elect people who will deliver. They're like the unknown files that accumulate on our computers and smart phones: At some point, we must review the "settings" in our districts, to "delete" those items that take up space. I doubt that many school boards actually look at the "settings" for their superintendent and budget. We asked our new

superintendent to examine our district's "settings" with respect to the allocation of dollars. We discovered that many of our non-profits hire outsiders and don't live up to their promises of serving our kids.

We also unearthed another "gentlemen's agreement" with respect to the monies paid by our district to prosecute our own kids. In one instance, we paid county prosecutors $20,000 to prosecute a truant student. We contract with our local police departments for student resource officers who don't answer to us as elected officials. As school board members, we should instantly bring an end to such practices.

Let's find a way to get the best people in the room, changing culture and shifting resources to empower our community and educate our kids in a more equitable manner.

"History Books are Written by the Victors"

David Snyder
Chair, National American Indian/Alaska Native Council
Fremont County School District #21 Board of Education
Fort Washakie, Wyoming

I self-identify as Native American or American Indian, or more specifically as Eastern Shoshone. I've known my identity my whole life: I grew up on our native land, the Wind River Mountains of western Wyoming. Growing up, I was blessed to hear my mother and grandmother speak Shoshone—my mother's first language.

My middle name is Wayne, so I idolized John Wayne as a kid. I watched his movies but never understood the implications. I now realize the biases that I internalized by seeing John Wayne fight Native Americans who looked like me. Later in life, as a parent, I came home one day to find my sons on the steps of my apartment with their toy guns. I asked, "What are you doing?" They replied, "We're shooting Indians!" They were playing with the other children in our apartment complex and didn't know better. What a tremendous teaching opportunity: I explained to them that *they* are the Indians. They, being little, were truly "colorblind" and just smiled and ran off to play some more.

Thankfully, I grew up around many strong figures. My dad and uncle both had military backgrounds. Their eldest brother was tasked with raising them when they lost their father, when my dad was 5, and when they lost their mother, when dad was 14. They were all thought to be heading to prison. They survived and all raised their families in a law-abiding way.

My mother also faced struggles growing up. She was taken from her family and sent to a boarding school at age 6, housed less than 100 feet from her mom and grandfather's garden. She remembers crying at the fence seeing them and not being able to go home. She remembers not being able to speak Shoshone and learning English. She graduated from high school in an off-reservation school and attended college in

She remembers seeing storefront signs in Lander and Riverton that said, "No Dogs or Indians Allowed."

Casper, Wyoming. She remembers seeing storefront signs in Lander and Riverton that said, "No Dogs or Indians Allowed."

My parents tried to shield us from racism, because they knew that we would face similar struggles. They showed us how to acculturate, not assimilate. We knew where we came from, and we knew what needed to happen for us to survive in the world we live in now.

I could never pretend to be anything but who I am. I've always been brown and tall. With that knowledge, I took it a step further and grew my hair out, so I couldn't be mis-labeled.

I could never pretend to be anything but who I am.

Fortunately, I had a number of people who helped me stay on my path. Aside from my mom and dad, one was a White police officer in Lander who looked out for me. Whenever I came into town and started getting into trouble, he had a knack of finding me. Instead of arresting me, he'd ask what I was doing and then tell me to go home. I had enough respect for him to listen and go home. There were many others who would keep an eye out for me and let my parents know if I was not behaving. Some were kind enough to show me what they knew. Jim, my friend and bowling coach, helped me improve my game. He also helped "level the playing field," by showing me that I am as valuable a human as anybody else. He stood up *with* me, not *for* me, to keep at bay those who sought to tear me down. He unfortunately has left us, and I feel the need to carry on, so that his lessons won't be lost. He and his wife remain some of the most wonderful people I've ever known.

He stood up with *me, not* for *me, to keep at bay those who sought to tear me down.*

Even with people looking out for us, racism was present for much of my life. When we left the reservation, for instance, to eat in Lander or Riverton, we received terrible service. We would be the last ones seated, even if there were open tables. I once went to a sandwich shop in Lander, where no one would wait on me. Staff members came out of the kitchen, then disappeared once they pretended not to see me. They looked past me and seated the White people who came in. When they finally seated me, I fumed over how I had been treated, and I shared my story on Facebook. I found a lot of support from people who experienced similar situations in other places. Even support from White people who were disgusted with how I was treated. The owner of the restaurant and the manager called me to apologize and offer

me a free meal. So, there are good people out there—if only they knew that racism exists right in front of them. Most people aren't aware of their implicit biases and micro aggressions. Sadly, they have no clue how their words and actions affect the lives of people all over our nation.

Most people aren't aware of their implicit biases and micro aggressions.

History books are written by the victors and too often distort the true accounts of this country's history. They fail to include much on the genocide of Native Americans through disease, and the fight for the land we never could own. Our government, current culture, and ways of life are definitely not in the history books. This lack of education leads to many misconceptions about our people. We are not beggars and thieves who live off government handouts. We're not the savages you see portrayed in movies, the bad guys to be defeated by the hero.

Our government, current culture, and ways of life are definitely not in the history books.

One of my greatest missions as a Native American is to show people the updated history and culture of Native Americans and how to act when at a celebration. Inspired by speakers at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education, I returned to Wyoming and created new networks with people who are helpers. By networking with such people, we can move mountains. These networks enabled me to push through and pass an Indian Education for All resolution at our Wyoming School Boards Association Delegate Assembly. I see it as a tool to help the people of Wyoming and the country understand who we are and what our culture really looks like. Every high school government class in the nation should include a lesson on tribal government and treaties signed by the U.S.!

We've come a long way in terms of civil rights for Native Americans. I can see it in my own family: As a young man, I would never dream of dating a White girl—I didn't want the daily fight proving my worth in dating her to a father who couldn't see my worth. Today my sons enjoy beautiful families with White and Hispanic women.

We have experienced great gains in how we treat one another as a nation,

We must continue to stand for our culture and accept others. We need to talk about race and get it "out in the open."

but we must continue to stand for our culture and accept others. We need to talk about race and get it "out in the open." We need to help people understand the reasons for their fears. We need to help people talk about and make sense of their biases, and how that drives racism. It'll take some work, but we can be a great nation if we all work on understanding each other!

"The World Needs More Diverse Dinner Tables"

Adam Soto
Director, Mexican American School Boards Association
Plainview Independent School District Board of Trustees
Plainview, Texas

I identify as a Mexican American and as a *Chicano*. I am a fourth-generation Mexican American. I remember the pride of identifying myself as Mexican-American in our 2010 U.S. Census. In previous years, the form presented us no choice but to identify as "White," which doesn't come close to describing our identity.

No matter the color of our skin, we all likely encountered some form of prejudice or discrimination at some point in our lives. I live in a small town of 30,000 people in the Texas panhandle. In the early 1950s, this community provided three elementary schools for Whites, and one school on the far eastside, Mexican barrio for "Colored" students. As a result, we suffered different treatment because of the color of our skin. In 1954, in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court ordered the end of segregation. But until 1965, when our schools began to integrate, only Hispanic students attended our school.

Blacks and Hispanics divided, too. To avoid fights, Hispanics didn't "cross the tracks" into the Black community, and vice versa. Distance caused a lot of tension, chaos and constant fights.

As a boy, I didn't see anyone defend our community and say, "You're doing our Hispanic community wrong" or "You're doing the Black community wrong." Instead, I learned I would one day work to provide for my family. I saw my parents, grandparents and relatives working long hours and earning peanuts in dead-end jobs. They never received pay that reflected their worth. Education became the least of my worries: I needed to figure out how to provide food and shelter for my family! Education and politics weren't for Brown guys like me. They seemed reserved for Whites.

Education and politics weren't for Brown guys like me. They seemed reserved for Whites.

The first in my family to try to obtain information on college, I planned to escape that small community. By high school, I decided that I didn't want to work in the fields, on a farm, or in a tire shop. I wanted to do better than my father—in the same way that I want my son to do better than me, and his son better than him.

After graduating from high school, I joined the Marine Corps, then continued to college. I'm one of 1.2 million U.S. Hispanic veterans. I married a Marine, too. As a soldier, we're taught and trained that the color of each soldier is green—that we're all on the same team. At boot camp, officers told us there were no Hispanics, Whites, Blacks, Asians or Indians in the military. Regardless of skin color, the people around us might one day save our lives, or we might save theirs. We knew that those of us who wore the same uniform all lived "in the same boat," in the same category, that we wouldn't be treated differently because of any social construct or "-ism." I'm not saying there's no racism in the military; there is—but our military led on the issue of integration. As a result of my military service, I don't differentiate by skin color, nor do I believe that skin color defines an individual. It bothers me when people make decisions based on skin color. That shows a lack of maturity and education.

The only way to defeat the evil of racism comes through education. Racism will always be around, as long as people believe themselves to be superior to others. Regardless of our educational level or job titles, we all hold prejudices about others, based on their economic status, where they live, or the color of their skin. Regardless, we must be our authentic selves. My friend, Tyrone, an amazing basketball player in high school, became an awesome, hardworking father and says, "I do what I do." We, too, do what we do!

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We have traveled a long way since the days of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., but recent riots show us how far we still must go. It reminds me of a time when I opposed the sale of liquor in our small community. Some people tried to convince us that alcohol sales would generate tax revenue for our schools and for our community. I opposed it—not because I haven't done my share of drinking, but because I've seen the harm caused by irresponsible individuals. We picketed outside city hall. The initiative went to ballot and passed. Nevertheless, we believed it important, so we got involved and

expressed our views on the issue. We have to do the same when it comes to such issues as racism and the education of our children.

Racism, rooted in the founding of our country to justify the kidnapping of Blacks from their countries and homes, still fuels strongholds throughout our nation. It affects and permeates our educational systems—but things have begun changing. In the same way that our views on sexuality and transgendered individuals changed, our views on racism have begun changing, too, largely due to education.

I return to the military image of treating everyone with the same uniform in the same way. That's exactly what we must do to overcome the racial caste system in this nation: We better understand and respect the cultures of others, seeing ourselves as more united than divided. We are obligated to unite and fight racism together.

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A recent example in my home might illustrate this: I am a fourth-generation Mexican American, my wife, a second-generation Colombian American. Our daughter's boyfriend is Vietnamese, and our son's girlfriend is White. One recent evening, when my wife babysat the two daughters of our Black friends, we laughed about our family's diverse dinner table, with a Mexican, a Colombian, two kids of mixed race, two Blacks, one White and one Vietnamese. We heard English, Spanish and Vietnamese—but we all felt welcomed and respected. This world needs more diverse dinner tables, where people can eliminate prejudices, grow less judgmental, and better understand others.

"Recovering from Racism is like Recovering from an Addiction"

Charles Ramsey Stafford
Treasurer, Mexican American School Boards Association
Denton Independent School District Board of Trustees
Denton, Texas

I'm an Anglo-Saxon, middle-aged, White guy. I understand White privilege, and I know I've unwittingly benefited from my heritage. My ancestry is mostly European: English, Scottish and German. My parents were not wealthy. My dad was raised on a farm, back when people had as many kids as they could, because they needed all the field hands they could muster. He grew up as one of 13 kids. My mom was one of four, and she grew up in Blooming Grove, Texas. My dad worked in education, as a teacher, counselor, and principal, and my mom worked in various clerical positions. We didn't live in a big house, drive new cars, or take expensive vacations, but I never lacked anything food- or clothing-wise. With a modest upbringing, I was taught to work at an early age. At age eight, I had my first newspaper route. I've worked my whole life, and I'm still working.

My dad was a deacon, and we went to church three times a week at the First Baptist Church of Lubbock, a large congregation of 3,000 members back in those days. One Sunday night, at the end of the sermon, they issued the invitation, and an African-American woman walked to the front of the church. Bear in mind, the only Black people I ever saw in that church weren't members; they worked on the custodial staff. First Baptist Church democratically voted new members into the church with a *pro forma* vote—but there were never any negative votes. That night, though, a bunch of hands went up, voting against her being admitted to the church! It rocked me. I grabbed my dad's coat sleeve, asking, "What are they doing?" I was old enough to understand that she was accepting Christ—and that the kingdom of heaven accepted *all* people. All you had to do was profess your faith and repent, and you, too, could be part of the Christian family—except in this instance. The pastor declared her in, but it really upset many people who wanted to reject her. It put my

father in a really bad place. He explained to me that some people do not welcome others who don't look like them. As an impressionable child, it tore me up to witness a church family essentially say to someone that she did not deserve to be in the kingdom of heaven. The church committed a blatant act of racism.

Years later, I learned from my mom that the deacons met the next night, and that my dad gave the equivalent of a speech on personal privilege. He ripped them. He shared that he explained their bigotry to his young son, so that I wouldn't sour on the church. I did not know at the time that my dad's words that night ended his membership as a deacon. He didn't quit the church; they quit him. They ostracized him. My dad's example, though, in standing up to others gave me the courage to later stand up to my friends at school when they said things that my parents taught me not to say. I called out my friends when they used the N-word or denigrated Hispanics. I lost some friends because of this. We shouldn't tolerate people who use racist language. We can't turn our back on something we need to confront.

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My dad, a very wise man, taught me that one way to recognize smart people is to discern whether they hold a well-developed sense of justice. We would all do well to ask ourselves how smart we are: Do we interact with a well-developed sense of racial and socioeconomic justice? In a society of the one percent versus the ninety-nine percent, equity begins with socioeconomic justice. The recognition of the needs of every person and child begins with what's fair. It begins with calling attention to the fact that a small percentage of citizens control the largest percentage of wealth. It's scary: Some people get what they claim is "theirs," then they pull up the ladder, so that no one else can climb—since it's easier to subjugate people in poverty, who are too busy surviving to react against the injustices all around them.

My parents didn't voice racist opinions, but many of their siblings did. I remember visiting my very racist aunt in Fort Worth, where we wanted to visit the local swimming pool on a hot summer day. My aunt pitched a fit, using the N-word and calling the *Latino* kids "Mexicans." She made it absolutely clear that we were not going to

visit that swimming pool. Most of my aunts and uncles held that perspective. For much of my childhood, I heard adults who expected respect say things that were absolutely awful. In contrast, my dad made it very clear: "We don't talk that way, and we don't treat people that way." I was surrounded by basically-accepted racism. Like other kids, I learned hurtful words to describe people of other races. I heard those words so many times that I became desensitized to many of them.

At a young age, I became aware that some people still openly and easily hate other people just because they seem different from them. Some people continue to poorly teach their children in this respect. It appalls and infuriates me that we elected a man to the U.S. Presidency who opened his campaign by descending an escalator and calling Mexicans rapists. As Americans, we shouldn't tolerate racist behaviors by anyone—and certainly not by the President.

I grew up learning in segregated schools. Only during my junior year did our school begin to integrate with a single African American. A good kid and a star athlete, he went on to pitch in the big leagues. It seemed to be part of an ingenious plan for desegregation: We knew we had to break the color barrier, and he was a nice guy who led us to a state championship. He became a hero at our school!

Talking badly about a whole race proves to be just plain stupid. Growing up, I heard that Black and Brown people did not work hard. By interacting with incredibly impressive people of color, I've learned how wrong that is. I know one guy who came here from Mexico, labors all week, and sends 90% of his paycheck to support his family in Mexico. He's a hard worker and a disciplined, smart guy. He didn't receive a formal education, but he's highly motivated. I just love that guy. He's simply one of many examples of why you can't take other individuals' words as truth when they paint entire groups of people with a broad brush. As a White, middle-class kid in West Texas, I saw that kind of crap in the wind on a daily basis. People said mean things about African Americans and *Latinos*, things they learned from their parents or educators. The failure to teach our kids the innate value of all people regardless of race

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In truth, our education system makes it easier to educate kids who are from more affluent backgrounds, who are part of our "exemplary" school districts. In contrast, it's really hard to be successful when 80 to 90% of your kids come from the lowest socioeconomic levels. They find it a harder climb. As school board members, we must allocate the funds for all children to succeed, despite barriers of poverty, language and so many other issues. Our equity problem shows that we have been unwilling to commit ourselves to socio-economic equality!

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We also face issues of funding. Ironically, a federal government accustomed to borrowing trillions of dollars at zero-percent interest to give tax breaks to friends, remains unwilling to adequately invest in our youth or our public education system. Instead, they fund two separate education systems: our public schools, and charter and private schools, which re-segregate our society in a backdoor way. Sure, charters recruit minority faces, but those students are very different from the socioeconomically-disadvantaged students they send back to our publicly-run public schools. Vouchers are also problematic: An $8,000 voucher doesn't help socioeconomically-disadvantaged families cover annual tuition of $15,000 to $20,000 in some private schools! Vouchers re-segregate our culture by social class, helping those who enjoy socioeconomic advantage. The real civil rights issue in our nation remains economic justice.

We privileged Whites ran state boards of education for years. We repeatedly eliminated an enormous source of pride for Black and Brown people by not accurately teaching history. I've attended conferences where I've learned the stories of dozens of *Latino* heroes: All the kids sitting in our classrooms—and their teachers—must also hear *those* wonderful stories! Some really mean, calculating White people cut them out of our textbooks, preventing our kids from feeling pride in their heritage. Perhaps it's not even conscious; it could simply be an unconscious habit of "putting them in their place."

I trace such unconscious biases back to the 1970s, when social justice was on the front burner of our culture. Suddenly, it became a

real big deal not to use racial slurs. Unfortunately, it seems that a lot of negative energy was driven underground. We changed and polished our speaking habits, but our hearts and minds weren't changed. We saw this when Barack Obama was elected: Old racial prejudices that boiled under the surface manifested themselves in racist talk, jokes and emails. It hurt me to watch racists take potshots at our first African-American President—and it irritates me that our current President refuses to say that White supremacists have no place in our culture or in our society. Our President dances around the issue, saying, "there are good people on both sides," while the rest of us say, "Give us a break: There's nothing good about White supremacy!"

We've come a long way since the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of the 1960s—but simply passing a law didn't change the hearts of people. As a young, inexperienced legislator, John Kennedy sought to pass civil rights legislation, but he couldn't pull it off. Lyndon Johnson, a master politician, shoved it down the throats of Southern Democrats, making them vote for it. But he didn't change hearts.

A lot of people are happy to live in a segregated world, but it seems we're outgrowing this. We're on a good trajectory. Whereas 60 years ago, there was no Mexican American School Boards Association, now we have organizations doing the hard work to create real change.

I'm really encouraged by the reactions to George Floyd's murder. We didn't simply see a couple of demonstrations before everyone went back to "business as usual." It wasn't about people saying, "I've done my part, and I'm done now." These actions started a movement that won't stop. They indicate the anti-racist actions that we must bake into all our curricula. They challenge us to be affirmative in our intentions and to hire people of color. They challenge us to embrace our diversity, which is one of the greatest strengths and joys of our culture. Those actions taught us that, if we plan to create a multicultural democracy, we must work for it!

It's also worthwhile to put energy into eliminating the racist characters lionized or made into heroic figures in our educational material. I'm glad to see all the Confederate statues go. Their removal—the fact that we're ready to see them go—provides a healthy statement about our society. The Confederacy kidnapped, owned, subjugated and mistreated Africans. Here in Denton, we renamed Robert E. Lee Elementary School after Alice Alexander, an

African-American educator. Two men came and spoke against it, but we voted unanimously to change the name. That was it. It felt wonderful.

In light of the recent, tragic events that have dominated our national consciousness, it's incumbent upon all who call themselves leaders to seize the momentum that we've seen in recent actions and take it further. This gives us an opportunity to teach our children about massive injustice over long periods of time and a chance to show them that we can be part of undoing this!

Recovering from racism
mirrors recovering from an addiction.
It always remains there.
We must tackle it every day—
or it will sneak out.

Recent events lead me to question whether we live in a better society today. Rather than think of racism as "one and done," as an act of contrition that ends it, we should see that recovering from racism mirrors recovering from an addiction. It always remains there. We must tackle it every day—or it will sneak out. We might learn a great deal from the behavior modification of addiction recovery. We can beat racism. We can pound it out of our culture, but it won't be quick or easy. We'll have to evaluate ourselves over time and see how we're doing. It really is like rehab. We have to constantly be vigilant, facing the fact that we can screw up at any moment. We can help by supporting one other through this. To borrow from Pope Paul VI: "If you want peace, work for justice"!

"Racism is a False Belief"

Guillermo "Willie" Tenorio, Jr.
Past President, Mexican American School Boards Association
Hays Consolidated Independent School District Board of Trustees
Kyle, Texas

Growing up, I identified as Mexican-American, because that remained the common phrase in Central Texas at the time. Then we switched to "Hispanic," which I've also used. Sometimes, I say *Latino* or *Latinx*. Mexican-Hispanic, though, may be the most accurate description of my identity. My Mom's mother is from Mexico and my father's family immigrated from Spain to Mexico and then the United States.

Many people carry ideas of how we should look. I'm a light-skinned person, but my mother's baby picture of me, taken at three or four months old, shows me with darker skin. I remember her telling me as a child, "You really weren't that dark." It turns out that the photographer's daughter, who was developing the photo, looked at my Mexican-American name and guessed that the picture was overexposed. My skin color didn't match her idea of my identity—so she colorized me and made me darker!

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In the third grade, during a lesson on race and ethnicity, our teacher asked all the White students to raise their hands, then all the Black students, then all the Mexican-American students. One girl objected when I raised my hand as a Mexican American. "You can't be Mexican-American," she said. "You're too White!"

It can be easy to form misconceptions based on limited experience. When I was around seven years old, I recall seeing one of my teachers at church. Usually my parents took us to Spanish-language masses. One Sunday, we went to an English Mass instead. There I saw my teacher with her husband, and I thought, "What are they doing here? They're White!"

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So accustomed to going to church with Spanish-speaking, Hispanic persons, it did not occur to me that White Catholics existed.

As I grew older, I noticed other ways race came in to play in the school setting. In middle school, I came to understand from my friends that families who lived halfway between our mostly-White elementary school in Buda and the mostly-Hispanic school in Kyle could choose which school their children would attend. Many of those decisions, I learned, depended on the racial demographics of each school. One boy told me his parents sent him to our school because "too many Mexicans" attended the other school.

I went to Hays High School, created during the height of the Civil Rights movement and named for a Texas Ranger. There were various ways race came into play: Our mascot was the Rebel, the confederate flag was our official symbol, and "Dixie" our school song. Our tenth-grade biology teacher told us that some races are intellectually superior to others. He even made the blatantly-racist claim that IQ correlates to race. As kids, we learned to listen and not talk back, so we didn't challenge his racism—or his views on homosexuality and the Catholic Church. He concluded the year by naming the students who would be good scientists —almost entirely White students in an integrated classroom. I wish I had been better equipped to do or say something about these events at the time. Still, we hear that some teachers espouse racist ideologies; I'm hopeful that our kids today know better how to respond to them.

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The conversations and experiences on race that I had as a youth have greatly impacted my actions on the school board. For example, while in college, a student in my physics class asked me, "What is that, on your class ring?" I said it was the symbol of my high school. He replied, "That's a Confederate flag! Do you know what that stands for?" The Confederate flag had been so normalized when I attended school that I didn't realize the meaning it held beyond the confines of my school. I am proud that, as Hays CISD School Board President, I placed an item on our agenda to successfully remove the symbol from our district.

After I graduated from college, I began thinking about how many Hispanic kids with whom I once studied—who seemed just as

capable as their White peers—*didn't* go to college. I contemplated the barriers that keep students from achieving what they're capable of. Many don't see role models they identify with. Their family members did not attend college. They don't find the supports or the financial means. They also face the expectations of biased teachers, like my science teacher. The fact that so many of them didn't go to college caused me to reflect on the implicit biases and racial prejudices of teachers, administrators and school board members.

In my role as a trustee, I helped establish a high school program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), to help underrepresented kids go to college. AVID provides them extra tutoring, equips them with study skills, and helps them apply to colleges. Unfortunately, biases affected that program, too: Some board members opposed it, and, after an election cycle and new administrators, the program was dismantled a year later.

Our dual-language programs, which simultaneously teach elementary students in two languages, were also dismantled. The research shows that dual-language skills can be especially beneficial for schools with larger immigrant populations, resulting in higher academic skills. Some board members and administrators fought dual language, suggesting that students who grew up speaking Spanish could not handle the curriculum. I called them out for such apparent racism, angering some of my colleagues, including Hispanic trustees. The discontinuation of that program delivered a huge disservice to our immigrant students.

After the death of George Floyd, the United States has examined its racial views. Our school district has also started to examine race and its impact on education. After a massive outcry from students and the community, we removed the Dixie fight song from Hays High School. This was not politically possible a few years earlier.

This fall, our district is creating a diversity council, comprised of parents and teachers, to improve the diversity in our school system—a dialogue we really must initiate. It will be eye-opening for many people, who will learn things that make them better-prepared to participate in positive change. Our Board also decided to use achievement data, disaggregated by race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, to evaluate the district's achievement gaps.

We all internalize implicit biases. We're taught to think of certain persons in certain ways, then we experience cognitive dissonance when others challenge our false beliefs. Racism exists as a false belief. We think in racist ways only because we've been taught to do so. We internalize the incorrect notions of our community—as well as what we see and hear in biased media.

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Some ideas considered "normal" die harder than others. We no longer see water fountains labeled "Black" or "White," which was common 55 years ago. We similarly segregated men and women, discouraging women from going to college. Our societal constructs contributed to keeping women from achieving their goals. Now, women compose the majority of our high school valedictorians. The same appears to be true of race: If we deconstruct the societal constructs that currently keep certain races of students disadvantaged, we might see their achievements soar!

I'm really proud that my father, Willie Tenorio, Sr., participated in the effort to desegregate our community in 1961. He and others led voters to approve the integration of our public schools before authorities mandated them to do so. In practice, though, our schools remain somewhat segregated nearly sixty years later. Zoning policies that distribute funding keep people apart, sending them to different schools. This contributes to a class system. Indeed, a long road lies before us until more students of color earn a college education and a higher income. I like to think that, within a decade or two, people will shake their heads and say, "I can't believe people thought that students of color couldn't do as well as White students," or "I can't believe there once was a time when an 'achievement gap' existed in our schools!"

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Achievement gaps are not natural. No natural reason exists for White students to outperform African-American or Hispanic students in reading and/or math. Those gaps point to societal failures that shortchange low-income students, who sometimes go hungry, receive fewer resources, and are

not provided the same supports. We should keep trying to find a way to ameliorate these challenges and help our students catch up. Ultimately, we need to enrich what students bring to the table with what our school districts provide to others. Only then will we conquer these challenges and really help kids do better!

"We All Bring Something to the Table"

Carmen Trujillo
Director, Arizona *Latino* School Boards Association
Phoenix Elementary School District #1 Governing Board
Phoenix, Arizona

I've been here in Arizona my whole life. I learned in Catholic school to sit quietly and listen—and not to challenge my White teachers. I became conditioned to believe that White leadership is reflective of education and stability. People of color, on the other hand, are often villainized as cheating systems and relying on welfare, all while immigrants pay their share of taxes and keep our Social Security system going.

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In college, I participated in a research assistantship where I archived and transcribed newspaper articles and other documents studied by scholar Walter Miller, for research on gang delinquency in places like Boston and Roxbury, Massachusetts in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Reading the articles' local and stereotypical perspectives in light of his social science research, I learned that my values aligned with his work—and that change was possible when public service programs aimed to understand the community.

Since college, I've gravitated toward the writings of James Baldwin. He possessed a melting pot of friends from various races, providing him the perspectives of various cultures and the foundations of lifelong bonds based in human connection and responsibility.

Many kids of color attend neighborhood schools that haven't changed as much as other schools in better-resourced districts, where students don't worry about technology or other needs. For years, I drove my kids to such schools because I believed they offered better opportunities and were closer to my workplace. But I didn't realize at the time what my kids experienced and how uncomfortable my kids

felt in those schools. When I later placed them in schools with students that looked more like them, they were much happier.

Racism remains a very sensitive subject, especially for people of color. In light of recent protests, I expected a statement from our elementary district on the Black Lives Matter movement at our June board meeting. A draft resolution circulated before a board meeting, and one of our colleagues suggested edits that made it longer and much more meaningful. It was a tremendous statement for our district, in which over 80% of our students are kids of color. I thought how great it would be for our students to know that we stood as a board with them. I praised my colleague at that meeting, and the tone-deaf criticisms of our three White peers hit me like a sucker punch. Our board president complained and rudely giggled about the number of "whereas" clauses. Another peer suggested the resolution was "too specific." They said, "we can't be too political"—and other things I would be embarrassed to repeat. It became a most uncomfortable moment. I felt offended as a person-of-color on the board, not included and not valued. After much community communication and feedback, we ultimately created a new Black Lives Matter resolution when a neutral third-party facilitator was hired to lead the collaboration.

From what I've experienced since my election, our district leadership and superintendent want new, Brown, female, and non-typical elected officials to fall in line with "industry standard" and not "rock the boat."

We must shine light on the differences between districts, which can be like night and day, depending on the street you live on. Some districts receive adequate funds; others don't. Some districts manage their funds like a well-oiled machine; others manage them poorly. As a parent, I learned to ask better questions by experiencing the enrollment processes for special education programs in different districts. As a board member overseeing our budget, the discrepancies in pay for non-certified staff, *Latino* and Black employees across the district teach me about decisionmakers. We still need to overcome barriers in

We must shine light on the differences between districts, which can be like night and day, depending on the street you live on.

district hiring practices and communication in our dual-language communities to end racism in our schools.

Had I been more aware of the inequities of our education system, I would have run for a school board seat a long time ago. Now we're trying to get excited about the equity teams being put in place after a district audit, all the while knowing we shouldn't need equity teams in the first place!

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Few people wonder what our kids go through outside of school—and their environments are so important. It's difficult to achieve equitable educational outcomes when our children of color cannot count on quiet places to study, good study habits, or structured environments.

I've come to conclude that systems that operate from foundations of racism must be put out, like a fire, and rebuilt from the bottom-up, in order for a new tone and intention to be set.

I don't want to sound negative, but we still face so much work to do. I'm not sure that I'll live to see equity and racial justice. I hope I do, and I'll keep working toward that end. In the meantime, I work to build relationships of understanding, and help to open others' eyes to the fact that we all bring something to the table—cool things about each person's history and culture that should be shared, not covered up, dismissed or disrespected!

I'm not sure that I'll live to see equity and racial justice. I hope I do, and I'll keep working toward that end.

"Systems are Simply Reflections of the People Who Run Them"

Curtis Valentine
Steering Committee Member, Council of Urban Boards of Education
Prince George's County Public Schools Board of Education
Upper Malboro, Maryland

Being raised in a Black family that spoke openly about race and racism made clear its impact on me, a Black boy and eventually a Black man. My parents taught me about my family history as sharecroppers in Georgia and free landowners in Virginia. The more I learned about my own family history, the more confident I became with discussing race and racism. Additionally, my rich life experiences as student at an HBCU, Morehouse College, and as a humanitarian professional in places in like Africa and Latin America helped me understand how to discuss race in the context of issues like education, healthcare, housing, the economy, and criminal justice, in order to bring about systematic change based on race.

I identify as both Black and African-American. My parents are Black/African-American, so I was born into those categories, but I embraced them both on my own for different reasons. I embrace the term Black for the power it connotes in the history of my people in America. I came to embrace African-American after working in South Africa, where I was recognized as "Coloured" rather than "Black." As a result, I came to recognize the greatness of my experience as an American of African descent.

One of my earliest memories of how it is that people are treated differently based on their physical appearance dates back to elementary school. In the first grade, my classmates saw my father as he picked me up from school and thought he was "White." My late father was a fair-skinned Black man whose ancestors were Black, Native American, and White. In many environments, my father could pass for White. I remember being ashamed of how those students made me feel. I later asked my father to not come inside the school for fear I would be further ostracized by my classmates.

I grew up in a diverse community where both White and Black neighbors gave me a strong sense of self. Outside of my community notions of race and racism came more from both the negative and positive depictions of others races on television and in music.

I am a student of history. My views on race as a young adult were mostly based on my study of race and racism and the personal experiences of family living through the Jim Crow South in the past. As I grew older, my views on race and racism expanded as I interacted with police, enrolled in an HBCU, and traveled internationally.

As a child, I saw the video of the beating of Rodney King. I remember feeling helpless to protect myself from police. As a high school student, I was threatened by a police officer who worked in my school. I immediately understood the likelihood of his threat coming to fruition. I now understand how that King video shaped how I interact with police—and how I prepare my kids for their interactions with them.

I have long believed, and research indicates, that racism is a social construct. Both my mother and father's families are Black, but had two different Black experiences. I implicitly learned as a child about the social construct of race. In South Africa, I saw firsthand how apartheid used race to divide "White" from "Coloured." I'm currently reading Karen Fields' and Barbara Fields' work, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, which speaks of the impact of how race is constructed and defined.

Racism does not always appear blatant. It can make its way into spaces you least expect. I sometimes feel implicit bias in my office building—a predominately-White environment—when I am assumed to not have access to certain spaces.

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Systemic racism also evolves. Systems do whatever is necessary to survive. The response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and desegregation of public schools in 1954, for instance, led to racist housing policies, like redlining and housing compacts. If racists could no longer segregate us through policy, they would do so through

locally-funded schools based on segregated zip codes. There are many examples of this.

Systems simply reflect the people who run them. Too many policy makers believe Black and *Latinx* students are inherently inferior. Too many still believe Black and *Latinx* parents don't want the same as White and Asian parents do for their children. Sadly, Blacks and *Latinx* persons can perpetuate those same biases about themselves. People internalize racism and implicit bias toward their own kind, so that *Latinos*, for instance, can end up believing that a predominately-*Latinx* school or that a *Latino*-led school is inherently inferior to a school led by a White person. We need to reverse such mindsets.

I'm optimistic about the future. At the same time, I don't believe we've made much progress against racism if we measure progress relative to the way people are treated in any period in time. We have a long way to go to fully understand how racism seeps into the crevices of institutions, but also how implicit bias based on race seeps into our minds. Most importantly, we must address how we respond to biases that we don't even see or fully understand. Every generation relitigates old fights for the rights we thought we already enjoyed, because racists so easily evolve and recreate racism in ways that make it hard to extricate itself from issues and the institutions we rely on.

Caste is as American as apple pie. I once thought exposure to other cultures would be enough to help us overcome racism and inequity, but I realize the privileged don't easily give up privilege.

Caste is as American as apple pie.

As a policy maker, I am interested in the intersection of race and government, and how race impacts public policy. The racism of how we fund and govern schools with predominately Black and *Latinx* students reminds us daily of how racism in education persists and takes different shapes. I've also seen the racism of Blacks toward the *Latinx* community as it relates to funding and support within a school district.

Our gains and improvements in educational outcomes have not been equitable. In places like Denver—where we see poor, Black and *Latinx* students improving academically—we also see affluent, White students improving just as much or more. Outcomes do improve, but achievement gaps aren't closing.

We have to be unapologetic about race, racism, and education. We can no longer tippy-toe around these issues. We must do the research. We must get better at telling our stories, be clear about our vision for the world and how everyone fits into it. We must be unapologetic about the resources it will take to get there. We currently struggle with each of those steps. Racists erase and distort our history, causing us to doubt our ability to deconstruct racial castes and racist institutions. But we've done it before—and we can do it again!

Racists erase and distort our history, causing us to doubt our ability to deconstruct racial castes and racist institutions.

"Education is the Best Answer"

Sylvester Elizalde Vásquez, Jr.
Director, Mexican American School Boards Association
Southwest Independent School District Board of Trustees
San Antonio, Texas

I self-identify as Mexican-American. With a mom born in Mexico and a dad born in America, that seems appropriate, even though I was born in America. All my grandparents are *Mexicanos*—so I'm Mexican-American.

From a young age, I learned about my heritage. My maternal grandfather talked to us about his childhood during the 1910 revolution in Mexico. He said that Pancho Villa's army took away his family's land, forcing them to come north, to find work and make money. During the next four years, he brought his wife and eleven siblings to the United States.

I was born in San Antonio. It was time for my family to raise a "junior," so they named me Sylvester Elizalde Vásquez, Jr. By six years old, I spoke fluent English and Spanish. My mother spoke only Spanish, and my dad, who spoke English and Spanish, earned a promotion, so our family followed him to his new job in Wisconsin.

My first experience of racism occurred when Mama walked me to the local public school, two blocks from our new home in Wisconsin. We walked in, and the lady in the office opened her eyes wide and said, "No, no, no. You need to go to Lincoln Elementary!" We thought maybe her school was over-enrolled—until we arrived at Lincoln Elementary, three blocks away, and discovered Lincoln was a Black school. At that time, Wisconsin was one of the most segregated states in America. Wisconsinites fought for the North, and they never owned slaves, but their state remained very segregated. Last year, in fact, WalletHub ranked Wisconsin the most segregated state in America!

Black and Mexican-American students attended Lincoln. We referred to the students of Lincoln as Black. Others referred to them as "Colored," which we now recognize was racist.

I joke that I used to be White. The school's registration form offered only two options: "Black" or "White." The clerk told us to check the "White" box—so they identified me as "White"—but not White enough to go to the White school. At that time, I didn't know this machination resulted from the effects of racism triggered by my skin color. That was my first experience of racism—at six-year-old!

They identified me as "White"—but not White enough to go to the White school.

Eventually, when the school's registration forms changed to "Black," "White" and "Other," we started checking "Other." Then words like "*Chicano*" and "Mexican American" were introduced. Now we see "Hispanic" or "*Latino*," with all sorts of other boxes for "of Puerto Rican descent," "of Mexican descent," *et cetera*. All this has happened during my lifetime.

After three years in the north, my family and I returned to San Antonio, where I attended a school that enrolled 100% Mexican and Mexican-American students. Oddly, we *weren't* allowed to speak Spanish in school. I'll never forget: On the first day of school, my teacher sent me to the principal's office because I translated for the Spanish-speaking boy behind me. She replied, "That's not my problem. Our rule is: No Spanish at all here!" To this day, I'm fluent in Spanish. I even majored in it in college. I believe being bilingual is a gift, allowing us to communicate with more of the world.

I believe being bilingual is a gift, allowing us to communicate with more of the world.

When in college, members of the Mexican American Club at our school kicked me out because I interacted with Black and White friends! Improper actions happened among peers as well. I refer to that time as my "*Chicano* period." In the eighth grade, we self-identified as *Chicano*. The "Brown Power" movement was underway, similar to the Black Panthers. I didn't participate too much, because the *Chicano* movement sometimes turned violent, and I always believed that you can get more done with your mind and speech, than by being a radical.

The Vietnam War grew more deadly during the same time period. My uncle served in an all-Brown squad in Vietnam—and he was

guaranteed to be on the frontline. At home, plenty of conflict and demonstrations organized at that time. Everyone went to demonstrations against the war: Blacks, Whites, Mexican Americans, hippies, non-hippies. Those demonstrations brought everyone together. Perhaps if we had built on that movement, we wouldn't need the demonstrations that we're seeing now.

As I grew older, I wanted to learn more about my culture and my heritage. My maternal grandfather shaped much of what I thought on race and racism. He came from Mexico, but he crossed the border, stayed in Texas, and even traveled to Chicago and Michigan—wherever his work took him. He would always make his way back to San Antonio, where he bought his first home. He knew which towns to avoid—where you couldn't eat at the restaurants or use the restrooms. Some businesses had signs saying, "No Coloreds." Others maintained separate facilities labeled "Colored." Grandpa's stories shaped me.

Mom and Dad made sure we went on a road trip each year: If Dad had a good year, we headed to Disneyland in California; other years, we visited his brother in Michigan. Many gas station attendants along the way told us that they didn't have restrooms for us. We were seven kids. I remember one time when my brother and I really needed a restroom, but the gas station attendant said he didn't have one. We went behind the gas station, where the restroom in fact existed—and we took care of business. That man chased us, so we jumped in the car and drove away.

Teachers in high school also shaped me. Many of them told me what I couldn't do. They said, "You're Mexican-American"—or sometimes they wouldn't say the "American" part. They messaged that Mexican Americans never "make it." Because I worked in painting and carpentry during the summers, with my dad, grandpa and uncles, my teachers encouraged me to work in construction. They said, "If you really want to go to college, we'll get you into San Antonio Community College or St. Philip's—a community college with trades." Those teachers caused me to say, "I'll show you!" I got accepted to the University of Wisconsin, to the University of Texas, and to Texas Lutheran University, where I chose to go. It was close

Teachers in high school also shaped me… They messaged that Mexican Americans never "make it."

enough to home that I, the oldest of seven children, could keep an eye on my parents and siblings.

In Seguin, the small town where Texas Lutheran was located, restaurant owners allowed us in, but we got "looks"—especially when I walked in with friends who were White or Black. When people in restaurants looked at us, we joked, "We have all these eyes on us: We should get up and dance!"

Those experiences gave me tidbits and tastes of racism, leaving me yearning for more. I would tell myself, "When I have a family, I will share these conversations with my boys." By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the times had changed, but I still engaged those conversations with my sons: I knew there were still places in the United States where racism occurs out in the open and not behind closed doors.

Back then, we thought we would cross this rainbow, and everyone would be able to marry whomever they wanted. Yet I had cousins who dated Black men and were given a hard time by other family members, including their dads. Some of my cousins married interracially, and those marriages have survived.

More recently, while I waited in the registration line at a school board conference a few years ago, a gentleman—and I'm being kind—told the African-American lady behind the registration desk that he would wait for a White person to attend to him. He said it as if it were common practice, as if it were okay. The conference staff handled the issue, but incidents like that make me think about the comments and tweets of our current President. He "stirs the pot," and I'm not sure if he's doing it because he's ignorant or because he's having a good ol' time doing it. His father raised him to think it's okay, just as they thought it okay to deny housing to Blacks. If we don't vote him out of office, we deserve everything we get from him. His speeches and tweets fire up a lot of Americans and show we must solve a much bigger problem.

In my experience, there's a lack of knowledge, both by those who act racist and those who suffer racism. We need to find a way to create and pass on knowledge about race and racism.

People aren't born racist. They don't take classes or watch YouTube videos on how to become racist. Like poverty, racism gets passed on from generation to generation—unless we do something about it. In the same way that we break the cycle of poverty by educating kids and sending them to colleges and trade schools, we

need to break the cycle of racism. One of my college classmates, Steve Richards, told me his parents would cut off his monthly check if they knew he hung out with a Mexican American. Steve worked on breaking the cycle!

We need to address this in the learned environment of all our students. School provides a great place for us to reach our students, who aren't racist until they're taught racism. In some instances, they're taught to tell their friends, "I can't play with you because my parents say I can't play with you." They don't know what they're saying; they just know what their parents told them.

The only way to combat racism comes through working with our children. In some cases, our kids will say, "That's not what my mommy and daddy told me." We must have that conversation. Education is the best answer.

Teaching and learning about race and racism is a start. We also need to teach our kids how we ended up with segregated living conditions and disparate wages for races. I'm 61 years old. I went to first grade in 1965, when segregation was common. Despite being ruled unconstitutional in 1954, segregation still happens today. People get confined to certain places. We know who lives on the westside, eastside, northside or southside of various cities—many times not by choice, but because that's the way it's always been. These things started with slavery, we fought to overcome them during the Civil Rights movement, and still they remain. Fortunately, they're coming to the forefront, thanks to social media and the speed with which we get news. We must learn to use this to our advantage. I'm optimistic. I'm heartened by social media and the fact that almost everyone owns a camera. We need to use that to our advantage and to educate people on racism. It's ridiculous that racist people continue to be racist in public, knowing that nearby cameras can focus on them. That might be the best thing at this time—that people see that racism still happens—and that these acts lead to true conversation and learning experiences.

It's ridiculous that racist people continue to be racist in public, knowing that nearby cameras can focus on them.

When I saw how police recently killed George Floyd, I wondered what the police officer who knelt on him thought. Why didn't his fellow officers do anything? What we're seeing today, as a result of that incident, reminds me of the Los Angeles riots and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Today's movement seems to be a youth movement. I hope it continues. We need our youth to participate in this conversation and these peaceful protests.

Today's movement seems to be a youth movement. I hope it continues. We need our youth to participate in this conversation and these peaceful protests.

I wonder whether racism will ever end. A few years ago, I told people we've come a long way with respect to race and racism—but now I'm running out of years. If I live as long as my dad, I have 21 years left to see that day. I'd like to believe that I'll see a major "kumbaya moment" for race in my lifetime.

In the meantime, I ask our superintendent what we're doing to talk about current events with our kids. We have to do more than teach *Tejano* or Mexican American Studies. We have to teach about current events—and we have to have conversations on what our students are thinking and feeling about current events. Our teachers need to be prepared to lead those conversations on the racism we're seeing in the United States, why it's happening, and how we can stop it.

I also ask what we're doing to train our teachers and staff, not only to answer questions, but to be proactive. I ask what we're doing to help teachers and staff understand our cultures. Do our Mexican-American students understand the culture of our students from Central and South America? Do they understand that tacos in Texas are different from tacos in Guatemala or Honduras? Do they know why their friends' families came here, or do they subscribe to the narrative that they're "taking away our jobs"? Do they know the conditions of the countries that other students come from?

We need to talk about race—not only among ourselves, but also with our students. We need to figure out how to have really meaningful conversations with them!

"Racism Isn't Just About Skin Color"

Dr. Lucía Vázquez
Director, California *Latino* School Boards Association
Visalia Unified School District Board of Education
Visalia, California

I grew up during the *Chicano* movement, and I self-identify as *Chicana*. To identify as Mexican-American has a whole, different connotation. My Mexican grandparents moved to Texas in 1910 during the exodus of the Mexican revolution. I grew up feeling that I wasn't part of the mainstream American culture. I wasn't White, and, although I had strong roots in Mexican culture and religion, I didn't have strong roots in Mexico. In fact, the closest I got to Mexico was Los Angeles!

I grew up among a Spanish-speaking, Brown population undervalued for its ability and skill to handle crops and bring them to market. I saw how closely racism and classism are interwoven. In California, the *Chicano* movement centered around farm workers' rights. I learned as a child that racism isn't just about skin color: It's about physical appearance, income, education, language ability, and being an "essential worker." I learned that some rules didn't apply to everyone: Farmworkers, for instance, did not enjoy the legal right to strike or boycott.

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My family was very involved in the United Farm Workers movement. I grew up during a time when people stood up and said, "This is not okay!" As a result, I have a strong social justice background. Because the United Farm Workers included people from all walks of life, I learned from a very young age to respect all people, regardless of age, color, education, language or even hygiene. In many ways, that really shaped who I am and helped me to be secure in speaking up in the face of injustice.

I serve on a school board in a very conservative area. I've made motions or mentioned things in meetings, only to have other board members come down on me afterwards, saying, "How dare you!" or "Why did you say that? What are you talking about?" They feel attacked by my words. I share an example: During one conversation with our cabinet, the question was raised why the district's student numbers don't settle down until October. I noted, "We all need to remember that not every family in our district has a regular salary; many families live paycheck-to-paycheck, and they don't have the means to remain in one place. Sometimes they even pack up and move in the middle of the night." The board member who asked the question about student numbers called me later, furious that I seemed only to be addressing him. He misinterpreted my words as a personal affront that embarrassed him in front of others.

I am the first *Latina* ever elected to our board. We've had *Latinos* on and off, but ours is mostly a board of White men. They aren't bad men, but their perspectives—as Whites and as men—are very different. Some people are really offended when others suggest that school boards need different perspectives!

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People have "blind spots" when it comes to our marginalized populations. I saw this at the onset of this pandemic. I heard from my colleagues in other districts that the poorest schools many times were left out of the distribution of resources. They, as *Latino* members, had to speak up in order to ensure redistribution. The poor, marginalized communities that most needed supplies, technology, internet access, meals and transportation were overlooked. It's not malicious, but it does result from implicit bias and cultural insensitivity. Simultaneous translation services are often an afterthought, leaving staff members scrambling at the last minute to accommodate and sometimes asking for volunteers to interpret, rather than a paid professional.

Many people are blind to the ways in which they are biased. I had an experience where parents in wealthier PTAs were blind to the fact that there were high-needs schools in our district, on the other side of town. That kind of ignorance is devastating. People in power also fail to see needs and injustices. They fail to see marginalized people, who

are treated as "insignificant." Recently, our board president was quoted as saying there is no discrimination in our district—which is comprised of 70% *Latino* students, and where 80% of our teachers are White!

Prejudice plays a role as well. We can be shallow, picking pretty people over fat and misshapen people. It is common to choose people like us for leadership positions—which explains the findings of Dr. Daren Miller's dissertation on systemic racism in hiring decisions. He found that in California's Central Valley, only eight of 340 school administrators were Black. Many of the people who make these hiring decisions aren't blatantly racist; they may not even realize that they're acting as a result of implicit biases. As educational leaders, we need to constantly ask ourselves, "Is this an equitable decision that I'm making? Am I ensuring that my implicit bias is not having an influence on the way that I'm hiring people?" Kids need to be able to see people who look like them.

When I visit campuses in our district, I use my academic title: Dr. Vázquez. It's important for kids to know that Brown women are doctors, too. I often ask principals to use first and last names when giving out awards, so students can feel the full value of who they are. Names and titles are important, and sometimes we simply need to call out what we see. In my district two years ago, I noted the fact that the men speaking to the board were introduced by their titles and last names, while the women were introduced by their first names. A simple review of board meeting recordings validated my claim of misogynist disrespect—and change was made.

It's important for kids to know that Brown women are doctors, too.

With cell phones and other technology, we can now see how bad racism is in some parts of our country. When you see a video of a person saying over and over again that he can't breathe, and then he dies, you can't ignore that. When you see a person shot in the back, you can't ignore that. These things also happened in the past, but people didn't see them as they do now. The Black Lives Matter movement is simply bringing these events to light. Sadly the incidents of these injustices are exponential to what is being realized on social media.

Changes in election systems have allowed us to get our "foot in the door," enabling us to create systemic change. School districts here in the Central Valley of California—and throughout the nation—are reworking their policies. We are asking for systemic change and an examination of the implicit biases in our hiring systems. In some cases, we're evaluating whether our decisions are equitable. We're developing equity departments with trained staff. Some districts are launching pilot dual-language immersion programs, in line with California's Roadmap 2030, which has the goal of making all California students bilingual by 2030. More districts are implementing restorative practices. Much training, support and resources are needed to correct our systemic problems—but, just like those farm workers, we're working together to create change!

"Make Sure No One is 'On the Menu'"

Carla Windfont
Immediate Past Chair, National Black Council
Crosby Independent School District Board of Trustees
Crosby, Texas

I self-identify as a strong, Black female. I knew this about myself since the age of four. I'm the sixth generation of the Barrett family, and, after news of the Emancipation Proclamation reached Texas on "Juneteenth"—June 19, 1865—my great-great grandparents, Tobias and Caroline Barrett, helped build the Black town of Barrett Station, Texas, where I now live.

As a little girl, I attended Charles R. Drew Elementary School, a Black school that didn't receive the same resources as the neighboring White schools. I recall local principals coming to my grandparents, to complain that they didn't receive the new uniforms and books they ordered. Instead, they received old, torn books and used uniforms from neighboring districts. Even as a little girl, I was aware of racist actions. I also recall the racism that revealed itself in basic services. Barrett Station didn't get its own post office or zip code—and we still don't have one today; our mail went in and out of the White town of Crosby. Because of institutionalized racism, the Whites got the "good stuff" and only shared their "leftovers" with the Black families of Barrett Station.

Some of the strongest influences during my childhood were my deceased grandparents, Rev. James and Mary Mills. They acted as political advocates for Black families, public education, and self-sufficiency. I saw my grandfather's White allies, and I realized that I couldn't judge people by others' stereotypes. Even Harriet Tubman interacted with White allies as part of her Underground Railroad. We must judge people by their actions, not by their appearance.

Everybody internalizes biases, and elimination of them takes conscious effort.

Everybody internalizes biases, and elimination of them takes conscious effort. My husband, kids and I like to play a game: When we

pull up to a fast-food restaurant, we guess the manager's race based on the race of the person greeting us at the window. We're usually right: Blacks tend to hire Blacks, and Whites tend to hire Whites. We must keep such biases in check and be sure that we're not judging others simply by the color of their skin. We need to assure that all people are represented in the groups in which we play a part. My friend, Dr. Kimberly McLeod, often says, "If you're not sitting at the table, you're on the menu." We need to make sure no one is "on the menu"!

"If you're not sitting at the table, you're on the menu."
— Dr. Kimberly McLeod

I was born in 1961, so I was reared in a racist era. I lived through the Civil Rights and Voters' Rights movements. I remember my grandfather, James Mills, urging the integration of Black students and Black teachers. It became a fight. Racism is real. My grandfather worked as an election precinct judge for 42 years. He witnessed the poll taxes that were abolished in my lifetime. I remember we drove the election results to the neighboring town of Crosby, Texas, where I remember seeing White men harass my grandfather, shouting at him and throwing things at him. When I was four or five years old, I remember when the Ku Klux Klan burned crosses in a neighbor's yard. I also remember when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Events like those made me realize that racism is real.

I remember how clerks followed my grandmother in stores, as if she sought to steal something. I remember how we couldn't enter the front doors of the restaurants in neighboring communities; Black people entered through the back door. When we attended the company picnics of the oil refinery where my grandfather worked, the White employees and their families enjoyed one section of the beach, while the Black employees and their families moved to the Colored section. In later years, they hosted the White picnic one day, and the Black picnic another day, so that the racism wasn't so blatant.

In 1969, our Texas public schools began to integrate. The law indicated that we would receive an equitable education—which never happened. We sat in classes with certain percentages of Black and non-Black students. A certain percentage of us earned access to gifted and talented classes. Even today, it's as if only a certain percentage of those of us who serve on our school boards are Black

due to the way our boards became structured with single-member districts.

All those experiences taught me resiliency. I learned to choose to do right and walk the Christian way. I began to look for ways to address the failures in our systems. My grandparents taught me that if we want to see change, we must be part of the change. So, we vote. We are vocal. We serve on local boards. We work to resist the stereotypes that others might hold of us.

If we want to see change, we must be part of the change.

As minorities, we often struggle for representation—not only at the local level, but also on state and national boards. I've been denied seats on state boards and wondered if that ties back to people's biases. The boards on which we do serve are typically the minority councils that we've created for Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans. Those boards give us a chance to sit at the table. I've been fortunate to serve the Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members and the National Black Council. I've also been a member of the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators and the Mexican American School Boards Association. These opportunities allow me to know and be inspired by others from across the nation.

In my experience, the only way we'll successfully confront systemic racism will be through SMART goals. If we see underrepresentation in certain areas—for board members, superintendents, teachers, *et cetera*—we must be intentional and purposeful about addressing those issues and creating change.

Nearly 60 years after the Civil Rights movement, we still face a long way to go. Ask children what they think of when they hear the words, "I can't breathe." They know about George Floyd. Blacks, Whites and all people marched together in the 1960s. That's what we're seeing again today. We continue to strive for the goals they marched for. We still haven't achieved them.

Only this year in Texas, our State Board of Education approved an elective in African American Studies. We must no longer limit our study of African-American history to the shortest month of the year. It's only an elective, and school districts aren't mandated to offer it, so thousands upon thousands of kids will still not hear the stories of their legacy and cultural background.

We want to help children appreciate their history and culture, so they can take pride in their backgrounds. I know Hispanic friends who don't want their children to learn Spanish. It's as if they want to erase their culture and history, rather than understand the pain and struggles of their parents.

Here in Texas, we've implemented Lone Star Governance, which is built on the premise that student outcomes don't change until adult behaviors change. The same could be said of racism. If we want our students to respect each other, we need to model that respect. If we want our students to inherit equitable systems that eradicate biases, we, the adults in the room, need to do it. As school board members, we need to implement equity policies. Without them, we'll never address the inequities in our educational systems.

When it comes to racism, we have to live by the words, "If you see something, say something." We need to address inequities. We need to adjust our systems. We need to have bold, courageous conversations. We need to address those who are obstacles. We don't have to be ugly or rude; we're in the business of education, so we merely need to help educate people!

As school board members, we need to examine the policies, practices and procedures of our own districts. We need to identify the policies that need to be more inclusive or that are hindering our systems. We need to ensure that our teachers and administrators reflect the demographics of our students. We need to be sure our own local boards—and our state and national boards—reflect the students we serve. Finally, we need to ask ourselves whether we're addressing the issues in our districts that really need to be addressed.

In the same way that the National School Boards Association has an equity department, we need to create equity departments at all levels, including the local level. If your school district is too small for an equity department, consider combining resources and efforts with neighboring districts, to create a department that serves all.

It seems that the social distancing of this pandemic has led many people to reflect on their lives and situations. I've heard White people say, "I have a Black friend, so I'm not a racist. Let's be clear: Just because you have a Black friend doesn't mean that you aren't a racist! Examine your actions. Think about how you've voted. Consider

where you live and which businesses are in your neighborhood. Are you supporting the *status quo*? Are your actions keeping things the way they are?

Are you supporting the status quo? Are your actions keeping things the way they are?

I remain optimistic. When members named me Chair of the NSBA's National Black Council, I said to my brothers, Armando Rodríguez of the National Hispanic Council and Jacinto Ramos, Jr. of the Council of Urban Boards of Education "Together, we can create change. It's going to take purposeful planning. It's going to take unity, with people of color standing together. Let's inform and educate. Let's share tools, and let's have courageous conversations!"

Working together, we can overcome racism!

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