

# The Power of Multicultural Education Summit: Improving Student Performance Outcomes



Hosted by  
The Julian Samora Research Institute  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI



**A Summary Report of the  
Multicultural Education Summit  
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## Julian Samora Research Institute

University Outreach and Engagement

Michigan State University

219 S. Harrison Road, Room 93

East Lansing, MI 48824

(517) 432-1317 • [jsri.msu.edu](http://jsri.msu.edu)



## Preface

Historically, the more powerful segments in society have enacted policies in accordance with their interests and their views of society. Today, it seems that public education in this country is caught in an endless crisis and endless processes of reform. Since 1965, there has been increased involvement in education by the Federal Government. The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson as part of his Great Society program. Passed in 1965, this Act provided a role for the Federal Government in K-12 policy. Its first statutory section established Title I, under which the Federal Government provides financial aid to school districts to help cover the cost of educating disadvantaged students. This was part of President Johnson's response to the Civil Rights Movement. Since then, it has been continuously reauthorized over the years, but it has also been substantially modified and taken in different directions.

The Civil Rights Movement valued and emphasized cultural pluralism and promoted multicultural and bilingual education and, for a time, was able to bring about the inclusion of these ideas and framework in the curriculum. But political winds of the day brought about a conservative response that has shaped the trajectory of K-12 education in this country since then.

In 1983, the report, *A Nation at Risk*, by the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education set in motion a reform movement focused on performance. It called upon the nation to address "the rising tide of mediocrity" in student performance if it was to avoid falling behind other nations, especially in economic productivity. In response, then Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton promoted "horse trading" less regulation of school systems for improved performance by the schools.<sup>1</sup> This led both to deregulation, a core principle of neoliberal ideology and its emphasis on free market fundamentalism, and increased state monitoring of student performance. This was followed by an emphasis on local goalsetting and performance standards, emphases stemming from the 1989 Education Summit chaired by Former President George H. W. Bush. The ideas from the Summit contributed to the Goals 2000 initiative under President Clinton.

The Federal Government lent financial and political support to professional organizations developing national content standards. By 1994, however, the standards emphasis became the source of political divisions between Liberals and Conservatives, with the latter promoting local control. Still, in 1994, President Clinton signed into law the *Goals 2000 Act*, which called for standards- and outcomes-based educational goals. This Act is seen as the predecessor to President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind*, which called for measurable improvement in student performance. Controversial, this initiative "compelled states to conduct annual student assessments linked to state standards, to identify schools that are failing to make "adequate yearly progress" (AYP), and to institute sanctions and rewards based on each school's AYP status" (Dee & Jacob, 2011: 418). Much of this initiative remains today in the assessments conducted by states, although the punitive approach has been softened.

Under President Barack Hussein Obama, a conservative political backlash modified the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* by passing the 2015 *Every Student Succeeds Act*, which the President signed. Basically, it rolled back the Federal Government's role in education and invigorated and expanded the role of states. Under President Donald J. Trump, Betsy DeVos championed local control, religious education, school choice, and financial support for private schools. She also rolled back President Obama's guidance on protecting transgender students.

The contours of school reform, or reforms, reveal a shift from a liberal, progressive trajectory to one in which local politics have descended into conservative attacks on teachers and schools, and which narrow curriculum content and ban books. Michael Apple (2015) has identified four groups that constitute a complex alliance of power and influence in education which he argues are altering public education. They are:

[Group One consists of] multiple factions of capital who are committed to neoliberal marketized solutions to educational problems... [Group Two consists of] neoconservatives who want a 'return' to higher standards and a 'common culture'... [Group Three] is composed of authoritarian populist religious conservatives who are deeply worried about secularity and the preservation of their traditions... [Group Four consists of] a fraction of the professionally and managerially oriented new middle class...made up of people who are committed to the ideology and techniques of accountability, measurement, and the 'new managerialism' to which has been called 'audit culture.'

Collectively, these groups, through overlapping ideas, constitute a broad-based movement that is diminishing rather than improving the nation's public education systems. Student performance has not improved and neither has the ranking of U.S. student performance on international comparisons. Additionally, teachers are leaving the profession—it is no longer a vocation, rather teaching has been transformed into a job overcome by testing, political attacks, and limited resources. Schooling has become contested terrain. There are interventions by legislators who believe they know better than educators how and what students should be taught in our schools and universities, and by local conservative groups wanting to dictate curriculum content. In states across the country these groups are promoting legislation that forbids teachers and faculty from teaching about the histories of racial domination and oppression and the deficiencies of free enterprise capitalism, calling the former indoctrination while defending and promoting the imposition of market logic on education.

In this context, we offer a return to the development of youth that teaches them how to think, includes the truths of humanity as well as the factors that shape their personal lives in today's world, and hold that this be done within a multicultural framework. Conservatives see multicultural education as responsible for the decline of student performance—claiming that standards were lowered to accommodate students of color and that the emphasis on self-esteem was partly responsible for student achievement. Actually, it is politics, the stratification of public education, and the bureaucratization of schooling that are part of today's education crisis.

The cultivation of young minds involves learning about all aspects of the world without fear or limitations, without political, religious, or some other ideological influence. It is the young who must live in the world that elders and adults have constructed, and who must continue the pursuit of higher levels of human existence. Narrowing of the curriculum through legislation and book banning are not pathways to the future, they are pathways to dark times of human existence. We offer the contents of the summit on "The Power of Multicultural Education" for consideration by you, the reader, for improving public education for all students.

Rubén O. Martinez, Ph.D.  
Julian Samora Research Institute  
Michigan State University

### References

- Apple, M. (2015). Foreword. In Watkins, W. H. (Ed.), *The Assault on Public Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dee, T. S., & Jacob, B. (2011). The impact of No Child Left Behind on student achievement. *Journal of Policy Analysis and management*, 30(3), 418-446.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Among the many responses was the formation of the Holmes Group of Education Deans, a consortium of research universities with professional education programs. The Group, which was affiliated with Michigan State University, focused attention on the professionalization of teachers through three major reports that it issued in 1986, 1990, and 1995. The Carnegie Foundation also issued an important report in 1986 on preparing teachers.



# DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: [ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp](http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp)



23 BOOKS	<b>1%</b>	170 BOOKS	<b>5%</b>	218 BOOKS	<b>7%</b>	301 BOOKS	<b>10%</b>	864 BOOKS	<b>27%</b>	1,558 BOOKS	<b>50%</b>
<b>American Indians/ First Nations</b>		<b>Latinx</b>		<b>Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific American</b>		<b>African/African American</b>		<b>Animals/Other</b>		<b>White</b>	

Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen  
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The CCBC inventory includes 3,134 books published in 2018. This graphic would not have been possible without the statistics compiled by the CCBC, and the review and feedback we received from Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Horning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner. Many thanks.





## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
Introduction.....	3
Welcome and Opening Remarks.....	3
“How We Got Here” .....	3
“The Education of Our Youth”.....	4
Issues and Solutions.....	5
“How Anti-Indoctrination Leads to Indoctrination”.....	5
“Information and Enlightenment: The Role of the Library in a Free and Inclusive Society”.....	5
“Windows and Mirrors: ALL Michigan Students Should see Themselves and Others through the Curriculum” .....	6
Student Voices: “Why Curricular Inclusion is Important for Us” .....	6
Keynote Presentations.....	7
“Diversity in America: Teaching Students to Know, To Care, and To Act in Global Times” .....	7
“Multicultural Education as a Solution to Transforming Educational Practices and Ensuring Equity”.....	8
Superintendents’ Perspectives.....	8
“Leading for Equity” .....	9
“Public Education in a Diverse Society” .....	9
The Summit Process .....	9
Next Steps on Curricular Inclusion.....	11
Selected Bibliography.....	15
Appendix A: List of Participants.....	17
Appendix B: NSAJ Incorporators.....	19



## Executive Summary

The purposes of the statewide summit *The Power of Multicultural Education* were three-fold: 1) Introduce the North Star Alliance for Justice as a statewide, multiethnic organization promoting an inclusive, equitable, and socially just Michigan; 2) Promote understanding and the importance of multicultural education in student achievement; and 3) Develop next steps in the development of multicultural education throughout public education in Michigan. Multicultural education improves public education curricula by including throughout the schooling process the histories, accomplishments, and perspectives of different populations in the country. The view is that inclusion gives voice, promotes a sense of belonging, and a sense of purpose to all students.

The Summit included several speakers who spoke on issues of indoctrination and academic freedom in a period of book banning, the role of the library in an open society, initiatives by the Michigan Department of Education in supporting multicultural learning experiences, students' experiences in contexts of standardized rather than multicultural education, and words of wisdom by two superintendents in Michigan. Participants heard keynote presentations by Drs. James Banks and Frances Contreras, both leading experts in multicultural education. Their message was clear: multicultural education enhances academic achievement among students, promotes democratic and civic values in students, and enables them “to know, to care, and to act” as global American citizens.

A key study mentioned at the Summit was that by Bonilla, Dee and Banner (2021) which showed that 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in San Francisco who took an ethnic studies course had higher attendance, higher graduation, and increased enrollment rates in college than did matched students who did not take the course.

Like the series of Black-Brown Dialogues Summits, afternoon activities included roundtable discussions on the key issues of the Summit's theme, general plenary reports by table speakers, and a discussion on next steps. Key issues included parent and family engagement, development of a vision for multicultural education in Michigan, integration of multicultural education in the curriculum, and ways by which a collaborative initiative can be built that promotes multicultural education at local and statewide levels. Specific recommendations were made for each of these issue areas with emphases on working with parents, school boards, superintendents, and community leaders.

In sum, multicultural education contributes to more inclusive school and classroom environments that build self-esteem and promote a sense of belonging among students, contribute to critical thinking, enhance understanding of diverse cultures, histories, and traditions, and promote democratic and civic values in students.



## Introduction

This report presents a summary of the proceedings of the *Power of Multicultural Education Summit* hosted by the Julian Samora Research Institute (JSRI) at Michigan State University on June 3, 2022. The summit brought together stakeholders from across the state in a daylong dialogue on the importance of multicultural education in the pursuit of a more equitable and inclusive Michigan. The Summit was co-sponsored by the North Star Alliance for Justice (NSAJ) and MI ALMA, with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

NSAJ, formed in 2021, is a collaborative of organizations and individuals committed to the pursuit of freedom, prosperity and social justice for all communities which historically have been negatively impacted by the policies and practices of dominant power groups. It advocates targeted measures to make Michigan a more inclusive, equitable, and socially just state. Working collaboratively with all who are interested in this vision for Michigan, the peoples of Michigan could wield significant policy influence, amplify concerns for communities, act as a clearing-house for data and policy changes, connect different marginalized groups, and engage constructively with policymakers. Its aims overlap with those of MI ALMA, which co-sponsored this and the previous three Black-Brown Dialogues Summits hosted by JSRI.

Today, communities of color are under attack and structurally induced divisions among ethno-racial groups continue to hinder community and societal progress. The idea of establishing NSAJ emerged from the three statewide Black-Brown Dialogues Summits that identified key challenges facing these populations in Michigan, steps for addressing those challenges, and organizational approaches for moving forward. Attendees included community leaders, academic faculty, education leaders, and students. A task force engaged volunteers in developing a framework for moving the knowledge gained from the summits into an actionable plan (the links to the previous summit reports are here: [Summit One](#), [Summit Two](#), and [Summit Three](#)). In particular, summit participants emphasized the importance of networking and intergroup collaboration for those committed to inclusion, equity, and social justice.

NSAJ is an innovative, high-impact 501(c) (3) organization focused on achieving a non-racial order through systems changes and policy advocacy. Through information sharing and community networking among ethno-racial minority and progressive-focused nonprofit organizations and allies in Michigan, NSAJ works to shape public discourse and influence policy at institutional and state levels. Moreover, it utilizes data to assess the status of communities to inform the public and nonprofit organizations engaged in racial/equity work. In particular, NSAJ promotes awareness of ethno-racial minority group and working-class commonalities in their histories and experiences as a means of achieving forward-looking collaborative alliances in civic engagement and advocacy in pursuit of an inclusive and equitable Michigan.

## Welcome and Opening Remarks

### “How We Got Here”

Dr. Rubén Martínez, NSAJ Board Member and former Director of JSRI, welcomed participants and provided introductory remarks. He provided an overview of the three summits in the Black/Brown Dialogues series and pointed out that education was identified by participants as the top-ranked issue facing ethno-racial minority communities. He then introduced the following

objectives for the Multicultural Education Summit: 1) deepening knowledge of educational issues and multicultural education, and 2) designing steps by locality to work with school districts in the transformation of curricula. He identified as a basic premise of the summit that “These are our cities, our state, and our country too!” Historically, governments and institutions have not worked for all populations. This is evidenced by such outcomes as increased income inequality, deteriorating infrastructures, and declining K-12 education in Michigan. Focusing on education, Dr. Martinez presented data that showed wide gaps in student achievement and sharp inequities along lines of race and ethnicity.

He then defined multicultural education and explained why it matters. According to the Glossary of Education Reform, “Multicultural education refers to any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds.” The main benefit of this approach is that it encourages open-mindedness among members of different groups of people and dispels negative stereotypes. He elucidated a core perspective for those invested in promoting multicultural education, arguing that the future of the nation is bound up with the future of all population groups, including Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, Asians Americans, Arabs, and others, whose lives are tightly woven together. The demographics of the nation’s population is changing, with White Americans experiencing natural decrease. However, while the population may change, the future of American Democracy need not fade—required is an educated and informed citizenry. Democracy does not belong to one group, he noted; it is a political idea that belongs to all members of the U.S. and other nations. Diverse populations believe in and defend the values and principles of a representative democracy by promoting civic and political engagement.

### **“The Education of Our Youth”**

Carlton Evans, Chair of NSAJ, spoke on the necessity of multicultural education in the struggle to achieve educational equity for Michigan’s students of color. Evans pointed to inequities faced by students of color, as well as students marginalized by factors such as socioeconomic status, ability, and immigration status. For instance, while dropout rates have decreased in recent years, dropout rates remain disproportionate for students of color and other marginalized groups. He further noted that these students are more likely to have fallen behind during the pandemic and less likely than students in well-funded districts to receive the social and mental health support necessary to help them recover from emotional distress caused by the pandemic and distance learning.

Evans then moved on to define equity and discuss how it can be achieved. He argued that achieving systemic equity requires mindfulness in centering racism and identifying and addressing power and privilege and bias-based beliefs. The definition of equity he provided was developed by the Lansing School District’s Equity Team, which includes members of NSAJ. It states, “Equity is the removal of systemic barriers and the creation of policies, practices, and cultures that achieve fairness, justice and liberation for marginalized students, families, community members and educators in our educational system.” He argued that changes in policy and practice are necessary to achieve equity. This includes making multicultural education a standard component of K-12 education and ensuring that teachers are able and willing to teach within a multicultural paradigm. It also requires equity in resource allocation between wealthy and poor

districts, including increased wages for teachers and support staff to address staffing shortages. Evans stressed that key to achieving these objectives is parent and community organizing at the local level.

## Issues and Solutions

### “How Anti-Indoctrination Leads to Indoctrination”

Dr. Rubén Martínez then addressed the current right-wing backlash against progressive political thought which constitutes a moral panic over the supposed “indoctrination” of our youth. He defined indoctrination as “the process of teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs uncritically.” Among Republican voters and elected officials, as well as neoliberal economists and business leaders, there is widespread concern that schools and universities are indoctrinating students with ideas about communism, socialism, racism, sexism, LGBTQ identities, and more. Historically, such panics have resulted in the censorship of public education, as when during the Civil War the southern states prohibited texts critical of slavery, when conservatives banned the teaching of evolution in the years following WWI, and in a wave of book banning that began in the 1980s and continues into the present. Importantly, the recent surge in book banning has led many school libraries to self-censor by removing books on controversial topics. By February 2022, he noted, 36 states had restricted education on racism, bias, ethno-racial minority histories, and criticism of free enterprise. While proponents of these restrictions claim that they promote individual freedom, Dr. Martínez quoted a revealing statement by Kentucky State Senator Max Wise: “Rather than instructing our students on how to think, let’s guide them on what to think and to think about.” This view is hardly one that promotes individual freedom.

As Wise’s statement suggests, Dr. Martínez rightly argued that today’s “anti-indoctrination” movement actually promotes indoctrination. It does so through erasure of the histories, processes, and modes of group domination, narrowing of the curriculum, elimination of critical thinking, elimination of academic freedom and the freedom to learn, and promoting anti-social-justice thinking and political authoritarianism. He then argued that multicultural education is the opposite of indoctrination. Whereas the conservative anti-indoctrination movement takes a negative approach by specifying what cannot be taught, multicultural education takes a positive approach that promotes the freedom to teach and to learn. The anti-indoctrination movement is restrictive, as it narrows the curriculum, bans books, and limits freedom to teach and to learn, while multicultural education is expansive, as it brings excluded areas of knowledge back into the curriculum. Finally, while the anti-indoctrination movement tells us what to accept as truth uncritically—in other words, indoctrinates—multicultural education promotes critical thinking, intellectual growth, and academic freedom.

### “Information and Enlightenment: The Role of the Library in a Free and Inclusive Society”

The first guest speaker of the day, Dr. Joseph A. Salem Jr., Dean of the MSU Libraries at the time, focused his remarks on the role of libraries in a free and inclusive society by highlighting several key points from the American Library Association’s (ALA) *Library Bill of Rights*. Dr. Salem pointed out that libraries should provide materials and resources for the “interest, information, and **enlightenment of all people** of the community the library serves,” regardless of the backgrounds or views of their creators. Relatedly, “Libraries should provide materials and information **presenting all points of view** on current and historical issues,” and should challenge censorship in their efforts to fulfill these two points. Dr. Salem then discussed the “Core Values of Librarianship” as outlined by the ALA. Among these are access, privacy and confidentiality, democracy, diversity, education and lifelong learning, social responsibility, and sustainability.



Dr. Salem noted that these values put libraries in direct conflict with attempts to ban, censor, or otherwise keep students from reading what they wish to or teachers from assigning what they feel is best for the education of students. Such attempts, he said, are anathema to multicultural education. He then presented a pie chart of the sources of challenges to library materials, with 39% of challenges coming from parents. He noted that many parents take their talking points directly from political or religious groups (which together account for another 10% of challenges). He stated plainly that many of these challenges are racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic in nature. Predictably, 82% of challenges are directed toward books, but challenges are also directed toward library programming, displays and exhibits, and other audio/visual and online resources. The majority of attempts to ban or censor materials occur in schools, with 44% directed toward school libraries and another 18% toward schools more generally. Another 37% are directed toward public libraries.

### **“Windows and Mirrors: ALL Michigan Students Should see Themselves and Others through the Curriculum”**

Dr. Corinne Edwards, Director of the Office of Education Supports at the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), and Scott Koenig, Social Studies Consultant, addressed efforts the Department is making to promote and support multicultural learning experiences for Michigan students. She began with the Guiding Principles of MDE’s Strategic Education Plan which hold, in part, that 1) “ALL students have access to high-quality instruction regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, economic status, native language, or physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities to close the student achievement and opportunity gaps that currently exist;” that 2) “ALL students are encouraged to express their creativity, have a voice in their own learning, feel connected to their schools, and have authentic, meaningful relationships with educators;” and 3) that “ALL students are provided every opportunity to achieve the broadest range of life dreams.”

Dr. Edwards then discussed other MDE initiatives including the “Diversity in the Literature” initiative, the “Teaching of Comprehensive History Instruction” initiative, and the Superintendent’s Student Advisory Council to Empower Student Voice. The Diversity in the Literature initiative looks to address representational inequities in children’s literature to let all Michigan students feel valued and supported in the curriculum, and since 2021, MDE has held multiple events in support of this initiative. Mr. Koenig then took up the topic of teaching comprehensive history. He highlighted an August 2021 meeting of the Michigan State Board of Education where State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice stated, “To choose to ignore race and racism in our teaching is to efface or erase history, implicitly or explicitly, and to shortchange our children, who deserve to learn the full breadth and complexity of our extraordinary history.” Dr. Rice continued, “Race and racism may be inconvenient for some, uncomfortable for others, and searing for still others, but, because they are inextricably a part of our history, they must be taught.” Finally, Dr. Edwards discussed Supt. Rice’s Student Voice initiative in which he invited local school district and public school academy leaders to nominate students to participate on a group that became the MDE Anti-Racism Student Advisory Council. Two groups, made up of middle school students and high school/college students, met monthly with Dr. Rice and others from MDE to garner student voice as a mechanism to empower students in their own communities.

### **Student Voices: “Why Curricular Inclusion is Important for Us”**

Mark Fancher, NSAJ board member, led a discussion with two students regarding their educational experiences in relation to whether or not their ethnic group was included in the cur-

riculum. Mr. Fancher’s opening remarks focused on the history of territorial theft from Native Americans, genocidal measures against them, the institution of slavery, the conquest of northern Mexico, and other forms of domination and oppression. He noted the importance of students knowing the history of their peoples and how they aspire to greater heights when they learn the achievements of their ancestors. This knowledge, he pointed out, prevents the ignorance that pervades the racial hierarchies that shape student relations.

Devin Carter, a graduating high school student, and Jennifer Padilla, a graduating college student, were on the panel and responded to prompts by Mr. Fancher. Devin spoke of the inclusion of Black history in high school but did not think that it was enough. She stated that she and other students found it difficult to relate to the classwork and at times felt like they did not belong in some of the classes. Greater inclusion of Black history in the curriculum since kindergarten would have made her and other students like her feel recognized and would have promoted more involvement in their classes. She also stated that having more school personnel from her group would have provided her more opportunities to connect with the school by just knowing there were people she could go to when she had concerns. She noted that students in the main respect each other but that White students did not understand the lives of Black students, especially how the “n-word” affects them. She noted that she had seen instances where White students harassed students of color as well as instances of microaggressions and “casual racism” such as touching the hair of Black students.

Jennifer, who is from a farmworker family, expressed concern about not having more students from her group and how it made her feel out of place. As a young student she had the opportunity to attend a bilingual school, but eventually it was closed down. Being one of few Latinas at her high school made her feel out of place. She noted that she did not have access to multicultural education until she attended college. As a result, she did not learn about Latino history. She stated that a multicultural environment would have contributed to her confidence level. She recounted that while on a study abroad program in London, and the only student of color in the group, she heard White students make disparaging remarks about people of color. Additionally, during her pre-college experiences she knew that others, including members of her own group, did not believe that she would succeed in college.

Both students noted that they would have benefited from multicultural education at both personal and intellectual levels.

### Keynote Presentations

#### “Diversity in America: Teaching Students to Know, To Care, and To Act in Global Times”

Dr. James A. Banks, Professor Emeritus at the University of Washington, and the leading scholar in multicultural education, delivered the first keynote address of the day. Dr. Banks focused his remarks on multicultural education as key to teaching students to become global citizens. He began by noting Paulo Freire’s directive that we must teach students to read the *word* and the *world*, meaning that we must teach students both basic knowledge and skills (the word) and to question assumptions and existing paradigms, and use knowledge to make the world more just and humane (the world). Pointing to Aihwa Ong’s idea of “flexible citizenship” and Will Kymlicka’s concept of “multicultural citizenship,” he stressed the importance of global citizenship

at a time of increased immigration where many people have multiple national commitments.

Dr. Banks then discussed the need to balance diversity and unity in democratic multicultural nation-states. He noted that unity without diversity results in cultural repression and hegemonic control by a dominant group, whereas diversity without unity leads to balkanization and the fracturing of the nation-state. He argued for the importance of keeping in mind intersectionality, which he defined as the ways in which the variables of diversity—social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, abilities and disabilities, language, racial group, and ethnic identity—intersect and interrelate, as the interactions between these variables are myriad and complex as they shape individual lives. He further pointed to the necessity of viewing an individual’s cultural, national, and global identifications as interactive rather than discrete as a way of countering forces of deculturalization. Through a multicultural education that recognizes these intersections and interactions, he argued, we can teach students to know, to care, and to act.

### **“Multicultural Education as a Solution to Transforming Educational Practices and Ensuring Equity”**

During the lunch plenary, Dr. Frances Contreras, Dean of the College of Education at the University of California, Irvine, discussed why a culturally responsive curriculum is important for students. A multicultural education, she said, acknowledges the diversity of students and our society, and incorporates the histories and voices of the rich cultures, values, traditions, and ethnicities that make U.S. society. She argued that a culturally responsive curriculum is an asset-based approach to pedagogy, as opposed to treating cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity as deficits. A 2017 study of San Francisco students who took an ethnic studies course in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade found that the course positively influenced students through graduation. These students had higher attendance, higher graduation rates and increased enrollment in college than matched students who did not take the course. Further, she held that multicultural education contributes to more inclusive school and classroom environments that build self-esteem, contribute to critical thinking, enhance understanding of diverse cultures, histories, and traditions, and promote democratic and civic values in students.

Dean Contreras then discussed the implementation of an ethnic studies curriculum in California schools. She began by noting that “ethnic studies” differs from “multicultural education” in that it is more specific with a focus on including ethno-racial minority communities and their histories, and directly addressing racism. In California, the San Francisco Unified School District added ethnic studies as a graduation requirement in March of 2021, and in October of the same year, Governor Gavin Newsome signed into law a state-wide ethnic studies requirement. The California ethnic studies model curriculum, published in March 2021 by the California Department of Education, focuses on African American, Chicano/Latino, Native American, and Asian American studies as the foundational fields, while also including lesson plans on Sikh, Jewish, Arab, and Armenian Americans. Dean Contreras noted that the policy framework in California gives school districts time to develop and implement curricular reform, and to do so in collaboration with other districts, teachers, university partners, parents, and community organizations

### **Superintendents’ Perspectives**

Superintendents Kim Carter, Battle Creek Public Schools, and Ben Shuldiner, Lansing

School District, shared their experiences, knowledge, and views on multicultural education. Both superintendents presented the view that it is important for students to see themselves in the curriculum. Educators must be able to incorporate perspectives and practices in the educational process in which students can see themselves respectfully in it.

### **“Leading for Equity”**

Superintendent Carter spoke about her experience leading for equity in Battle Creek Public Schools with support from the National Equity Project. She noted that the process began with conversations about what all students should have access to and receive the benefit of in their education. She emphasized the importance of getting away from incremental change and adopting a transformational framework. School districts need bold leaders who can speak up for all children. She pointed out that the achievement gap is really an opportunity gap, with some students not having the same opportunities to succeed as others. Multicultural education for her is about developing a sense of belonging in the schools among all students. That sense of belonging begins with students seeing themselves in the curriculum. Students should be able to see themselves in the books, the materials, and the resources of the schools. It also involves the mindsets of teachers and how they are able to know every child by name, need, and strengths. Dr. Carter emphasized that it is important for educators to leverage the needs and strengths of every individual student in the education process.

### **“Public Education in a Diverse Society”**

Superintendent Shuldiner pointed out that K-12 education systems are characterized by the “soft bigotry of low expectations.” K-12 system personnel already “know” what the child before them is capable of because the students have been tested, there is already a number associated with each of them. School systems deny the actual student, instead puts them in little boxes, and calls it a day. When you have a class-divided society and you want to keep people where they are, he stated, you keep doing the same things over and over again. Multicultural education says the dominant narrative is not right, the dominant power structure is not right, and asks “How can we create a school system that allows other voices and other people with different backgrounds to be valued?” Needed is a different lens that allows us to see the backgrounds of all students as a source of strength. Knowing languages other than English is an asset, a source of strength. Because the education system codifies the existing power structure, education needs to be re-structured to be able to value the backgrounds of all students. Instead, schools are structured as boxes with students having to go into a building, then a classroom, to sit at a desk to study a standardized curriculum that does not resonate with them. He noted that multicultural education works for students, with research studies showing that when kids go into a class where they feel respected, where they see themselves, they do well. When students do well in such a class, they tend to go on to do well in other classes.

## **The Summit Process**

Following the model set by the Black/Brown Dialogues summit series, which was designed as a dialogic process to facilitate constructive discussions among participants at the events, the final portion of the day was given to a general working session. Participants were asked to con-

vene at tables based on locality and answer four questions:

- 1) What are the initial steps that must be taken at the level of the local school district to ensure improvement in student performance outcomes?
- 2) What should be the vision for and emphasis on integrating multicultural education into the curriculum in the improvement of student performance outcomes?
- 3) How can multicultural education be integrated into the curriculum to improve student performance outcomes in your local school district?
- 4) How can the North Star Alliance for Justice support local efforts to improve student performance outcomes?

Representatives from each table then reported their answers to the plenary group. Responses are summarized thematically in this report.

*What are the initial steps that must be taken at the level of the local school district to ensure improvement in student performance outcomes?*

Responses to this prompt largely focused on needs assessment in one or more forms. One group, for instance, stated that districts should “critically examine measurements [and] tools being used,” and “create [and] use multiple ways to provide feedback of data to parents [and] communities.” This group further argued that districts need to take into consideration the circumstances and basic needs of students and “how these impact student learning [and] success.” Numerous groups emphasized the importance of parent and family engagement and the creation and maintenance of strong relationships between families and schools. One group focused on the need for more teachers of color and methods to attract and retain them. Another group advocated for principals and school leaders to take activist roles in their districts, arguing in particular that school leadership “must embrace change even if it means breaking administrative rules.”

*What should be the vision for and emphasis on integrating multicultural education into the curriculum in the improvement of student performance outcomes?*

Responses to this question emphasized tailoring a multicultural curriculum to local communities and creating supports and professional development opportunities for teachers and staff. The group from Pontiac, for instance, called for the examination of “predominant cultures present in the Pontiac school district” and “find ways to engage the students within their cultures so that they take ownership of their own learning.” Another group argued for “permanent staff development to teach [multicultural education and] to teach with love.” Other groups offered vision statements for their districts; the Kent County group, for example, offered the following: “Students at all grade levels must be provided a curriculum that includes a multicultural perspective which inspires individuals’ academic success.” Another group’s proposed vision statement reads, “Equity and multiculturalism are the fundamental principles on which ALL Michigan curricula are developed from Pre-K through K-12.”

*How can multicultural education be integrated into the curriculum to improve student performance outcomes in your local school district?*

Responses to this question varied widely. One group advocated for student exposure to



diverse mentors, teachers, and historical figures in every subject through classroom, online, and experiential learning formats. Another argued for “broader representation across multiple subjects with a multidisciplinary approach to cultural learning.” Another held that integration of multicultural education should be done through school boards, with parents learning how the district decides on its curriculum and how they can impact that decision. Finally, another group took a more radical stance, arguing that multicultural education *cannot* be integrated into the existing curriculum, but instead “requires the creation of a NEW curriculum” by a “multidisciplinary, multi-stakeholder, student-centered group.”

*How can the North Star Alliance for Justice support local efforts to improve student performance outcomes?*

The working groups offered a range of ways by which NSAJ could support local initiatives, many involving NSAJ members acting as consultants to school boards and parent and community groups or as advocates for students and families. For one group, this involved engaging local community organizations to identify their needs and desires in terms of multicultural education. Another group suggested that NSAJ serve as a communication hub to encourage local engagement, but that it should allow local activists and attendees to lead meetings. Another group suggested that NSAJ take an active role in schools through student mentorship, participation at staff, board, and district meetings, and attendance at content and curricular meetings. Finally, one group said that NSAJ should continue to convene annual summits and disseminate summit findings statewide to policymakers, parents and families, school systems, and the Michigan Department of Education.

### Next Steps on Curricular Inclusion

As the summit came to a close, participants engaged in an open discussion regarding next steps relative to supporting parents. Suggestions included:

- Provide language translations at meetings and events for parents with limited English proficiency;
- Provide food at meetings with parents;
- Convene meetings at times and locations that are convenient for parents;
- Build sustainable relationships with parents;
- Provide different ways by which parents can communicate with the schools and provide input;
- Provide childcare for young children so parents can participate in meetings; involve families (parents and students);
- Conduct focus groups and surveys with parents to garner their views regarding the education of their children;
- Build relationships with principals and collaborate with them on promoting parent involvement;

- Clarify for parents the processes on obtaining scholarships for their students;
- Invite parents to set agendas for meetings; avoid top-down approaches;
- Promote education during community cultural events;
- Host events like “neighborhood movie nights” with short agendas (in this case multicultural education);
- Encourage parents to take leadership roles on certain issues regarding the schools;
- Support parents with research results to empower them;
- Meet parents where they are at; contact them by phone; and provide continuous support;
- Use social media to provide information for parents to access without having to leave their homes; address questions;
- Organize events where parents are the people who know and can share their culture with the community;
- Implement programs that engage parents and students together, such as pathways to college programs.

Following this discussion, Dr. Martinez posed some questions for participants to consider:

- Who is helping teachers develop teaching skills and how are parents involved?
- What are the effects of the teacher development programs that are available?
- How can we work at both the local and state levels to address policies?
- How do we work with superintendents, knowing that requests must be specific?
- How can we utilize the programs that PBS makes available to communities?
- Can we have WKAR and other PBS sites conduct interviews relevant to our communities regarding education, as well as programming focused on the information needs of parents?

Carlton Evans provided closing remarks on behalf of NSAJ. He noted that our society has become increasingly dysfunctional and our schools reflect the dysfunctions, with violence and racism too prevalent in the schools. “We must do better for our society to thrive and flourish. We must put pressure on our institutions and our politicians to do better.” Students in Lansing and Michigan are falling behind the U.S. average.

Mr. Evans reviewed the mission of The North Star Alliance for Justice, pointing out that it was an outgrowth of the Black-Brown Dialogues Summits, where education was identified as the top priority, and why it is also the Alliance’s top priority. NSAJ will organize parents, will build relationships with local school boards and superintendents, and will focus at this time on Lansing. He invited participants to join NSAJ, invited their support and leadership, and concluded with the statement that “Together we can achieve what we cannot achieve as separate individuals.”



Dr. Martinez closed by noting that a summit is not a conference, it involves applying at the local level what was learned during the day, especially building networks with local organizations, including education leaders, foundations, non-profit organizations, businesses, and families. Ongoing assaults on communities of color demand that communities stand up in this historical moment and not allow regressive forces to take control of public institutions. It is important that mindless consumerism not continue as the major means of social control, keeping in mind that complacency sustains subordination. The aim is to work together to build local multicultural education models that can be implemented in other communities.



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## Appendix A: List of Participants

Paul Babladelis	Eunice Foster	Joseph Salem
James Banks	Mariza Gamez-Garcia	Henry Sanchez
Norma Bauer	Summer Godette	Tony F. Shepherd
Danaina Bernard	Lupita Guadalupe-Gutierrez	Patti Sholler-Barber
Jacquelynne Borden-Conyers	Nabih Haddad	Benjamin Shuldiner
Lillian Brooks	Diana Hernández	Marcelo Siles
Siddharta Camargo	Lee June	Valerie Smith
Devin Carter	Jean Kayitsinga	Jesús Solis
Kimberly Carter	Scott Koenig	Adnoris “Bo” Torres
Frances Conteras	Anthony Lewis	Liliana Torres
Don Cooney	Dolores Lopez	Sonia Trevino
Richard Davila	Erica Lopez Negrete	Roxanne Truhn
Erika Driver	Viki Lorraine	Filiberto Villa-Gomez
Helen Driver	Yoshira Macías Mejía	Francisco Villarruel
Corinn Edwards	Clara Martinez	Alison Vincent
Patricia Edwards	Rubén Martinez	Sheryl Weir
Maite Elizondo	Jennifer Padilla	William Weir
Carlton Evans	Stephanie Perez	
Nicole Evans	Robin Pizzo	
Mark Fancher	Saturnino Rodriguez	



## Appendix B: NSAJ Incorporators

Carlton Evans

Richard Davila

Mark Fancher

Nabih Haddad

Joy Hannibal

Tedda Hughes

Rubén Martinez

Marvin McKinney

Donald Weatherspoon

Asa Zuccaro





## Notes



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**“Multicultural education contributes to more inclusive school and classroom environments that build self-esteem, contribute to critical thinking, enhance understanding of diverse cultures, histories, and traditions, and promote democratic and civic values in students.”**

**-Dean Frances Contreras**

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