

LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

 ISSUE 01 | FALL 2021 | [LEARNINGFORJUSTICE.ORG](https://learningforjustice.org)



the **Curb-cut Effect**

CURB CUTS MARKED A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN DISABILITY ACTIVISM, BUT THE EFFECTS WERE BROADER. CENTERING THOSE MOST UNDERSERVED CAN HAVE WIDESPREAD BENEFITS—INCLUDING IN EDUCATION.

the
Forgotten
Slavery
of our Ancestors

A LEARNING FOR JUSTICE FILM

The enslavement of Indigenous peoples predated and shaped the enslavement of Africans on land that is now the United States, stretching across the continent and through the 19th century. Use this new film to introduce students to what historian Andrés Bésendez calls “our shared history.”

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LEARNINGFORJUSTICE.ORG/FORGOTTENSLAVERY

RECOMMENDED
FOR GRADES

6-12



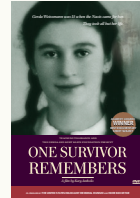


**BRING SOCIAL JUSTICE
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SELMA: THE BRIDGE TO THE BALLOT

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Grades 6-12



ONE SURVIVOR REMEMBERS

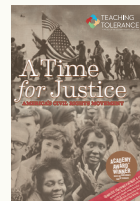
Gerda Weissmann Klein's account of surviving the Holocaust encourages thoughtful classroom discussion about a difficult-to-teach topic.
Grades 6-12

STREAMING ONLINE



VIVA LA CAUSA

An introduction to lessons about struggles for workers' rights—both past and present.
Grades 6-12



A TIME FOR JUSTICE

Follow the civil rights movement from Emmett Till to the passing of the Voting Rights Act.
Grades 6-12



MIGHTY TIMES

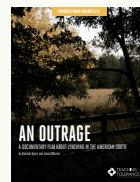
THE CHILDREN'S MARCH

The heroic story of the young people in Birmingham, Alabama, who brought segregation to its knees.
Grades 6-12



**BULLIED
A STUDENT, A SCHOOL AND
A CASE THAT MADE HISTORY**

One student's ordeal at the hands of anti-gay bullies culminates in a message of hope.
Grades 6-12



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All kits include film and viewer's guide.

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LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

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on the cover

Targeting solutions to those most underserved can have broader benefits. This applies to schools, too.

ILLUSTRATION BY **DOLA SUN**



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LEARNING FOR JUSTICE

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DIRECTOR Jalaya Liles Dunn
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING Hoyt J. Phillips III
MANAGING EDITOR Monita K. Bell

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Crystal L. Keels
SENIOR WRITERS Cory Collins, Coshandra Dillard
MARKETING COORDINATOR Lindsey Shelton
NEW MEDIA ASSOCIATE Colin Campbell
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Anya Malley

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER Sarah-SoonLing Blackburn
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FACILITATORS Kimberly Burkhalter, Courtney Wai
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SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMING AND GRANTS MANAGER Jay Ehrenhalt

PROGRAM COORDINATOR Steffany Moyer

INTERIM CREATIVE DIRECTOR Scott Phillips
SENIOR CREATIVE LEADS Michelle Leland, Kristina Turner
DESIGNERS Shannon Anderson, Hillary Andrews, Cierra Brinson, Sunny Paulk, Jacob Saylor, Alex Trott, Claudia Whitaker
DESIGN ASSOCIATE Angela Greer

PRODUCTION
PURCHASING PRODUCTION COORDINATOR Kimberly James

CONTRIBUTORS
Taylor Callery, Eleanor Davitt, Julia Delacroix, Eley, Julie Feng, Gene Lester, Anne Hamersky, Peter and Maria Hoey, Jamilah A. Hud-Kirk, Sena Kwon, Jianan Liu, Kristle Marshall, Simone Martin-Newberry, Karsten Moran, Chanelle Nibbelink, Christina Noyes, Cha Pornea, Nadia Moshtagh Razi, Marvin Reed, Mia Saine, Ana Sebastián, Tanya Shyika, Dena Simmons, Jordan Strauss, Dola Sun, Skye Tooley, Kailey Whitman, Kaia M. Woodford

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EDITORIAL OFFICE 400 Washington Avenue, Montgomery, AL 36104
EMAIL lfjeditor@splcenter.org **SUBSCRIPTIONS** learningforjustice.org/magazine/subscribe

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THE MISSION OF LEARNING FOR JUSTICE IS TO HELP TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS EDUCATE CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN A DIVERSE DEMOCRACY.



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Perspectives

“There is never time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now.”

—JAMES BALDWIN



THIS INAUGURAL ISSUE of *Learning for Justice* magazine could not have come at a more critical moment. Together we are witnessing an unprecedented paradox of time. It’s a time of poignancy, great promise and hope. But it’s also a time of pain and sorrow stemming from a global pandemic that exacerbated economic and racial injustices. We recognize the reported and unreported state-sanctioned police violence against Black lives and the increase in hate crimes against members of the Asian American community. We also bear witness to the rapid upspring of laws and policies set forth to undermine the voting rights of Black and Brown people and those experiencing pov-

erty, to eliminate the gender rights of our students and the right for all students to have an inclusive, honest and meaningful learning experience.

Despite the poignancy of this time, the urgency of now also calls for hope and promise—and action. Educators, students, their families and communities are joining together to demand truth-telling in schools and to counter decisions that censor dialogue around race and injustice in the classroom. People are applying collective pressure to ensure enforcement of the law through *Plyler v. Doe*, affirming undocumented children’s rights to enroll and participate fully in public schools. All over the nation, people are working together for a stronger democracy. These actions are necessary.

How we respond to this urgent moment will determine how we shape the meaning of justice. This time requires a unified base of advocates committed to a multiracial, multiethnic democracy. We’ve collectively learned lessons from this past year—and much longer. Following them will

get us closer to the world we hope for ourselves and for the generations to come. I am proud that this first issue of *Learning for Justice* magazine speaks to these lessons. As you flip through this issue, I hope you will internalize the call to learn from these lessons and advance justice in your school community.

Lesson one: We can’t return to our schools, classrooms, workplaces or community spaces and get back to business as usual. The lens of justice must be refocused. As LiberatED founder Dena Simmons explains in her interview with LFJ Associate Editor Crystal L. Keels, “Much of what we were doing before was because it was convenient and what we knew. However, there’s a tension between equity and efficiency. We need to be doing the work of equity, which takes time. It’s a process, but we have not yet invested in it.”

Lesson two: Our schools can’t exist isolated from the communities they are

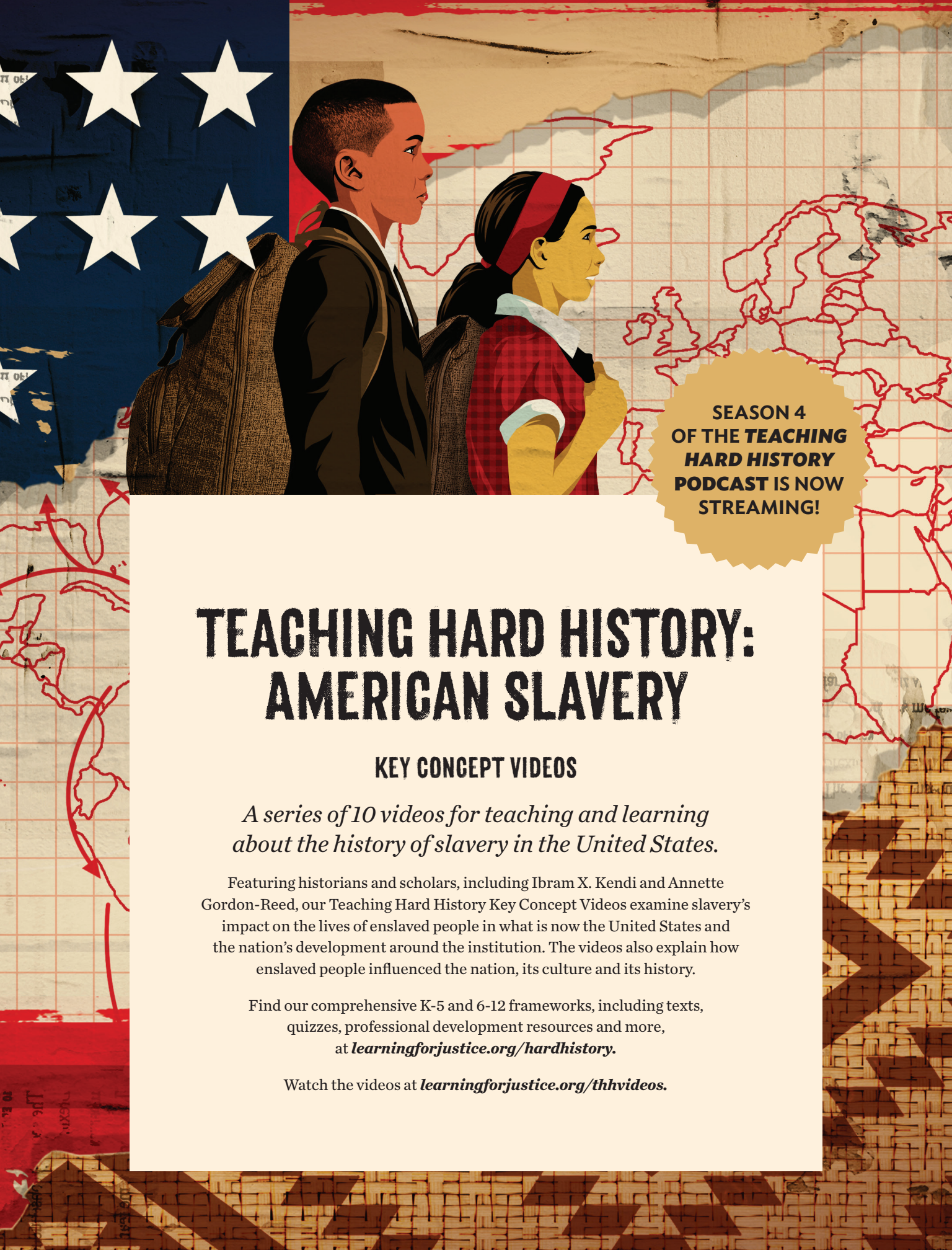
placed in. LFJ Senior Writer Coshandra Dillard makes this clear in “Envisioning School Safety Without Police.” People in several U.S. communities, from parents and former students to members of grassroots organizations and intergenerational initiatives, explain why those most affected by school police presence must have a say in what safety and justice mean in their contexts.

Lesson three: This is our shared time in history to forge the arena for a multiracial, multiethnic democracy. The ways in which disinformation and misinformation have jeopardized this arena, especially online, are critical fights of this time. LFJ Senior Writer Cory Collins spells out the stakes of this fight in “Reimagining Digital Literacy Education to Save Ourselves.” And in “We Can Create Change Together,” LFJ Professional Development Manager Sarah-SoonLing Blackburn argues for the importance of remembering and teaching about multiracial solidarity: so that young people see that they have the power—and great examples—to enact justice in community with one another.

Each story in this issue attests that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

This school year, let us all commit to working in solidarity to champion the needs of our children, first and foremost. And let’s allow our shared lessons to inform and inspire us to keep moving forward for a more just and equitable education for all young people.

—Jalaya Liles Dunn,
Learning for Justice Director



**SEASON 4
OF THE TEACHING
HARD HISTORY
PODCAST IS NOW
STREAMING!**

TEACHING HARD HISTORY: AMERICAN SLAVERY

KEY CONCEPT VIDEOS

*A series of 10 videos for teaching and learning
about the history of slavery in the United States.*

Featuring historians and scholars, including Ibram X. Kendi and Annette Gordon-Reed, our Teaching Hard History Key Concept Videos examine slavery's impact on the lives of enslaved people in what is now the United States and the nation's development around the institution. The videos also explain how enslaved people influenced the nation, its culture and its history.

Find our comprehensive K-5 and 6-12 frameworks, including texts, quizzes, professional development resources and more,
at learningforjustice.org/hardhistory.

Watch the videos at learningforjustice.org/thhvideos.

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ILLUSTRATION BY DOLA SUN

Learning for Justice depends on your support and critical feedback to improve our work. We love hearing from you! Please let us know what you think by emailing lfjeditor@splcenter.org or reaching out via Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

OUR NEW NAME

So glad to see this name change! While I've always loved this organization's resources, the idea of merely "tolerating" diversity never sat right with me. This new name is a much better reflection of the organization's mission.

—@CMONIQUE1023
VIA TWITTER

This shift says everything.
🔥 #ToleranceNoMore
#ThePowerofLanguage
@tolerance_org @
learnforjustice

—@JULIAFLISS
VIA TWITTER

Reader Reactions

In our Spring 2021 issue on white supremacy in education, Natalie Odom Pough looked at dismantling white supremacy in teacher preparation programs. Read her story "A Flaw in the Foundation" at lfj.pub/flip.

To break down barriers and promote equity for all students, we have to take a hard look at the inequitable systems we unintentionally uphold. Change starts within ourselves! #MSGC

— @SCUTLER_SU
VIA TWITTER

This article does a great job of addressing an issue that is often ignored: teacher preparation [programs] have historically been breeding grounds for a lot of the social inequities in schools. There is no coherent structure in the US for teacher education.

—@SELENACARRION
VIA TWITTER

I am so glad you changed the name. It shows growth and insight that you sought to do so and recognized the inadequacy of the former name despite the fantastic work you were doing. Bravo!

—SHAWNDW1026
VIA LEARNING FOR JUSTICE
MAGAZINE ONLINE

SPRING 2021 MAGAZINE ISSUE: WHITE SUPREMACY IN EDUCATION

I read this entire issue in one night. Couldn't put it down. So many thought provoking articles and I love the name change

@learnforjustice I highly recommend this reading to all in education. We have a lot of important work to do.

—@MRS_MOITOZA
VIA TWITTER

BLACK MALE EDUCATORS CREATE SPACE FOR JOY

This was a really helpful read, thank you for pointing out that our schools need more Black male educators for the right reasons. It's not just about diversifying for diversity sake! So much truth packed into this article!

—KWISMER
VIA LEARNING FOR JUSTICE
MAGAZINE ONLINE



ABOUT DR. SEUSS...

I was so thankful to find this post of yours and this article because somehow I'd missed all of this discussion/controversy. I appreciate the tone and clarity of this article, specific examples of themes discussed, early work of his, etc.

— SHANNELL SEDGWICK
VIA FACEBOOK

My God! Let kids be kids... let kids enjoy the literature that was intended to make them laugh and smile. It is absolutely disgusting the way these groups are impacting a child's experience in school... censorship is wrong, there are more necessary and valid concerns affecting school.

—@MERMAIDNJ918
VIA TWITTER

LFJ ONLINE ARTICLE: PRESENTLY INVISIBLE

Until today, I didn't know about #ArabAmerican HeritageMonth. As an equity advocate, I continue to learn and share with hopes to create racially inclusive and equitable learning environments. #InformInspireInfluence #ALLmeansALL #TheWorkContinues #EquityAdvocate

—@PSLOANJOSEPH
VIA TWITTER

TEACH STUDENTS TO SPEAK UP AGAINST HATE AND BIAS!

We love and use these "Speak Up at School" printable guidelines from @learnforjustice. They empower students and adults to be better equipped to take antiracist actions.

—@RJMAMA
VIA TWITTER

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND STEM: MATHEMATICS IN CONTEXT

Such a beautiful interweaving ... [of] personal stories, professional responsibilities, and a vision for the mathematics community. Thank you for sharing.

—@BURTON114
VIA TWITTER

This [toolkit] is a great resource that I can't wait to use with my students.

—@ZDEARAUJO
VIA TWITTER

STOP USING "BIPOC"

I am a huge fan and supporter of your work. I always have been. I have to say though I am very frustrated that you are using the term BIPOC. I am not BIPOC. The term Black Indigenous People of Color for one is like a double positive in the sense that both groups are already considered "People of Color." Furthermore, Black and native peoples don't have enough in common to be grouped together in this way. ... Please do not succumb to the new flavor of the month with this term. It is disrespectful to the experiences of both groups who deserve their specific attention to their struggles.

—DR. OMEKONGO DIBINGA
VIA EMAIL

Editor's note: We are so grateful for this feedback and will take it to heart as we continue to use the most inclusive language we can. We have

retained the term in this issue in interviews and in referencing resources that use it.

ON "WE WON'T WEAR THE NAME"

Students are far ahead of adults. #leadership! 🙌

—@CBYERSCHRISTINA
VIA TWITTER

ON "AFTER ATLANTA: TEACHING ABOUT ASIAN AMERICAN IDENTITY AND HISTORY"

This was wonderful. And to have written it today, so soon after. Liz, you are a gift. Sending all the love and appreciation your way.

—@HOPEJRC
VIA TWITTER

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

Have an opinion about something you see in *Learning for Justice* magazine or on our website? Email us at lfjeditor@spicenter.org with the subject line "Letter to the Editor." Or mail a letter to 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104.



Wow!!! I love ["Min Jee's Lunch"] so much!! My mom used to pack me home-made bean burritos and I was ashamed because the kids would always say something. I wish this ... was around when I was a child ❤️

—@COUNSELOR_MRSMARIN

Ask Learning for Justice



Q: Why did you change your name?

Editor's Note: While some in our community may be already aware of our new name, we wanted to share with all our readers why we've changed from Teaching Tolerance to Learning for Justice.

Thirty years ago, Teaching Tolerance was founded by the Southern Poverty Law Center with a specific goal: eradicating hate by fighting intolerance in schools.

Celebrating diversity was key then. Knowing the difference one teacher could make, we offered resources for creating classrooms where all children could thrive.

Yet, even we have admitted that “tolerance” wasn’t enough. We justified our name by applying the term broadly, saying

no single word captured the range of solutions needed to create an equal society. We’re proud of the work we’ve done. But our approach and work have evolved. So have our goals.

Justice is the heart of what we want for our young people and for society at large.

We’ve expanded our focus. Our Social Justice Standards bolstered our celebration of identity and diversity with attention to questions of justice and strategies for student and collective action.

We now work with a community of classroom teachers, administrators, counselors, librarians, support staff, teacher educators and more. We’re making moves to start working with caregivers and communities, too.

We also know that the health of our society largely depends on the state of things in the South where, along with the rest of the Southern Poverty Law Center, we are becoming more deliberate about our work.

With blatant white supremacy and ongoing racial injustice on display, we’re fighting harder for real democracy and justice.

We’re building on the work we do alongside educators teaching the hard history of American slavery; promoting policies that ensure queer students are safe on campus; and navigating critical conversations with young people about race, gender and class. We’re advocating for sanctuary schools where students and their families needn’t fear

deportation. We’re offering guidance to interrupt a school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately affects Black, Latinx and Indigenous students and their communities.

In essence, tolerance is neither justice nor a sufficient description of the work we do or the world we want.

With our new name, we were thinking of how best to make the changes we want to see in schools. We’re shifting from “teaching” to “learning” as we recognize that we don’t have all the answers.

We are learning alongside you to work for changes that students, families, educators and districts need to make schools places where all students thrive. We are in this work together to honor this truth: Learning from—and with—one another is the first step to making justice real.

We’re grateful for our community that has supported, encouraged and pushed us to find a name that better reflects what we do.

We hope you’re as excited as we are about our new name and the incredible work we’ll do as we continue learning for justice together.

ASK LEARNING FOR JUSTICE!

Need the kind of advice and expertise only Learning for Justice can provide? Email us at lfjeditor@splcenter.org with “Ask LFJ” in the subject line.



ARTICLE 4.8.21 // GENDER & SEXUAL IDENTITY, RIGHTS & ACTIVISM

Talking With Students About Transgender Athletes

BY SKYE TOOLEY

Currently, there are over 80 anti-transgender bills that are being proposed across the United States. These bills target trans youth participation in sports and their access to gender-affirming health care. They reinforce stereotypes around transgender athletes, including student athletes, painting their gender identity as “other” or something that needs to be contained.

Even before these anti-trans bills, trans youth were under attack. According to the ACLU, when their school community recognized them as trans, more than 2 in 10 girls with trans experience were harassed and bullied to the point that they had to leave school. Another 1 in 10 was actually kicked out of school. More than half of transgender and gender non-conforming youth have considered suicide, according to the Trevor Project, and 40% of transgender and nonbinary youth reported being physically threatened.

Our trans youth are being threatened on a daily basis—and now, they are being threatened by state lawmakers. By discussing and celebrating trans athletes in our classrooms, we can begin to dispel these stereotypes and myths around transgender folk.

And a reader replied...

Fellow educators, please do not stay silent. Ideas for how to discuss gender identity and highlight trans athletes in your classroom here.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE:

ifj.pub/transgender-athletes

ARTICLE SPOTLIGHT

Search for these headlines at learningforjustice.org.



It Has Stayed With Me
BY COSHANDRA DILLARD



Queer People Have Always Existed—Teach Like It
BY CORY COLLINS



Use the Tools of Science to Recognize Inequity in Science
BY SHINAE PARK AND MOSES RIFKIN



Supporting Arab American Students in the Classroom
BY DR. RANIA SAEB



In the 2017-18 school year, sworn law enforcement officers with firearms were present at least once a week in 46.7% of all public schools. —NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Why I Teach



Marvin Reed teaches third grade at Rosa Parks Elementary School (Berkeley Unified School District) in the Bay Area.

The Moments Students Remember

I will never forget the last words I said to my class of third graders in the spring of 2020, at the start of the pandemic. The school had received notice that we would follow stay-at-home orders. My class was getting ready to leave. Students grabbed their backpacks and waited for the bell to ring. Once it rang, I said, “I’ll see you in two weeks. Please be safe. I love you all.” I never saw them in person again.

In addition to the deadly virus overwhelming the world, the United States faced a divisive presidential election and ongoing anti-Black and anti-Asian hate crimes, sparking a nationwide anti-racist movement. I felt a huge need to support my Black and Brown families, especially throughout the unrest our country experienced after the murder of George Floyd.

There was a huge weight on my heart. Trying to teach while protecting my students was definitely challenging. I was even more scared as a Black man and started to feel my mental and physical health take a downturn. This was one of the hardest times of my teaching career. *So why did I decide to stay in this profession?*

Prior to the move to distance learning, I was in leadership seminars for the Sacramento Mandarins Drum and Bugle Corps, a nonprofit working to transform lives through the performing arts. The in-person camps we held before COVID-19 were impossible now. The leadership staff and I worked for weeks to figure out how to provide students meaningful experiences. We planned a month-long curriculum that would meet the

social emotional needs of the corps’ student leaders.

On top of this, I was finishing the year with my class. Yet, through planning for the camp’s student leaders, I realized building positive, healthy relationships with students sustained me. As the month went on, I started to understand the flow for distance learning—the nuances and skills needed to support students during this pandemic. The camp was a way to prepare for this.

As my school district got closer to distance learning, I decided to offer my passion for relationship building and my technical skills to other educators. While teaching remotely, many educators felt defeated by the technology. The district allowed me to lead a district-wide, online

SHARE YOUR STORY

What motivates you to get up each morning and serve students in our nation’s schools? We want to hear from you. Send your 600-word submission for the “Why I Teach” column to lfjsubmissions@splcenter.org.

professional development session, and that became a pivotal moment in my career.

I told my colleagues, “We went into this field because we enjoy building relationships with students. Some of you have mastered this and have master’s degrees in this. We don’t have to let this computer take that away from us.” A waterfall of support and agreement cascaded into the chat. At this point, I realized my reason for staying in this profession—to uplift others and bring the field into the future.

The pandemic pushed me to rethink how students will be taught when school returns to some “normalcy.” My biggest takeaway from it all is the importance of social emotional learning, specifically socialization. Children want to talk to their friends. In every online session, students wanted breakout rooms so they could hang out and share their pets on camera—we had many pet parties and Zoom dances.

These are the moments my students will remember: when we came together and appreciated the community we built. While the students’ technology skills did develop, something else shined through, too. Their patience and forgiveness for others grew tremendously. They started to understand that some things in life are beyond our control, and sometimes we need to just take a breath and do the best we can. These are the life skills they will utilize as they navigate the world long after they’ve left my class. And that’s why I will keep teaching.

ARTICLE 4.23.2021 // RACE & ETHNICITY

Anti-racism: Educators Must Do the Heavy Lifting

BY NADIA MOSHTAGH RAZI

We know that schools are places that can reinscribe trauma, including racialized trauma. We know that harm is inflicted on BIPOC students in school, through classroom culture, through policy and through the curriculum. If we listen, our students will reveal that racism. We need to listen.

Teachers and school district leaders must understand the gravity of our responsibility at this pivotal moment in our nation’s history. We cannot allow anti-racism work to be pushed aside.

Every educator who is committed to anti-racism work should become familiar with achievement, discipline, attendance and school climate data in order to learn how schools and districts disproportionately harm students of color.

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights disaggregates data by subgroup, and shedding light on disproportionate statistics for certain subgroups of students is an essential component of equitable and empowering advocacy. Educators of all races should be using our voice and privilege to question unjust policies and practices in our schools.



And a reader replied...

Excellent article affirming anti-racist educator practice. Sometimes we wonder ‘what can I do in my classroom, my school?’ A reminder to center BIPOC students and to truly hear their experiences, rather than focusing on white/system discomfort.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE:

lfj.pub/heavy-lifting

DID YOU KNOW?

DID YOU KNOW?

A 2018 study found that, on Twitter, falsehoods spread more quickly and reached more people than true statements.

—SCIENCE

DID YOU KNOW?

DID YOU KNOW?

On February 3, 1964, over 460,000 New York City students boycotted school to protest the absence of quality, integrated schools for all.

—RETHINKING SCHOOLS

DID YOU KNOW?

DID YOU KNOW?

In the United States, 7.4 million children who are 5 and younger —1 in 3—have at least one parent or caregiver who speaks a language other than English.

—MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE

Embracing a Limitless Mindset

Principal Jamilah A. Hud-Kirk serves in Clayton County Public Schools (Atlanta area) and collaborates with principals through Off School Grounds Coalition (OSG), a national organization founded by former principal Dennis McKesey. Hud-Kirk is a school leadership consultant, mentor, advocate for work-life balance and mother of five. She took time from her day to speak with Learning for Justice about the lessons of 2020-2021.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

You have referred to this past school year as a “plan-demic.” What does that mean?

That’s a term from my OSG principal colleague, Aneesha Jacko. It’s a perfect description for this school year—a time for us to think differently about what our students’ needs are. Even before the pandemic, the things we were doing in education weren’t always working. Inequities didn’t start then—they were just magnified. We now have the opportunity to plan and work on the things that serve us best, personally and professionally. We have the opportunity to change what educating our scholars looks like.

As part of addressing the fear and trauma our school community experienced, last summer our district emphasized training on social and emotional learning (SEL) practices. We can proudly say that SEL is not something that we do now—it’s who we are. If it were not for those practices, our challenges probably would be even greater. We committed



Jamilah A. Hud-Kirk has served for 12 years as principal at Fountain Elementary School in Forest Park, Georgia.

to implementing SEL throughout the day with students and staff. As a leader, it was important for me to ensure that we were also implementing SEL practices with our staff. We learned a lot about our strengths, and, despite the lows, there have been great highs. People took this time to grow themselves professionally, creatively—reconnecting and thinking differently. That’s the mindset we encourage with staff, students and parents.

The last year was pivotal. What should we leave behind in education, and what should we bring forward?

We need to leave behind limited mindsets. It’s about the work and making the impossible possible. If you’re intentional and your mindset is that there are no barriers, you will get more things done than you realize. Things such as SEL need to move forward. Pouring into our youngest children should move forward. Creating schools

Tune In!

Learning for Justice podcasts are a great way to learn! Here are a few moments from some of our favorite episodes.

Did You Google It?

The Mind Online

“Questions about complex social phenomena are rarely answered well by search engines. ... Expecting to ask complex questions and getting an answer in .03 seconds is really antithetical to everything we know about being deeply educated.”

[lfj.pub/google-it](https://www.learningforjustice.org/podcast/did-you-google-it/)

Resistance Means More Than Rebellion

Teaching Hard History

“Teaching resistance is the key to getting students to want to learn about slavery. Hard history, you see, is not hopeless history.”

[lfj.pub/resistance](https://www.learningforjustice.org/podcast/resistance/)

Romantic Friendships (Part I)

Queer America

“Understanding that girls in the 19th century might fall in love and express their love and desire openly shows students that history holds a lot of surprises, and that can help them think differently about the present they live in and the futures they will make.”

[lfj.pub/romantic-friendships](https://www.learningforjustice.org/podcast/romantic-friendships/)

Reframing the Movement

Teaching Hard History

“Here, we set the historical record straight by separating civil rights fact from civil rights fiction.”

[lfj.pub/reframing](https://www.learningforjustice.org/podcast/reframing/)

as hubs for the community needs to move forward. There was a time when school was a hub for all things and placed on a pedestal. We’ve got to get back to that. I am that principal who, when something is not right in my school, I take full responsibility. I have to make impactful change. But that change cannot happen without the support of the district, churches, businesses and families in our community. We all have to do our part.

Community in schools is essential. Our school, like a lot of Georgia schools, is considered a food desert. A newspaper article a couple years ago ranked all the state’s cities, and Forest Park was in the bottom five. We gave that article to our fifth graders that year and asked, “What would you do?” They said, “Well, can we do a school garden?” “Absolutely, let’s do a school garden, combat food insecurities in our area and share that food with other students and families.” We started that garden initiative. Out of the mouths of babes. If you empower them to make choices and give them information, they come up with pretty clever things. Get them to start thinking critically about social issues in their own backyards.

What are you looking forward to most about the next school year?

Opportunity, professionally and personally, and creating new norms. We found that when you create opportunities for your students, people

recognize your efforts. I discovered that I had not been using my voice as much as I thought. In this pandemic, I learned to speak out about the things I want to manifest. As a result—because I’m trying to create that hub—we now have a nonprofit, Trinity of Faith, the Atlanta Food Bank and [Atlanta’s professional baseball team] sponsoring our school once a week providing 150 weekend bags of non-perishables to our scholars. This effort will continue over the summer. We also had authors Hal Elrod and Brianna Greenspan and the Miracle Morning community provide literature to every staff member and our families to support our school’s SEL practices. These are just a couple of examples.

You start doing things and have a limitless mindset that, “Whatever I want, I can get as long as I do the work,” and get the buy-in from staff and the community—it can really work. Principals all over the country are doing this work and transforming their communities. There are going to be challenges, but half the battle is mindset, really. That’s something we’re trying to teach our students. I pray that whatever we’ve taught the children here is enough that they will go out and, in turn, make a greater impact so that we can change some of these things that we’re seeing on the news and in our communities. Because if we don’t, shame on us. Shame on us. This is our time.

FREE STUFF!

These web resources support and supplement social justice education—at no cost!

Kinfolk, a resource from the organization Movers and Shakers NYC, provides resources and curricula for teaching about important figures from BIPOC history. The project focuses on primary source documents, connects to the present day and encourages student reflection. [kinfolkhistory.com](https://www.kinfolkhistory.com)

The University of Minnesota’s **Immigrant Stories Project** presents an archive of first-person stories, and their educator resources include lesson plans, class activities and other materials for teaching about immigration. [lfj.pub/immigrant-stories](https://www.umn.edu/immigrant-stories)

Featuring journals, photographs, newspapers and more, the **American Indian Digital History Project** compiles various Indigenous materials and resources from Native North America. [aidhp.com](https://www.aidhp.com)

Women & the American Story (WAMS), a New-York Historical Society project, offers curricula and primary source documents on a diverse range of women in the United States. [wams.nyhistory.org](https://www.wams.nyhistory.org)



Thirty Years of Learning and Counting!

As we worked on this first issue of *Learning for Justice* magazine, we focused in on one question: “What will we carry forward from this extraordinary past year?”

In this issue, we’re lifting up models of exceptional work in social justice education—examples from educators, scholars, students and families who recognized the ways the pandemic and a national reckoning on racism threw a spotlight onto issues of inequity and injustice that have harmed so many of us for so long.

We’re looking at how people have called for change, working in ways that refused a goal of getting “back to normal” and instead insisted on a better education system for all students.

Reviewing these inspiring stories, we asked ourselves: What will we at LFJ carry forward through this time of remarkable change?

It’s a question we’ll keep posing. We’re continuing to revise our work to ensure it aligns with our mission and our values. Right now, for example, even as we continue to share new articles and episodes of our podcast, we’re also reviewing all of our lesson plans, updating two of our best practices guides, and expanding and working on a new framework for teaching the civil rights movement.

But as we look back on the work we’ve done, we want to make sure you and all our readers know about all of the resources available to you at learningforjustice.org. Here’s just a bit of what we’ll be carrying forward!

Classroom Resources

Among our most popular resources, LFJ's offerings for classroom use are designed to support instruction and student inquiry.

Just for You

Classroom Lessons

Currently, LFJ has over 200 ready-to-use K-12 classroom lessons. In our online classroom lesson bank, you can search by keyword or filter lessons by grade level, social justice domain (select identity, diversity, justice or action), academic subject or topic.

Learning Plan Builder and Learning Plan Bank

Our Learning Plan Builder helps educators combine LFJ's Social Justice Standards with Common Core-aligned literary strategies and student performance tasks. You can build your own lesson or search through the hundreds created by other LFJ users.

Student Tasks and Teaching Strategies

For LFJ-recommended activities and assessments supporting writing, civic engagement and critical literacy, check out our recommended student tasks. And for ideas about engaging students in inquiry and discussions, browse through our dozens of recommended teaching strategies.

Articles and Publications

We often say that LFJ is more than a magazine! Our special publications are designed to help you implement some of the great ideas you read about in our features. Check out our website for these resources and more.

Magazine Archive

We may have changed our name, but you can still find complete issues of *Teaching Tolerance* magazine available for free on our site! Browse our magazine archive to peruse three decades of articles about social justice in education.

Frameworks

LFJ has created several frameworks that offer road maps for critical topics in social justice education. Along with our Social Justice Standards and our Teaching Hard History resources, we also have frameworks for teaching about digital literacy and the civil rights movement. Find a sneak preview of our updates on the latter on pg. 40!

Share With Students

Student Text Library

The nearly 600 selections in our Student Text Library range from historical documents to original, commissioned stories for students in grades K-12. All of our texts are keyword-searchable and, like our lessons, can be filtered by grade level, social justice domain, academic subject and topic. Texts are accompanied by student-facing questions to support comprehension and start conversations.

Film Kits

Our classroom-friendly films are designed to introduce students to critical social justice topics and start important discussions in your classroom. From brief introductions to key topics to student-ready documentaries to a semi-autobiographical short, LFJ films are accompanied by viewers' guides, lessons or text-dependent questions that offer critical context and recommendations for teaching.

Printable Posters

Our One World posters are archived on our website in high-definition files ready to download and print for your school or classroom. Browse our archive to find some of our favorite inspirations for making the world—and each of us—just a little better.

Best Practice Guides

LFJ has also created a number of best practices guides. Some of them support specific student populations, including ELLs and families and LGBTQ students. Others provide guidelines for leading conversations, like our *Speak Up at School*, *Reading for Social Justice* and *Let's Talk!* guides. And still others, like *Responding to Hate and Bias at School*, give recommendations for building more inclusive and just schools.

Online Articles

Print issues of *Learning for Justice* magazine come out only twice a year, but online we've got you covered year-round! LFJ's online short articles lift up the voices, experiences and reflections of K-12 educators working for justice in their schools and communities. Check out our Article Spotlight (pg. 10) for a few of our recent favorites



Professional Learning

Did you know that LFJ also offers several options for self-paced learning? Whether you're looking to brush up on content, improve your practice or help build a strong, equitable school community, LFJ can help.

Podcasts

For a deep dive into the topics you wish you'd learned in school and recommendations for how to teach them, explore LFJ's podcasts. *Queer America* traces the hidden LGBTQ history of this country. *Teaching Hard History* tracks the untold or often-oversimplified stories of Indigenous and African slavery in what is now the United States, of Reconstruction and of the civil rights movement. *The Mind Online* explores critical questions about digital literacy and online content. Listeners can also download certificates of completion that your school or district may accept for professional learning credit!

Webinars

For those with only an hour to spare, LFJ webinars provide helpful guidance and resources from experts on a range of subjects! We have more than 50 webinars on topics from engaging families through home visits to making space for educator self-care to teaching the history of redlining in the United States. Participants can also download professional learning certificates upon completion.

Self-guided Learning

And if you'd rather move at your own pace, explore LFJ's self-guided learning resources. Browse our toolkits on instruction, classroom culture, school climate, family and community engagement, and teacher leadership.

Celebrating 30 Years of Learning for Justice

This year marks the 30th anniversary of our program. Since 1991, we've produced a deep well of resources. We've created thousands of articles, hundreds of lessons and dozens of webinars on critical topics in social justice education. We've produced films and podcasts. We've designed workshops and written reports, built a text library and developed a learning plan builder.

We're proud of the work we've done over the last three decades and pleased to continue so much of it. And we're looking forward to continuing and expanding our work alongside you in the years to come.

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS, PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS FOR PROTECTING YOUTH FROM EXTREMISM

New resources from the Southern Poverty Law Center and American University's Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab offer classroom strategies for recognizing and protecting students vulnerable to exploitation and responding when incidents occur.

In this expanded guide, you can find information about warning signs, language and ideologies to be aware of and guidance on best practices when approaching these topics.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

- ➔ Educators
- ➔ Caregivers
- ➔ Mentors
- ➔ Parents
- ➔ Coaches
- ➔ Counselors

Download the
free guide at
splcenter.org/PERIL





The Curb-cut Effect and Championing Equity

Centering the needs of underserved people often has a broader impact on the community. The same is true in schools.

BY CORY COLLINS ILLUSTRATION BY KAILEY WHITMAN

IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S iconic science fiction novel *Parable of the Sower*, protagonist Lauren Olamina reimagines community. Facing violence, government instability, social stratification and widespread suffering, she preaches adaptation; she envisions how, in the right setting, meeting people's needs could help communities grow "into something brand new."

"Now," she says, "is a time for building foundations."

During a dystopian school year in which everyone was forced to adapt amid a pandemic, political upheaval and social isolation—and the ongoing traumas of racial injustice and violence—Butler's words felt prescient.

"One of the purposes of science fiction is to expand our conception of what's possible," explains Dr. Ashley Woodson, director of the Abolitionist Teaching Network's Virtual Freedom School. "And we all just lived through science fiction."

The 2020-21 school year demanded something brand new—shaped by the needs of students, families and educators facing unprecedented challenges. In this crisis, existing inequities grew worse. They required targeted solutions and a reimagining of the status quo.

The best solutions were designed to help students and families least supported by the system. And those solutions proved widely beneficial. Universal meal programs designed to ensure food reached families experiencing homelessness and poverty also granted greater access to families who traditionally fall just outside of outdated free meal qualifications. Districts that suspended standard homework and grade models helped students who had to work or care for siblings and those experiencing mental health struggles. Schools that emphasized outreach to families who may not have access to public aid or home language resources—such as undocumented families—improved overall family engagement and communication.

These targeted solutions with broad benefits illustrate what many advocates call a "curb-cut effect"—a phenomenon rooted in decades of activism that has newfound relevance in the ongoing fight to center equity in our schools.

What Is the Curb-cut Effect?

Today, curb cuts are ubiquitous points of access required by U.S. law. But these ramps connecting sidewalks to streets were hard-won.

Disability activist Patrick William Connally, describing his digital painting depicting the first curb cut in Berkeley, California, explained that its purpose was to help people in wheelchairs. The fight for curb cuts was championed by and for people with disabilities. But its effects were broader.

"People without wheelchairs began using the ramps too," Connally reflected. "In fact, sidewalk ramps made our public spaces more livable for everyone."

People pushing strollers and luggage moved more easily through the city. So did skateboarders and elderly people. A targeted solution that granted better access to wheelchair users had incidental benefits for people across the Berkeley community and across the country.

That "curb-cut effect" has its roots in disability activism, but the concept—like curb cuts themselves—has proven widely applicable.

In a highly cited 2017 article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, lawyer, activist and policy expert Angela Glover Blackwell highlights the curb-cut effect as a framework for understanding the community-wide benefits of any innovation specifically designed to achieve equity for an underserved group.

"There's an ingrained societal suspicion that intentionally supporting one group hurts another. That equity is a zero-sum game," writes Blackwell. "In fact, when the nation targets support where it is needed most—when we create the circumstances that allow those who have been left behind to participate and contribute fully—everyone wins."



Blackwell reframes the curb-cut effect as a way of describing the outsized benefits of equity-based solutions. Access for those denied it is the goal. Access for everyone is the result.

Blackwell foregrounds the understanding that a policy must be explicitly designed to give a specific group of people what they need to thrive. This is what Blackwell calls *curb-cut thinking*. It's an informed faith in equity, which she defines as "creating the conditions in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach full potential."

She offers simple examples. Seat belt legislation designed to protect kids saved countless adults' lives. Bike lanes designed to protect riders improved pedestrians' safety. Public transit routes designed to give underserved communities access to economic opportunity benefited those economic centers.

This foundational framing of the curb-cut effect confronts the idea that equality (everyone is treated the same) is more beneficial than equity (everyone gets what they need).

"Equality gives everyone the right to ride on the bus," Blackwell wrote. "Equity ensures that there are curb cuts so people in wheelchairs can get to the bus stop and lifts so they can get on the bus and ensures that there are bus lines where people need them so they can get where they need to go."

For educators, understanding curb-cut thinking and the curb-cut effect offers a deeper understanding of what it means to advocate for transformational change and equity.

The Curb-cut Case for Centering Equity in Schools

"We need to be centered on where the lack of equity is and the lack of protections are," says De Palazzo, the Safe & Healthy Schools Director at Equality Florida. "At the same time, we also know to frame it broadly. That's strategy, but it's also truth."

Both Palazzo and Woodson say an understanding of the curb-cut effect can be useful in an advocate's toolkit. Providing examples of how equity-centered policies or actions have improved or could improve the lives of many students and the community broadly can help school and community leaders see the measurable *and* intangible benefits of equity.

"This is a particular type of argument," Woodson says, "but it is a useful way of thinking about it in order to pitch reform. ... It's one strategy of many strategies where we can begin to mitigate the harm that schooling causes for all kids, particularly for Black kids."

For advocates of more equitable schools, the first step of curb-cut thinking is to uplift students and families least supported by any given policy or system.

Palazzo has spent years in coalitions fighting for LGBTQ students' rights and protections in Florida school districts. As those students face threats of anti-trans legislation, Palazzo points to curb-cut effects for previously hard-won rights.

She mentions single-stall restrooms—a targeted solution to provide gender nonconforming and nonbinary youth with an option (not a mandate) to use a private restroom space where they feel safe. Having this option in schools proved beneficial for many students—including those with disabilities and social anxiety or those experiencing bullying and violence.

Centering LGBTQ students, Palazzo has found, creates more inclusive learning environments for many students. But specificity matters. Naming LGBTQ identities in anti-bullying policies creates both a safer school climate and a precedent that is difficult to undo.

Curb-cut thinking will lead to widespread benefit, but that isn't the goal. The goal is equity for those being denied equity.

Such policies can always be referenced when schools try to scale back or discriminate—and they are harder to dismantle than vague, equality-focused policies that relegate some vulnerable students to the margins.

“What’s critical is having it framed within [a group of underserved students’] particular areas of interest and need, and how it speaks directly to them,” Palazzo says. She sees the curb-cut effect as a tool for illustrating that such policies work for the entire school community.

Curb-cut thinking, advocates say, can inform equity-centered innovations across a school.

For Woodson, that includes advocating for the expansion and improvement of Black history education in K-12 schools. Against the backdrop of concerted efforts to curtail U.S. history curricula that honestly reckon with racism and uplift the contributions of Black people, Woodson sees an opportunity to advocate for its widespread benefits.

“When we refuse to acknowledge the intellectual diversity within the Black freedom struggle,” Woodson says, “we limit our imagination of what reparative work might look like, not only for Black people but for all who have been marginalized, exploited or subjected to state violence or extralegal violence.”

Woodson says everyone’s understanding suffers when Black history is erased or simplified. That’s why she also says it’s important for educators and advocates to understand that there is often an equal and opposite version of the curb-cut effect: Policies that don’t center equity or those least supported do immense harm to students experiencing discrimination or erasure and also do secondary harm to their peers.

“It’s recognizing that when you don’t think in that way, what we end up with hurts students,” Woodson says.

Woodson points to “gifted and talented” programs as an example. These programs’ “neutral” models have historically ignored the role of bias in selection and evaluation. This exacerbates opportunity gaps between white students and students of color and ultimately fails to deliver meaningful advancements in literacy or math skills for all kids.

In Palazzo’s work, both erasure and targeted discrimination can produce this widespread harm. An anti-bullying policy that fails to protect specific identities ultimately isn’t enforced; the lack of guidance leaves educators unsure how, if and when to address identity-based harassment and leaves students unsure of their rights

to safety. And something like an anti-trans sports bill requiring girl athletes to undergo medical examinations if their gender identity is challenged harms and invades the privacy of trans girls, as well as intersex students and cisgender girls accused of having “masculine” features.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s clear that a focus on equity could move schools toward repairing historic harms and transforming the system to better serve students and families historically harmed by school spaces.

Woodson says the pandemic proved the viability of many targeted policies that were once deemed too difficult. Access to the internet and digital devices increased for many students who didn’t have them at home. Free breakfast and lunch programs expanded, including during vacation times that historically burdened struggling families. Schools provided alternative methods for students to engage with classwork and the school community. More leaders questioned standardized testing and the effects of economic and social conditions on the results. The efficacy and inequity of homework came under question.

“There’s no reason that we would go back to normal and reconstruct the barriers,” Woodson says. “I think all children benefit from these novel ways of thinking about what schooling could be.”

Nationwide, schools face major challenges to equity-centered work. There are targeted campaigns to depict everything from inclusive curricula to anti-discrimination policies as exclusionary. The reality of the curb-cut effect exposes these false narratives and provides a framework with which advocates can fight for equity-focused policies.

And as Woodson notes, there are tremendous opportunities to learn from creative solutions that arose from an education system in crisis. It’s a time for building foundations. Even against the backdrop of struggle, something brand new seems possible.



“When the nation targets support where it is needed most—when we create the circumstances that allow those who have been left behind to participate and contribute fully—everyone wins.”

—ANGELA GLOVER BLACKWELL



An inaccessible curb, decades before today's ubiquitous curb cuts

Remembering the Purpose

Despite its value as a tool for understanding and discussing the benefits of equity-based approaches, advocates warn against using the curb-cut effect as a primary justification for equitable policies.

Woodson and Palazzo both stress that universal benefit cannot be the goal—and that an overemphasis on the widespread benefits of equity policies could, in practice, erase the most pressing needs of underserved students.

“We absolutely still have to have a pointed method of speaking directly to the needs of any group that is marginalized,” Palazzo says. “We cannot completely water it down.”

“Because of resource and opportunity hoarding,” Woodson explains, “if you implement a policy that makes it even a little better for the folks who already have power, that’s how it will continue to compound itself exponentially.”

As Woodson puts it, “Black kids have to be enough.”

It’s a point Blackwell herself makes. Curb-cut thinking will lead to widespread benefit, she contends, but that isn’t the goal. The goal is equity for those being denied equity. The goal is opportunity for those being denied opportunity. The goal is access—a ramp where a barrier once stood.

By most accounts, the first curb cuts in the United States appeared in 1945, in the Michigan towns of Battle Creek and Kalamazoo. Jack H. Fisher—a lawyer who left the Army after a stateside

leg injury—advocated for World War II veterans with disabilities, including through a campaign that led to curb cuts and safety rails.

Nearly three decades later, in Berkeley, California, a literally groundbreaking movement took place. Berkeley’s Independent Living Movement, spearheaded by college students and disability activists like Ed Roberts, pushed for safer, more accessible sidewalks. A group of these activists, who called themselves the “Rolling Quads,” went out at night, mixing and pouring concrete to create makeshift ramps on street corners. By 1972, their advocacy and crude construction pressured the city of Berkeley into creating its first official curb cut.

When those activists poured concrete over Berkeley’s curbsides, they weren’t thinking of the bike riders or delivery drivers who would find easier passage. They were confronting a system that had excluded them from the beginning. They were demanding access and entry for wheelchair users and people with disabilities—for themselves.

They were creating the conditions that allowed them to transform a space built by and for someone else into something brand new. ♦

Collins is a senior writer for Learning for Justice.

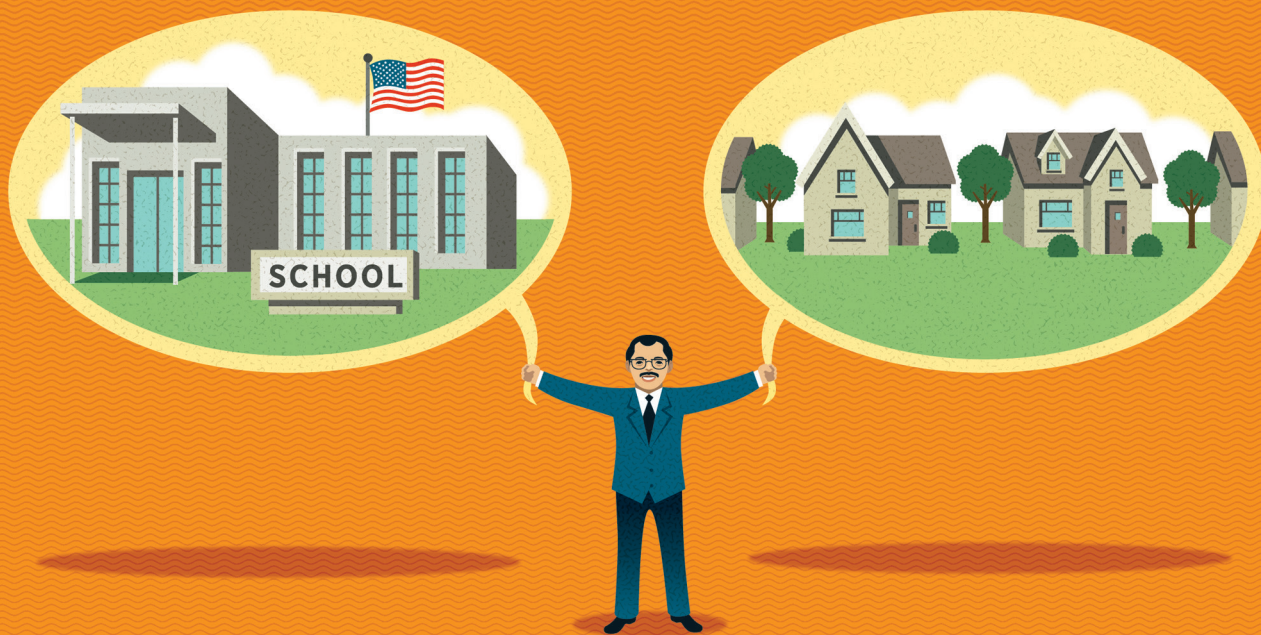


LANGUAGE ACCESS

More Than Translation

School districts in Washington state illustrate the power of making language access foundational—not an add-on.

BY **JULIE FENG** ILLUSTRATION BY **PETER AND MARIA HOEY**



AS A PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETER and parent organizer in South King County, Washington, Maricela Rodriguez often hears from parents about the challenges they face. When schools began distance learning in March 2020, Rodriguez began hearing more and more stories about the gaps in communication between schools and families.

In one typical example, a parent told Rodriguez about a missed parent-teacher conference. She and her child’s teacher had been originally scheduled for a meeting time with an interpreter, but when the virtual meeting before hers went long and the teacher rescheduled, they didn’t include the interpreter in the new meeting.

The pandemic presented new problems, but schools and districts have long needed better strategies for communicating with families in languages

other than English. Even in places like South King County, where almost half the students qualify for English language learner (ELL) services at some point in their education, there are gaps. It is critical to close these gaps because ELLs are not problems for districts to manage or minimize—they are core members of school communities.

The Rights Guaranteed to Families

For many years, and still in some places across the United States, students were pressured to act as de facto translators for their parents. Issues of equity and quality remain, despite the legal mandate for schools to provide translation services. Under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA), public schools are required to support ELLs in participating meaningfully and equally. This

includes sufficiently staffing ELL programs, avoiding unnecessary segregation of ELLs and providing language assistance.

In Washington state, House Bill 1153 would have increased language access in public schools, but when the bill died in committee, community organizers pivoted to turn the bill into a proviso that was able to pass funding in spring 2021. The proviso will fund the reconvening of a state language access workgroup, as well as direct the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to establish a language access technical assistance program.

Title VI and EEOA—and some state-level laws—protect emerging English speakers in our schools. But, as with all civil rights legislation, the law provides a floor, not a ceiling.

The pandemic continues to reveal to those in power what communities

of color and immigrant communities have always known: that access is about more than information.

“When we were going into distance learning, what shifted was that the whole system was now put in a position where we have to rely on families,” says Kisa Hendrickson, chief engagement and partnership officer at Highline Public Schools (HPS), a district just south of Seattle. “We had to partner with our families to ensure that our students were able to access their education online.”

Teresa Vazquez, an ELL paraeducator in nearby Renton School District (RSD), says, “Last year was incredibly confusing for everyone. And people have needs beyond just academics, so how do we even begin communicating?”

Three resources can make a meaningful difference for families: culturally responsive interpretation and translation, support for families as they navigate the system, and a clear message that the district recognizes language access for families is essential to a child’s education—not a supplement to it.

Providing Culturally Responsive Interpretation and Translation

Alexa Villatoro, a youth organizer with the immigrant rights organization OneAmerica, worked on the campaign for Washington’s HB 1153 along with their partner organization, Open Doors for Multicultural Families. Villatoro believes that providing language access needs to start at the top.

“The language access bill would have required schools to do things that they’re very capable of doing and that they’re responsible for,” she explains, “requiring those culturally responsive strategies for providing interpreters and providing translated material

that is extensive, that is thorough. It’s not just about providing and funding interpretation and translation but providing it in a way that is culturally responsive. Oftentimes interpreters and translators are not required to be respectful or mindful of cultural aspects that interfere with education and access.”

“It’s not just about providing and funding interpretation and translation but providing it in a way that is culturally responsive.”

—Alexa Villatoro

Villatoro’s advocacy is driven by her own experiences as a former HPS student and by watching her mom, who teaches a fifth-grade dual-language (Spanish and English) class at Highline’s Mount View Elementary.

“Schools are trying to provide as much access as possible, but ultimately it’s a systemic issue,” she says.

Districts need to consistently assess the language needs of their

communities, as well as the effectiveness of their language access services. This means prioritizing systemically equitable family engagement practices and providing guidelines and training so schools know when and how to use multilingual staff or contract interpreters. The pandemic has also highlighted the need for remote interpretation, a resource that can continue to be useful even as students go back to in-person learning.

Centering Language Access

To help overcome some of the most basic barriers to access, Villatoro recommends that districts have designated staff and offices families know they can contact for language access.

“It is really tricky when you go to the school and you don’t know who to talk to, and they throw you to someone else, and that someone throws you to someone else.”

Lita O’Donnell, director of family and community partnerships at HPS, says Highline’s centralized Family Center is a useful starting point. “Families have a place to go where they feel comfortable, where there’s that connection,” she specifies. “Our families have their own cultural capital, in their own communities, where they’re sharing information.”

The district has also built staff positions expressly designed to support families of ELLs, creating the position of bilingual family liaison to prioritize language access. Highline has always employed paraeducators who happened to be bilingual. And, as Kisa Hendrickson explains, many bilingual paraeducators were already doing the work of connecting the school and families “because many of them came from the community. A lot of them were parents. Some of them grew up in the district.”

“We support families because there is a lot of misunderstanding, and it’s not just the language. It’s the system.”

—Louis Trujillo

Creating the official position of bilingual family liaison means staff members aren’t asked to include multilingual family engagement as an add-on, but to center it—and be compensated for it.

When Hendrickson started working in Highline, these positions were paid out of categorical funds, which she believes created the unintentional message that multilingual family engagement is supplemental work.

When Hendrickson started working in Highline, these positions were paid out of categorical funds, which she believes created the unintentional message that multilingual family engagement is supplemental work. To change the message, HPS changed the budget so those positions were paid out of basic education dollars, in addition to raising their hourly rates. Today, there are 98 bilingual paraeducators in HPS, and 28 serve as bilingual family liaisons. As these shifts show, any model for change means considering language access services as foundational, not additional, to a district’s mission.

Prior to Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds coming in, Highline’s enrollment had been declining. Declining enrollment means declining budget opportunities. Yet, Hendrickson shares, “no part of our conversations about budget cuts ever included reducing our translation and interpretation budget. It has never been on the table. So while funding for language access may not necessarily increase once ESSER funds go

away, it won’t decrease because it’s part of our standard operating procedures.”

Supporting Families Navigating the System

Students and families need the support of school and district staff who are specifically compensated and structured to use language skills, not just staff who happen to be bilingual. These staff—such as the multilingual family liaisons employed by districts like Highline and neighboring districts Renton and Tukwila—become trusted bridges for communities. They don’t just translate messages; they guide families through the school system.

“We support families because there is a lot of misunderstanding, and it’s not just the language. It’s the system,” says Louis Trujillo, a bilingual family support specialist in Renton School District (RSD).

For instance, RSD uses a hotline for language access, but there’s limited capacity for staff to return calls. “One thing some parents don’t know,” Maricela Rodriguez notes, “is that they might prioritize calling back parents who leave a complete message with details because there are so many calls that go through. So ... relationships with staff like Louis are so important for helping parents know what to expect.”

Rodriguez adds, “I always hear from parents that they really love talking to their bilingual family liaison, especially when the liaison is also from the community and has passion and respect and love for the community.”

Tukwila School District (TSD), a smaller district than Highline or Renton, employs four district-level parent and community liaisons with four different language specializations: Somali, Spanish, Burmese and Nepali. These roles are invaluable, not only because the liaisons give families more access to information about the school system but also because the information flows the other way, too.

“From the schools’ side, they need to learn about our families’ cultures,” asserts Ohn Ohnmar, TSD’s Burmese parent and community liaison, who also speaks Karen and Thai.

Community connections go beyond education. Liaisons help families navigate housing, health care and other basic needs. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have also been troubleshooting technology and helping families apply for relief funds.

“Just recently, a student’s family member passed away from COVID-19, and we had to help their family navigate the U.S. funeral system,” says Ohnmar. “We never stop learning together.”

“We can’t just focus on academic support and communicating with families,” adds Tukwila’s Nepali Parent and Community Liaison Binita Dahal. “We try to fill the barriers of their basic needs and have deep relationships.”

Scaling and Systemizing

Vincent Davis, an ELL specialist at RSD’s Highlands Elementary, explains the value of—and the need for—such relationships. “We just need to open the

doors for them. One of the best things is when parents really take ownership of the school and the community.”

One way their team has scaled up this work is the Renton Parent University, a 10-week program for parents of ELLs to learn about the U.S. school system. Highlands has been running the Renton Parent University since 2016, and it has continued virtually since the pandemic began.

“The crux of it all is the relationships and the trust built between families and school staff,” says Mickey Dunn, an ELL specialist and family engagement coordinator at Highlands.

Inequities have swelled during the turmoil of the pandemic—but in some places, so have opportunities to advocate for systemic change. One of these changes is pay increases for multilingual staff who use their language skills in addition to their main roles. During the pandemic, Renton has added a 5% pay increase for these staff to honor their substantial contributions.

Another change is language access training for all educators and staff. While this training was accessible before, organizers and community-based groups are now advocating it as a foundational necessity. In a survey conducted by a language access workgroup convened by OSPI and the Office of Education Ombuds, only 27% of district staff and 10% of school staff indicated that they had received training on how to work with interpreters.

Not everyone who works at a school needs to be an ELL expert, but everyone should be familiar with resources they can connect families with—whether that’s asking a multilingual family liaison to reach out, understanding how to prioritize scheduling with a translator or knowing which colleague can best answer a parent’s questions. Technical training

on district practices and state policies can equip all school personnel with what they need to support students and families.

This past year, in the midst of the pandemic, HPS adopted an official language access policy. Hendrickson says that while the district has been providing language access for many years, they saw the effects of the pandemic as an opportunity to systemize it. “When the demand for it significantly increased during the pandemic,” Hendrickson says, “we wanted to get it into policy so that there’s no disputing this is what needs to happen.”

“We had our practices and our guidance, and now we have it in policy,” HPS’s Lita O’Donnell points out. “How do we support schools when we get back into, quote-unquote, normal times, when our families will still need to receive information in a language that they understand and that they’ve asked for—so that they can be partners in their child’s education and understand what their child needs to know, and be able to contribute and co-create with their schools? We need to make sure that infrastructure is in place.”

It takes changes in both policy and practice. That’s why it’s critical that educators, families, students and communities advocate for foundational shifts and continue modeling that with each other.

Language access is more than just letting a parent know what their child’s homework is—it’s a bridge built from community, culture and collective care. ♦

Feng is a senior communications strategist for the Community Center for Education Results, supporting the Road Map Project.



Humanity, Healing and Doing the Work

BY CRYSTAL L. KEELS EDITED BY ANYA MALLEY PHOTOGRAPHY BY KARSTEN MORAN

Honoring our collective humanity will result in an education system in which all children thrive.



DENA SIMMONS, ED.D., is the founder of LiberatED, a collective at the intersection of racial justice, social emotional learning (SEL) and healing in education rooted in radical love. Simmons has expertise in anti-racist education, emotional intelligence, social justice, teacher education and curriculum development. She is a graduate of Middlebury College and Pace University with a doctorate from Teachers College, Columbia University. Simmons has delivered two TEDx Talks, as well as a TED Talk on Broadway, and has been featured widely across various media outlets. Identified as one of a new generation of activists for social change, she is the author of an upcoming book, *White Rules for Black People*. Simmons recently spoke with Learning for Justice to discuss lessons learned from the pandemic and what to carry forward to make education more equitable.

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

We are looking back at lessons learned from the pandemic and the sudden move to remote learning. What aspects of the educational system should we move forward, using the pandemic as a pivotal point for ways to imagine better?

I feel like we need to throw the whole system away. It sounds like I'm taking the easy way out by saying that, but what we've learned through the pandemic is that much of what we were doing before was because it was convenient and what we knew. However, there's a tension between equity and efficiency. We need to be doing the work of equity, which takes time. It's a process, but we have not yet invested in it, as we've learned from the heightened inequities during COVID-19. If we invested in creating equitable spaces, my hope is that we could dream up collective liberation too.

At the same time, we have seen how, when we have pressure on us, we can innovate and make so much happen with limited resources. We suddenly found resources and saw more public-private partnerships to support the education of young people in this country. Where was that commitment before?

You have said the United States functions with inequity by design. How do we get people to see the potential in imagining something different for education—that it can actually be for everyone?

The first step is honoring our collective humanity and understanding our education system does not serve all children well. For all of us to thrive, it needs to serve every child well. I'll just give an

example in terms of equity. If we look at the sidewalk—I'm a city girl—there's a little dip. That dip was made so that getting up from the street to the sidewalk is accessible. I'm not in a wheelchair, but I still benefit. I benefit from that little dip when I have my luggage or when I'm walking with my niece or nephew. Like the little dip, we all benefit from equity, and that may get people to start thinking about how we can ensure that education is a place where *all* children can thrive.

If we look at what's happening right now in the country with the work I'm doing as an activist, as an anti-racist educator, as someone who unapologetically speaks about white supremacy, anti-Blackness and Black genius, we see how this work has been dismissed and called "too political." We see the backlash and protests. Some folks have decided that Black humanity; Black, Indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC); and queer humanity and genius are political. The pushback we get is [that] we need to be neutral.

People will see the potential of education once they realize that every student is someone's child. Our students are people. They hurt, they laugh, they experience joy, they cry. Instead, I think we continue to think about what's good for *my* child, instead of what's good for *our* children. We need to move beyond that self-centeredness.

You've said that you lost some of yourself to survive in white spaces. How has this experience helped you to realize how someone can "come back to" themselves?

I grew up and went to the same school in the Bronx from Head Start to eighth

grade, and I thrived there. Everyone looked like me. I felt safe to be myself. Once I entered into white spaces, I was made to feel inferior. I started to feel like a hollow vessel in my predominantly white boarding school. I was not safe to be Black. I had to assimilate very quickly to be considered successful and acceptable. That continued to happen up until the point where I told the university where I worked that I was leaving to save myself. It's full circle—now I'm in the moment where I'm returning home, and returning home is returning to me.

In June of 2020, at my former university, I became a victim of a racist attack. I took time off to heal. The distance made me realize how unwell I had been. I realized that my pattern was *wake up, go into my white space and fight*. During my distance from the university, outside of that toxicity, I realized, "Yo, I have been in a state of unwell for mad long." Though we have models of people who've persevered in these spaces, I just want to be. I just want to rest and relax. That's also part of our revolution.

Part of my healing also included breaking up with a very narrow version of what success means. For too long, I was made to believe that success only lived in whiteness. I needed to unlearn that.

That's why we have to create schools where students can believe in their creative genius and not feel like they're not enough because their genius doesn't fit into a box that was never even created for them. We really have to ask, "How do we make the world safer for queer and BIPOC? And how do we reimagine a world where we eradicate toxic whiteness and heteronormativity?"



You've spoken about the need for culturally responsive social emotional learning. What can educators do to get more culturally responsive SEL in their classrooms and schools?

Good teaching includes building relationships, and good teaching is ensuring that the social and emotional aspects of our young people are healthy. However, we've talked about SEL more as an outcome. That's what happens in education: We decide that everything is an outcome, and we have to test to this outcome. As a result, when we start to think of SEL in this very narrow, static way, we lose the dynamism of the work. At LiberatED, the way we think about SEL is that it, like racial justice, like healing, is a *process*, and we have to focus on the process along with the desired outcome: a world where all children feel safe to thrive in the comfort of their own skin. We also have to realize that superb teachers have always been building relationships, helping students resolve conflict, helping students through difficult emotions.

In this way, we have to honor the genius that already exists within the teaching staff and the educator force who have already been doing this work before we separated it out and called it a thing. SEL and healing should be the air that we breathe in schools, and so should racial justice. Those are all parts of this work. And you're culturally responsive because culturally responsive practices are, at the core, student centered and community centered. If we paid attention and asked the right questions, then we would know what our students and educators need.

Yes, we want to ensure that everyone is safe, but the argument for bipartisanship and neutrality only comes up when we're talking about diversity, equity and belonging. We've made neutrality a weapon to silence voices at the margins.

How can educators do right by their students if they don't have the support of administrators and districts? How can they feel liberated in their circumstances?

[School leaders] feel pressure to be bipartisan. Yes, we want to ensure that everyone is safe, but the argument for bipartisanship and neutrality only

comes up when we're talking about diversity, equity and belonging. We've made neutrality a weapon to silence voices at the margins. Being neutral is essentially honoring whiteness. It honors the oppressor like Desmond Tutu said: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

What I'd say for teachers is you've got to break the rules. You have to try things out. You've got to do whatever it takes to honor your students' humanity. And for racial and social justice, you've got to be willing to lose or give up something—you've got to be willing to lose your job. That's the type of life I'm about.

What can educators and caregivers do to sustain healing and help children feel safe in the midst of everything that's going on in the world—the pandemic, continued police brutality, political polarization and misinformation?

When you help your students or the children that you're raising feel like they have control and agency and that they can be part of the change they desire, they feel motivated. They feel like they can make a difference.

At some point, too, we need to have the difficult conversations in which sometimes there are no answers. When I think about Black parents and how they have to teach us what to do if we get stopped by the cops, I remember this isn't a conversation all parents are having with their children. If Black parents could have this conversation with their children, it's possible for everyone else to talk to their kid about how unfair the world is.



I don't know why some people are so scared to admit the ugliness of our country's racism to themselves, evident in the fervor to ban any talk of anti-racism. A Black teen witnessed and videotaped George Floyd's public lynching. Yet, we're saying, "We can't really talk about it in school." We've decided which children to protect from the world. And Black children are not protected from the world because our Blackness is, unfortunately, treated as a target. When you grow up knowing that you're a target, you're always attentive. Your survival depends upon it. That's why Black children are always learning different ways to maneuver. That's part of Black genius—and the fact that we're still here. We ain't broken. We're magic.

Can you talk more about LiberatED?

LiberatED centers healing, justice and radical love in SEL to create a world where all children and youth love, learn

and thrive in the comfort of their own skin. We aim to disrupt what has always been and to co-create content and resources with communities so that, together, we dream about what could be. We want to ensure that process and practice are the core of our work—rooted in African and Indigenous wisdom. We want collective liberation.

For years, I've been working with school districts on healing, equity and racial justice, even before LiberatED. I feel blessed to be doing the work I do. But I'll tell you it's not easy. I want someday to feel like I'm not fighting to exist all the time.

What are some of the most valuable lessons about healing and justice that you've taken away from your work in education?

Some of what I've learned about healing and justice in education is that you can't do it alone. It is collective work and there's no self-care without

collective care. If I keep going into an unwell society or an unwell setting and I'm doing all of this work to get well, I'm going to get contaminated and poisoned. So, this work has to be done collectively. When we begin to think of this work as *collective* work, then we begin to think of collective solutions. So, when people say, "It doesn't really impact me," you don't think it impacts you, but it does.

There's no backing out of this work. If you think you can, then check your privilege. Because if you're not in education to be part of the revolution for collective liberation and humanity, find another job. ♦

Keels is an associate editor for Learning for Justice, and Malley is the program's editorial assistant.



EXIT

ENVISIONING SCHOOL SAFETY WITHOUT POLICE

Communities across the country are mobilizing to improve school safety without police presence while advocating for students' dignity.

BY **COSHANDRA DILLARD**

ILLUSTRATION BY **CHA PORNEA**

ON JUNE 2, 2020, eight days after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) voted to end its contract with the Minneapolis Police Department. Floyd's public death had hit Minneapolis students hard. Young people there had long urged school officials to cut ties with police. Now that police were responsible for the brutal murder of yet another Black man in their community, that demand became more tenable.

Following the murder, protesters in Minneapolis and around the country rallied for either defunding or abolishing police. Minneapolis students and many community members concentrated on school resource officers (SROs). The majority



of the MPS population comprises students of color, some of whom were tear-gassed during the 2020 protests.

Nathaniel Genene, now a 2021 graduate from a Minneapolis high school, was a student representative on the school board at the time. He emailed local school officials and reached out to fellow students to build solidarity around ending police presence in Minneapolis schools. “I realized that we couldn’t have a safe culture ... in our schools with an MPD officer in that building,” Genene says. “We want to invest in students, not cops.” Other large school districts across the country have also cut ties with police. The school board in Seattle, Washington, suspended its police contract for a year. District contracts with police were fully terminated in Denver, Colorado; Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco and Oakland, California; and Rochester, New York. Efforts to do likewise are also happening in smaller communities and in the South, in such places as Gwinnett County, Georgia.

Activists say it takes years of organizing to establish police-free schools, and some community members say

police-free schools aren’t a one-size-fits-all solution. But with activism and multigenerational engagement, school communities have reimagined and can reimagine safety without police presence.

Feeding the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Schoolyard fights, childish pranks and tantrums used to result in a visit to the principal’s office. Today, however, code of conduct violations can end with students in handcuffs. Juvenile and adult courts then become inundated with children who pose no real threat in their communities.

Latrice Johnson, of Montgomery, Alabama, can attest—as a former student and now as a parent—how police intimidate or react violently to students. Her son faced criminal charges after getting into a school fight when he was 16. The charge was eventually thrown out, but it created stress on the family. “Kids will be kids, but take the time out and don’t just try to send them to juvenile or suspend them. There are alternatives today,” she says.

Many students, parents and community members say school police have been ineffective. Studies have shown that SROs don’t reduce crime

but cause harm instead—including increased arrests, expulsions, physical restraint and the kind of family stress that Johnson describes.

Florida is one case study in the harm SROs create. There are more police in Florida schools than nurses. And the number of SROs there is more than double that of school psychologists and social workers, according to the ACLU of Florida report *The Cost of School Policing: What Florida’s Students Have Paid for a Pretense of Security*, a collaborative project of several social justice organizations.

The study found that “during the 2018-2019 school year, the number of youth arrests at school increased 8%, while the number of youth arrested in the community continued to decline by 12%.” The number of students expelled or physically restrained also increased significantly. This includes younger children too. Florida SROs arrested elementary-age students 345 times during the 2018-2019 school year.

According to the same report, there was no consistent evidence that an increase in SROs at schools decreased the number of behavioral incidents. In

other words, SROs don't necessarily improve school safety.

Pulling SROs into issues regarding arbitrary school rules is common—and it disproportionately affects students of color. Gwinnett County, Georgia, parent and activist Marlyn Tillman knows this firsthand. She says that in 2003, a teacher targeted her son for his self-styled clothing and engaged an SRO to enforce the dress code. Her son was suspended. Tillman sued the school district and, in 2006, settled the case.

Then Tillman and other parents organized to create the Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett SToPP) in 2007. While working with school administrators to modify the district's code of conduct policies, she noticed language that was similar to criminal codes.

“You're teaching them how to go to jail,” she recalls telling an administrator. “You're desensitizing them to being criminally involved. This is all part of the whole prison industrial complex.’ And this was when I was starting to do this work.”

The effects of this kind of harm on Black girls is significant. Recent research shows that the adultification of Black girls often leads to contact with police and entry into the school-to-prison pipeline. Tawanda Morgan, a former teacher who now provides diversity, equity and inclusion training for educators in Alabama, highlights this issue and hopes to obtain funding for additional research.

Pointing to the work of social justice scholars like Dr. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Dr. Monique W. Morris and Dr. Jamilia Blake, Morgan says Black girls are often left out of the conversation because, historically, Black women have always been brutalized, sexualized and erased. That is a reason to focus more on their protection.

Protection of the most marginalized students takes priority as communities rethink what school safety means.

Valuing Students' Humanity and Mental Health

Student activists often repeat the refrain, “Counselors, not cops,” which has become a national movement. Schools generally lack enough counselors or referrals for mental health services. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the national average student-to-counselor ratio is 424-to-1. ASCA recommends a ratio of 250-to-1.

Yet, say advocates for police-free schools, most behavioral issues are best alleviated with nonpunitive practices and the help of mental health professionals. “[We should be] seeking more restorative practices so that we can create more of a healing environment for students,” Morgan says.


Even parents who aren't completely sold on removing all police from schools see the value in prioritizing mental health services and alternative safety measures. In Birmingham, Alabama, Tyrone King says that, while he has no problem with SROs, community engagement could reduce the need for police. King, the father of an elementary student in Birmingham City Schools, belongs to a group of fathers who monitor schools in the mornings as their schedules allow. They also work to build rapport with principals and other school staff.

King says he respects police officers in his community but recognizes that they aren't trained to provide the types of support students need. And he acknowledges that police officers often evoke anxiety in students of color. “Most law enforcement officers aren't trained in that area or have no social work background, and some of them aren't even parents,” King says.

Latrice Johnson thinks schools should do more to address bullying and the mental health needs of students to prevent students from reacting in violent ways. “They would rather send your child to prison than get your child mental stability,” she says. “I feel

“You're teaching them how to go to jail. You're desensitizing them to being criminally involved. This is all part of the whole prison industrial complex.”

MARLYN TILLMAN

An illustration of a person's arm and hand holding a red book. The arm is dark brown, and the hand is holding the book from the top. The book is red with white pages. The background is a mix of orange and blue colors.

[the education system] wasn't designed for [Black people]. We were just included."

A Movement Is Born in Oakland

In Oakland, California, community members worked for decades to reimagine their education system with a focus on police-free schools. Since 1957, when Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) established its own police force, groups from the Northern California chapter of the NAACP to the Black Panther Party have opposed police presence at schools.

Recent opposition has come from Black Organizing Project (BOP), established in 2009 to create safe spaces for Black community members to address systemic issues.

During BOP's early years, a national "post-racial" narrative had formed following the 2008 election of President Barack Obama. But in 2009, Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old Black man, had been killed by an Oakland transit cop, which garnered national attention. Two years later, in a reaction to gang violence, Oakland city officials established gang injunctions, which restricted the activities of people identified as gang members.

Local activists argued that these injunctions would increase police profiling, violate citizens' civil rights and create an environment that would lead to more deaths.

"A lot of criminalization was happening while there was a mainstream narrative that, 'Oh, Barack Obama is in office—everything is changing,'" says

Jasmine Williams, BOP spokesperson. "While there was this image of progress in the streets and in the most impacted communities, our people were still dying at the hands of police violence."

Planning and Persistence

Already organizing against police violence, BOP members launched the Bettering Our School System (BOSS) campaign after the 2011 killing of Raheim Brown Jr., a young Black man, by an Oakland school police officer.

BOP knew that their fight could result in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline. They were not interested in police reform; they wanted abolition. However, they knew they had to accept small wins first.

They pushed district officials to shift some money from the police budget into restorative justice practices. They also created a complaint policy for teachers, students, parents and caregivers to ensure that school police were held accountable.

BOP's ultimate goal was to remove police from Oakland schools by 2020. In March 2020, they presented Oakland USD board members with a resolution—two months before Floyd's murder. The resolution lost.

After Floyd's death, BOP received an outpouring of support. They regrouped with parents, caregivers and students to implement 10 Days of Action: a campaign to get school board members and city officials to support another resolution to remove police from schools. "We amped it up," Williams says. "We really had to make sure that they felt the pressure so that they would vote right this time."

On June 24, 2020—after a nine-year struggle—the Oakland USD board unanimously voted to eliminate its 67-member police force. They also agreed to reinvest the force's multimillion-dollar budget in an alternative safety plan and other student resources.

Engagement with district officials, examining data and multigenerational

organizing helped BOP members better inform the community's push toward abolition. But it was an uphill battle. While BOP found solidarity with allied groups in Los Angeles and Denver, they had to work harder in Oakland to realize their vision of police-free schools there.

"People didn't think it was possible," Williams says. "People felt safer going for reform or talking about cultural and climate sort of stuff, which are all very necessary for the whole ecosystem. But abolition of police in schools was not necessarily a mainstream conversation or something easy for people to swallow in the beginning stages."

The Value of Student-led Efforts

When Nathaniel Genene began organizing around police-free schools in Minneapolis, some school administrators told him there were other priorities. But as the 2020 uprising accelerated in the city, Genene says, he had to do something.

"Every three years we would have this conversation of what it means to feel safe, how to keep students safe, how to keep buildings secure," Genene reflects. "Last year, it kind of became more, 'Are we going to morally align with the MPD or are we going to invest in an institution that is literally traumatizing our students day in and day out?'"

He and a friend from another high school gathered feedback from students in the district and collected more than 1,800 responses to an online survey. Genene and his friend presented their findings during the board meeting at which members ultimately voted to end the school system's police contract.

Genene's organizing had been done while students were at home doing distance learning. The strong response showed the power of technology to connect young people with a common goal. He later received thousands of emails from people around the country who

wanted to emulate that kind of effort in their communities.

Looking Ahead

For parents like Latrice Johnson and Tyrone King, questions linger about solutions for school safety. But like others who advocate for the removal of SROs, they agree that school communities must take action to ensure students' safety.

There are signs that the police-free school movement continues to build steam. Activism among students and the broader community has inspired new bills at state and federal levels. According to the Movement for Safe and Just Schools Map, dozens of schools, community groups and organizations are mobilizing to reimagine safety at school without police. At least 24 communities have passed measures to remove SROs.

Some members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have worked together to reintroduce the Counseling Not Criminalization in Schools Act (defeated in the last Congress), which would, in part, divert money from school-based policing to trauma-informed services. A bill that would remove police from schools has been proposed in the Maryland Legislature. Massachusetts has ended its requirement for police in schools. Similar local-level proposals are in play around the nation.

Jasmine Williams of BOP reminds us that creating a safe and just school community won't happen overnight. Small wins, losses and concessions will happen along the way. "These systems were built hundreds and hundreds of years ago," she says. "It puts you in a place to understand that this is not going to be a quick fight. And one policy isn't ... going to fix it all." ♦

Dillard is a senior writer for Learning for Justice.





TEACHING HONEST HISTORY

A New LFJ Resource for
Teaching the Civil Rights Movement

LFJ is pleased to introduce a forthcoming educator resource: *Teaching the Movement: A Framework for Teaching the Black Freedom Struggle*.

INTRODUCING THE 2019 ESSAY COLLECTION *Understanding and Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*, editor Hasan Kwame Jeffries points out that most scholars dispute the history that American students—and educators—learn about the movement. That story, he says, is what civil rights leader Julian Bond called “The Master Narrative.” Jeffries sums it up this way:

“In this fiction, the movement begins in 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court concedes that segregation is wrong. It gains momentum when an interracial coalition, inspired by the court’s bold action, engages in noble acts of nonviolent protest, ranging from bus boycotts to sit-ins. Dr. King leads this moral crusade and receives the unwavering support of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, who put the full weight of the federal government, including the vast resources of the FBI, behind it. It reaches its peak when northern whites learn the disgraceful extent of racial discrimination in the South and southern whites recognize that racial prejudice is morally wrong. Then Congress passes landmark legislation designed to end racial discrimination. Unfortunately, African Americans are dissatisfied with the remarkable progress and undermine the movement by rejecting nonviolence, shunning well-meaning whites



STUDENTS AREN'T WATCHING THIS FROM AFAR. THEY ARE LIVING IN SPACES OF INJUSTICE. THEY ARE AT THE HINGE OF OPPRESSION.

— JALAYA LILES DUNN, LEARNING FOR JUSTICE DIRECTOR

and embracing Black Power. Finally, in 1968, Dr. King is killed, effectively ending the movement. But thankfully, by that time, America had essentially righted its racial wrongs, thereby leveling the playing field for future generations and paving the way for Barack Obama.”

As Jeffries notes, this narrative is far more than an oversimplification. It is both untruthful and harmful in its untruths.

“Students aren’t watching this from afar,” explains Learning for Justice Director Jalaya Liles Dunn. “They are living in spaces of injustice. They are at the hinge of oppression.”

Students know the playing field hasn’t been leveled: The effects of redlining are still evident in the noisy fans that clatter in the windows of some schools and the well-kept lawns that stretch beneath the windows of others.

When we offer them a story about civil rights that glosses over the complexity of this history to pretend that the movement ended with all its goals accomplished, Liles Dunn says, “we are robbing students of their rights to discern the world for what it is and for what it has been—and their contribution to what it could be.”

That’s why Learning for Justice is developing a new resource for educators: *Teaching the Movement: A Framework for Teaching the Black Freedom Struggle*. Tracing the deep roots and many branches of the U.S. civil rights movement, this framework supports middle and high school educators in pushing beyond “The Master Narrative” to teach an honest history of the U.S. civil rights movement.

Based on the book *Understanding and Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*, the framework offers recommendations and support for teaching a more accurate narrative of the movement—one that recognizes its origins in the days of

Reconstruction, details the wide range of resistance with which it was met, encourages students to recognize the diversity of the movement’s advocates and tactics, and clearly locates the movement’s goals not only in political equality but also in true economic and social justice.

Teaching the Long History of Resistance

Temporally and thematically, *Teaching the Movement: A Framework for Teaching the Black Freedom Struggle* begins where LFJ’s *Teaching Hard History: A Framework for Teaching American Slavery* ends. The new framework opens with learning goals that specifically ask students to “describe the systems that limited Black political, social and economic power across the United States,” beginning in Reconstruction and through the early 20th century, and to “describe the ways that Black people and communities pushed back against those systems.”

Neglecting the long history of this resistance and resilience, “The Master Narrative” positions the civil rights movement as a time of rapid and responsive change led by an extraordinary few, rather than the culmination of decades of activism and hard work by countless people.

That’s why focus on resistance is critical. In *Teaching Hard History*, resistance is one of the 10 foundational “key concepts.” *Teaching the Movement* continues to trace that thread.

It’s critical, Liles Dunn says, that students get these “stories of resistance, defiant stories, stories of struggle, and victories.” These stories, she says, give students a space to ask, “How do we continue this story?”

Too often, histories of the Black freedom struggle hide these stories from students. For example, instead of starting after Reconstruction, as Jeffries notes, “The Master Narrative” would have the civil rights movement begin in 1954, with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Taking this date as a starting point does two things: It centers the Supreme Court’s role in the struggle. And it obscures the history that led up to the court’s ruling.

One instance of that history is that Thurgood Marshall, who argued the 1954 case, had helped forward the NAACP’s legal strategy challenging segregation since 1934. Unspooling history from the nine white justices who signed onto the ruling in 1954 doesn’t just push our understanding of the movement back through time. It also pushes our understanding out from those in power, encouraging us to recognize the critical contributions of those who too often go unnamed.

Teaching the Diversity of the Movement

When we move away from the “big names and important dates” idea of

history that informs “The Master Narrative,” we expand the frame around *Brown v. Board* to show students the Black families and lawyers who moved the trial forward, the Black activists and leaders who rallied support, the Black writers and editors who spread the story, the Black teachers and drivers and students and parents and pastors who answered the NAACP’s calls for justice with donations that would fund this work.

Recognizing the Black communities across the nation who worked together—and sometimes apart—for Black liberation, as well as the outsized role of grassroots activism in the fight for change, the framework pushes back against narratives that represent the Black freedom struggle as a single, streamlined, monolithic movement.

Teaching the Movement: A Framework for Teaching the Black Freedom Struggle also expands the geographic

and ideological boundaries established by the dominant narrative of the movement. Racism and white supremacy have never been limited to the South; neither has people’s resistance to them. That’s why the framework includes examples of movement activism from CORE work in Brooklyn to NAACP protests in Milwaukee, from coalitions between Black Panthers and disability rights activists in Los Angeles to the famous 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Instead of presenting one North Star on which students can fix their understanding of the movement, the framework offers a constellation. As a result, when studying the ways that the movement worked for economic justice, students can still connect their reading of King’s “Mountaintop” speech with “I Have a Dream.” But they are also invited to recognize how King builds on A. Philip Randolph’s work

fighting for Black labor unions and to compare King’s approach to the informative pamphlet on “Right to Work Laws” written by Bayard Rustin and César Chávez.

This expanded focus not only helps students better understand the events of the movement—it also helps them better understand its ethos. As an example, Liles Dunn cites the work of Ella Baker and her “political, radical, democratic approach to justice. She thought that everyday, ordinary people carry the power. She recognized that local autonomy is important, that people’s voices are important, that people’s stories are important.”

In *Teaching the Movement*, those stories take center stage. The framework directs educators to primary sources that center the voices of those on the ground.

As Liles Dunn says, “The people tell their own story.”



ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

The result of more than a year of collaboration among scholars and educators, much of the writing of *Teaching the Movement: A Framework for Teaching the Black Freedom Struggle* unfolded over the summer of 2020. As people across the United States took to the streets in record numbers in support of Black lives, the grassroots approaches and strategies of protesters illustrated the enduring impact of the civil rights movement, even as their ongoing calls for justice evidenced the work left incomplete.

Designed for grades 6–12, the framework is organized chronologically, with sections covering 30-to-40-year blocks of time from Reconstruction to the present day.

Within each historical period, you will find one or more **Summary Objectives**—broad, era-specific learning goals for students. So, for example, when studying the period including the 1960s and '70s, one summary objective asks students to understand that “following major legislative victories, the freedom struggle shifted its emphasis to address continuing injustices more directly.”

Each summary objective is followed by a series of more specific, content-based learning goals. These answer the question **“What else should my students know?”** To better understand how the freedom struggle shifted its emphasis, for example, the framework recommends students know the following: Dr. King focused increasingly on economic inequality and the need for structural reform in the late 1960s; new movements for Black arts, Black Power and Black labor unions continued to develop after King’s assassination; CORE and other organizations expanded their focus beyond the South; and much of this work continues today.

Beneath each of these points, the framework recommends one or more resources to answer the question **“How can I teach this?”** In this way, the framework offers depth as well as breadth.

Look more closely at a sample summary objective: Students will understand how the freedom struggle shifted its emphasis following the major legislative victories of the mid-1960s. From this, we can narrow our focus to one key point students should know: CORE and other organizations took a more national view. To help you teach this history, the framework directs you to primary sources from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, detailing NAACP protests in that city. It recommends the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project’s oral histories and other resources for tracing the work of CORE in the Pacific Northwest, and it highlights the Brooklyn Public Library’s resources for teaching about CORE’s work in New York City.

The organization of the framework means that you can use it in a number of ways. Those with the opportunity and administrative support can take advantage by developing a new curriculum, a course that takes a deep dive into the honest history of the civil rights movement. Others may choose to excerpt a section of the framework, teaching one of the historical periods or one of the summary objectives as a unit.

But you don’t have to teach the framework as-is. You can also use it as a reference, checking current curricula against the summary objectives and supplementing existing units as necessary. Even individual lessons can be aligned with the framework, with learning goals offering helpful context and recommended resources providing additional approaches for teaching.

While this framework was developed by scholars with expertise in this subject, we know you are the expert on your students—we hope that you will use this resource in the way that works best for you.

Teaching the Movement Today

The framework’s expansive, inclusive presentation of the movement stretches across the nation and back to the 19th century. It also follows the movement into the present day. Each section of the framework includes recommendations for tracing key ideas, accomplishments, strategies and goals into the 21st century.

These connections, Liles Dunn explains, don’t overcomplicate this history. They help students make sense of it.

“Today is so complex,” she says, “but [textbooks will] give me a linear history. It just doesn’t match.”

Jeffries agrees. In addition to editing the text upon which the framework is based, he also hosts LFJ’s *Teaching Hard History* podcast. The first two seasons of that podcast align with LFJ’s framework for teaching American slavery. Seasons three and four—season four debuts this fall!—align with *Teaching the Movement*.

In a season three episode about teaching the ties between the movement and the present day, Jeffries says that such connections offer students “valuable insights into the world they inherited and the one they inhabit. The challenge for teachers is how to teach the past through the present and how to teach the present through the past.”

In recent months, as the teaching of honest history has become more and more politicized, that challenge has come into sharper focus. This framework is designed to help you meet that challenge head-on.

As Liles Dunn says, students “have a right to discern the world around them.”

We cannot deny them that. We must have the courage to teach honest history. ♦



Learning Virtually Redefined

When the pandemic halted in-person professional learning, facilitators and trainers began imagining a new world.

BY JEY EHRENHALT ILLUSTRATION BY ANA SEBASTIÁN



“**[THE PANDEMIC] IS A PORTAL,**” wrote novelist Arundhati Roy in April 2020, “a gateway between one world and the next.” Last fall, soaring coronavirus rates cast a pallor over back-to-school season. As school doors shuttered, communities left behind their familiar worlds of in-person learning.

At first, the uptick in professional learning Zoom workshops, online lectures and virtual self-guided learning opportunities grew out of necessity. But in time, educators discovered an untapped wellspring of opportunities for greater equity and access. Almost overnight, online sessions reached educators not just in urban centers but also those in isolated regions and with limited mobility. Some had previously thought attending in-person training impossible. “Having an opportunity to take an [LFJ] PD is a dream come true,” wrote one Learning for Justice professional learning participant in a post-session survey. “I would never be able to take time off to travel to a larger city to attend an in-person workshop.”

Facilitators and trainers had begun imagining a new world. This world contained breathing room to contemplate the meaning of liberatory education. In this new world, educators adapted schooling and training for remote platforms—and in the process, redrew the boundaries of learning.

EXPANSION BRINGS ACCESS

The rise in virtual options meant many educators at schools with limited economic resources no longer had to contend with their communities’ competing priorities for anti-bias trainings. Learning for Justice Professional Development Manager Sarah-SoonLing Blackburn reflects on her time as a classroom teacher and how professional learning couldn’t compete as a priority for her school. “My classroom used to flood every time it rained,” she remembers. “So, [the administration] isn’t thinking about, ‘OK, what great social justice training can we get for people?’ They’re like, ‘How do we use our budget to fix this roof that’s been leaking for five years?’”

Many under-resourced schools with high teacher turnover rates reserve professional development for foundational teaching skills. However, with widespread remote access, educators could design their own professional learning priorities. Cornelius Minor, a Brooklyn-based literacy coach, says last year he engaged in the most professional learning of his entire career. “People can select the professional learning they want and [access] it à la carte, for free,” he says. “It’s really democratized professional learning.”

Increased accessibility doesn’t only benefit those on the margins. When more people can access a space or conversation, *everyone’s* experience improves. Disability activists dubbed

this phenomenon the “curb-cut effect,” after the sidewalk aprons they advocated for aided pedestrians at all ability levels. Civil rights advocate Angela Glover Blackwell later applied the term more broadly, and educators have observed it in this past year’s virtual shifts in professional learning.

Blackburn and LFJ Professional Learning Facilitator Kimberly Burkhalter witnessed the curb-cut effect in their virtual sessions, when an adaptation intended for a minoritized group brought benefit to all. To better serve attendees with hearing loss, they began using Google Slides’ automatic closed captioning in their sessions. While the facilitators initially did this solely for a particular group, educators without hearing loss reported on how helpful they found the feature. The pandemic’s constraints allowed them to spot gaps in their sessions’ accessibility they may not have known otherwise.

Virtual learning has likewise borne fruit in the social realm. In virtual sessions, attendees can forge connections outside of their usual spheres. Meeting thought partners from different professional contexts brings fresh perspectives and insights. Social justice educators feeling isolated can find solidarity grounded in shared passion.

“Some educators feel really attacked in doing the work, and it’s reassuring to them to know that there are other educators who are doing the same work and support

them,” notes Blackburn. “It helps remove some of that self-doubt that starts to creep in, because if you feel like you’re the only one, you’re like, ‘Maybe I’m wrong. Maybe what I’m doing isn’t the right thing.’”

While building robust virtual community is possible, it does require the right conditions and thoughtful design. Educators need reliable internet access to participate. And without the ease of face-to-face networking, facilitators must foster a shared sense of purpose. With Zoom fatigue and the ease of going off-camera, it can be difficult to tell how participants are engaging.

To prevent this pitfall, facilitators can accommodate a broad spectrum of learning styles using uniquely virtual features like chat and breakout rooms. “I loved learning the capabilities of an engaging Zoom,” wrote one LFJ session participant. “This is new to us. Annotating, breakout groups, the poll idea, it was all very engaging and added to the training.”

“Love this as a model of digital learning,” wrote another. “Chat, short video, breakout groups. All effective ways of engaging! These are the qualities of the meetings which lend themselves to retaining my attention.”

FROM ISOLATION TO INVENTION

For education consultant shea martin, social distancing only intensified the inherent isolation in their daily work, and they attribute this isolation to taking up the work of an anti-bias educator. “A lot of times,” martin says, “when we are teaching or working and doing really difficult work that’s pushing back against systems, it can be a very isolating experience in general. And so this increased isolation was just really hard.” martin sought solace remotely, reaching out to friends and colleagues Kass Minor, Elizabeth Kleinrock and Kelly Wickham Hurst. They brainstormed solutions

and, soon thereafter, Liberate and Chill* was born.

Liberate and Chill* operated as a virtual collective for equity, justice and anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) education—a collective that has grown since that early outreach among friends. Its mission employed three key principles: learning, community and continuity.

“The first goal was to ensure that people and teachers were still getting quality anti-bias, anti-racist professional development during this time,” martin explains. “The other piece was to encourage and create community networks of care online. And the third was to ensure that the people who’ve committed their lives to this work, like consultants, are able to keep the lights on.”

Liberate and Chill* offered modules on ABAR education, 10 Q&As with social justice educators, a BIPOC affinity space, an LGBTQ brunch, community groups like “knit and nurture,” and open conversations about education and justice. Hundreds of participants gathered on Sunday nights to lesson plan together, splitting off into subject area breakout rooms, then coming back together for video gaming, fiber arts lessons and the reassurance of community.

“It became huge almost overnight,” remembers Cornelius Minor. “There were hundreds of teachers coming together. That really taught us that people want to study beyond what their schools are giving them.”

The collective’s success demonstrated an important fact: Physical proximity is not a prerequisite for solidarity. In fact, when communities drop the expectation of geographical closeness, rarely centered experiences and identities can come to the fore.

For those with historically oppressed identities, this presents a precious opportunity, as seeing oneself mirrored in others is already too rare. In this way, virtual community

THINKING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM WALLS

Educators have responded to the pandemic’s limitations by constructing brand new avenues for collaboration. For Cornelius Minor, remote learning has allowed him to expand the boundaries of schooling itself, as class sessions were no longer confined to the four walls of a room.

Last summer, with indoor gatherings prohibited, Minor and his partner in all things, Kass, taught in parks and on street corners in socially distanced groups of four. “Rich kids were doing that; their parents were paying for pods,” Minor recalls. “But we’re like, ‘Who’s in the hood doing that? Can we, in the neighborhood, convene groups of people to study nature or to study really cool books?’ And there were people who were like, ‘You can’t do that. That’s not what school is. School isn’t outside on a corner.’ And we’re like, ‘Who said?’”

Teaching virtually, Minor traversed time zones to visit peers’ virtual classrooms. When he struggled through teaching a particular concept, a friend offered to drop into his virtual class so they could go through it together. “Now I go to people’s classes,” he says, “and I’m like, ‘Hey, how’d you do that book with your kids?’ And I’ll literally be in there with them and their kids, and we’ll be doing the book together. Then I run back to my Zoom room and I’m like, ‘All right, here’s how I just saw my friend do it, so here’s how I can do it.’ Professional learning doesn’t have to be a proper noun.”



“
As soon as the pandemic hit, there has been this really toxic discourse about, ‘When are we going to get back to normal?’ And that normal that we left behind left far too many people at the margins.

—Cornelius Minor

provides an oasis for soaking in safety and connection.

“Rarely ever am I in spaces with all of my people,” Cornelius Minor says. “That was a really cool aspect of it—where there was no need for the cultural translation work that has to happen, where we could just be. Even if we weren’t doing school stuff, we could just be.”

RADICAL DREAMING

COVID undeniably shook the social fabric of school communities to their core. And yet, there’s more to the story. Concurrent with the trauma and grief, the pandemic created openings for educators like martin to dream boldly.

When stay-at-home orders took effect, martin hit the ground running. They teamed up with colleagues to create a public space for Black educators to gather after the murder of George Floyd. They started a Padlet project for educators to process their experiences through creative writing. They also did a lot of thinking with colleague Cody Miller about queer kids who may be struggling at home.

“As soon as the pandemic hit and we knew that we were going to be at home for a while,” martin recalls, “Cody and I had a conversation. ... For some kids, school is their safe space and maybe home isn’t a place where they can be out or themselves. And

so I spent a lot of the early pandemic being worried for some kids who are not out, some kids who rely on teachers or friends to really be that network that shows them family.”

In September 2020, the two teamed up to start Love and LiteraTea, an online book club for LGBTQ youth to read literature featuring and penned by LGBTQ people. Over 200 students in grades 8-12 meet biweekly in three cohorts for online discussion about the readings. The students run the Love and LiteraTea social media account, and authors join meetings to talk with students about the books they’re reading.

The pandemic left many queer students isolated; for others, it only magnified a chronic sense of vulnerability and aloneness. By supporting LGBTQ youth to connect regardless of location, Love and LiteraTea reached so many of them.

FREED FROM THE MOLD

Virtual education disentangles learning from the confines of the physical classroom. It allows marginalized students and educators to connect in supportive learning environments. “There are kids who say they feel safer learning from home,” reflects Blackburn. “And I think that is something we should honor in multiple ways. If you feel like you’re an outsider

because of your interests or identity, you want to go to a school where there are other kids like that, where you don’t feel like such an outcast every single day and where you recognize that the world has a place for you.”

When it comes to traditional in-person learning, social justice educators agree: There’s no going back. Instead of returning to the status quo, they intend to keep reimagining how to best reach their students. Educators like Cornelius Minor celebrate this as a profoundly positive shift.

“As soon as the pandemic hit, there has been this really toxic discourse about, ‘When are we going to get back to normal?’ And that normal that we left behind left far too many people at the margins,” Minor reflects. “That is not a normal I want to return to. That normal was not OK if you’re poor. That normal was not OK if you’re queer. That normal was not OK if you’re Black or Brown.

“I’m all about thinking about, ‘What can we create?’ Blank canvas, brand new paints. What can we create moving forward? What can we create for students? What can we create for ourselves?” ♦

Ehrenhalt is the school-based programming and grants manager for Learning for Justice.

REIMAGINING DIGITAL LITERACY EDUCATION TO SAVE OURSELVES

BY **CORY COLLINS**

ILLUSTRATION BY **JIANAN LIU**

Misinformation and online hate are crisis-level threats to democracy and liberation movements. Digital literacy education must be among the solutions.

EVERY CRISIS AND INJUSTICE now live in two parallel realities: on the ground and online.

Misinformation and online conspiracy theories had detrimental effects on mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Dehumanizing online rhetoric and anti-Asian misinformation surrounding the coronavirus often amplified and inspired offline violence. Online disinformation campaigns targeted Black voters to suppress turnout. And years of disinformation helped foment an attempted insurrection of the U.S. Capitol building on January 6.

At every turn, online misinformation, misrepresentation and hate had direct ties to offline acts of violence and threats to democracy.

The scale is global. “Everywhere we look around the world, disinformation is a threat to society,” says Dr. Kristin Lord, president and CEO of IREX, a global development and education organization. “No matter what issue you look at, whether it’s violence and racism in the United States, polarization, health issues like the pandemic or the health of democracy—you can just go down a list and disinformation makes every public policy challenge harder.”

The scope of the challenge underscores the need to understand the roots of today’s online misinformation and hate—and how to counter them.





Experts say schools and communities need to update and extend their commitment to digital literacy* across all subject areas—in a way that directly addresses how information spreads, who it helps and who it harms.

What Isn't Working

The way media literacy is often taught has simple objective: to help students discern a “good source” from a “bad source.” These lessons often fail to provide students with transferrable skills they need to navigate today’s online spaces.

Dr. Joel Breakstone directs the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), whose Civic Online Reasoning (COR) curriculum translates skills learned from professional fact-checkers into classroom practice. He says, “One of the biggest challenges we’ve encountered is that so much of the existing materials focused around digital literacy are really outdated and can lead students dangerously astray.”

This includes checklists like the widely used “C.R.A.P. test,” which provides criteria for evaluating a source’s credibility. The criteria include things like credible URL domain names (.org, for example), which Breakstone explains can easily belong to a fake or biased source.

Curricula like COR focus instead on skills like lateral reading and click restraint that can help students evaluate any source, even if it externally presents as credible.

SHEG’s studies illustrate that these skills do make students better fact-checkers. But COR doesn’t stop there—and experts agree that it’s important to take digital literacy beyond the question of true or false.

“If we rely exclusively on a simple true-false measure of content, we lose out on the nuance,” says Dr. Alison Trope, the founder and director of Critical Media Project. “[We] potentially dilute or obfuscate the importance of unpacking

*SIDE NOTE

We use the term digital literacy to describe a holistic approach to cultivating skills that allow people to participate meaningfully in online communities, interpret the changing digital landscape, understand the relationships between systemic -isms and information, and unlock the power of digital tools for good. This includes media literacy. Terms like critical media literacy, media literacy, news literacy and more are not necessarily interchangeable.

and understanding the complexities of the media we consume, the ideologies they embody, and the way those ideologies are normalized and perpetuated in culture and society.”

Azsaneé Truss agrees. Truss is a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, researching at the intersections of critical media studies, identity, justice and power structures. She sees traditional media literacy as failing to ask fundamental questions.

“It’s very focused on what’s real and what’s fake, what’s objective and what’s not,” Truss explains. “I think it should be more about moving toward, ‘Who made this? Why did they make it? What systems of power does this enforce? What perspective are they sharing? Whose stories are being told, and whose are being left out?’”

Breakstone also notes that many traditional media literacy materials are not real-world examples or relevant to students—often in attempts to present “neutral” content.

“What we need to do is give students the opportunities to practice with the kinds of sources they encounter every day,” Breakstone says.

Peter Adams, the senior VP of education at the News Literacy Project, echoes this need. Those “authentic examples,” Adams says, “help students develop a deeper understanding of how misinformation works, the patterns it expresses over time and steps they can take to combat it.”

The Stakes for Students

Fostering those skills in students and their communities is essential to their well-being.

“As the disinformation scholar Joan Donovan has pointed out, the effects of disinformation and extremist propaganda are distributed rather than primarily borne by the people who create and amplify it,” Adams says.

"MEDIA LITERACY IS DOOMED TO FAIL IF IT IS A SEPARATE, STANDALONE COURSE."

DR. JOEL BREAKSTONE

Learning for Justice has tracked reported hate incidents that take place in school contexts. From 2019 to 2021, 35% of incidents happened online. Often, incidents intersected with surges in online misinformation, such as a spike of anti-Black incidents that coincided with concerted efforts to spread misinformation and fearmongering about Black protesters in June of 2020. Targeted students faced compounding harms.

It’s why “centering survivors and victims of hate ... is incredibly important in these interventions,” says Wyatt Russell, a fellow for American University’s Polarization and Extremism Research Innovation Lab (PERIL). Their resources focus on combating youth radicalization and recruitment by extremists. “We can’t just be focusing on the perpetrator and their needs.”

But students are at risk of internalizing these harmful messages. Part of expanding digital literacy means providing students with skills and

supports to inoculate them against extremist rhetoric and recruitment. This became especially pressing during a pandemic in which many students were isolated and very online.

With the Southern Poverty Law Center, PERIL produced a guide that offers strategies for recognizing signs of radicalization and intervening. The focus groups that informed the latest revision of the guide included educators, who stressed the need for digital literacy resources and restorative intervention strategies.

The consequences of inaction are dire.

“If no actions are taken, polarization can increase the potential for youth to continually be on-ramped,” Russell says. “These problems don’t go away, and that’s going to mean continual instances of hate and bias within our schools, within our communities.”

What Students Need

Research indicates that students need repeated practice to develop

"IDENTITY FUNDAMENTALLY SHAPES OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD."

DR. ALISON TROPE

sustainable digital literacy skills. The most seamless way to make this happen, experts say, is to teach digital literacy across all subject areas.

"Media literacy is doomed to fail if it is a separate, standalone course," Breakstone says. "If it is a barnacle on the hull of a bloated curriculum, it's going to be scraped off when there is a crisis or budget crunch."

It's also clear that for students to do better than the generations who came before them, they need to reckon with cognitive biases.

"This is actually very empowering," Lord says. "When you understand how your cognitive biases work, when you understand why you're reacting

the way you do and why you were jumping to conclusions and why you have this urge to share certain things, it actually gives you back some control and power and helps you make different choices."

These skills are important safeguards against online misinformation and hate speech. But conscious choices, historic harm and systemic prejudices can't be ignored.

Building understanding, resilience and resistance to those threats requires directly confronting them.

Digital Literacy Is Social Justice

When the Confederate flag entered the Capitol building on January 6, it wasn't carried by misinformation alone. It was hoisted by a belief that the wills of Black voters in Michigan and Georgia or Navajo voters in Arizona somehow counted less. Misinformation supported something more pervasive.

"Conspiracies and misinformation and disinformation played a huge role in what happened back in January," Azsaneé Truss says. "But I think the thing that people are glossing over, again, is that the real issue here is white supremacy. These people were motivated by white supremacist propaganda."

Trope is aligned in this thinking: "The issues have always been there because they are tied to unequal and unjust power structures that undergird our society and culture," she says.

The insurrection exemplifies the importance of centering issues of identity and justice in teaching students to navigate misinformation.

But historically, explains Dr. Stephanie Flores-Koulish, media literacy has "avoided, in many ways, a social justice or critical media perspective."

Flores-Koulish is the director of Loyola University's Curriculum and Instruction for Social Justice program

and the conference chair for the 2021 National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) Conference, which notably chose "Media Literacy + Social Justice" as its theme.

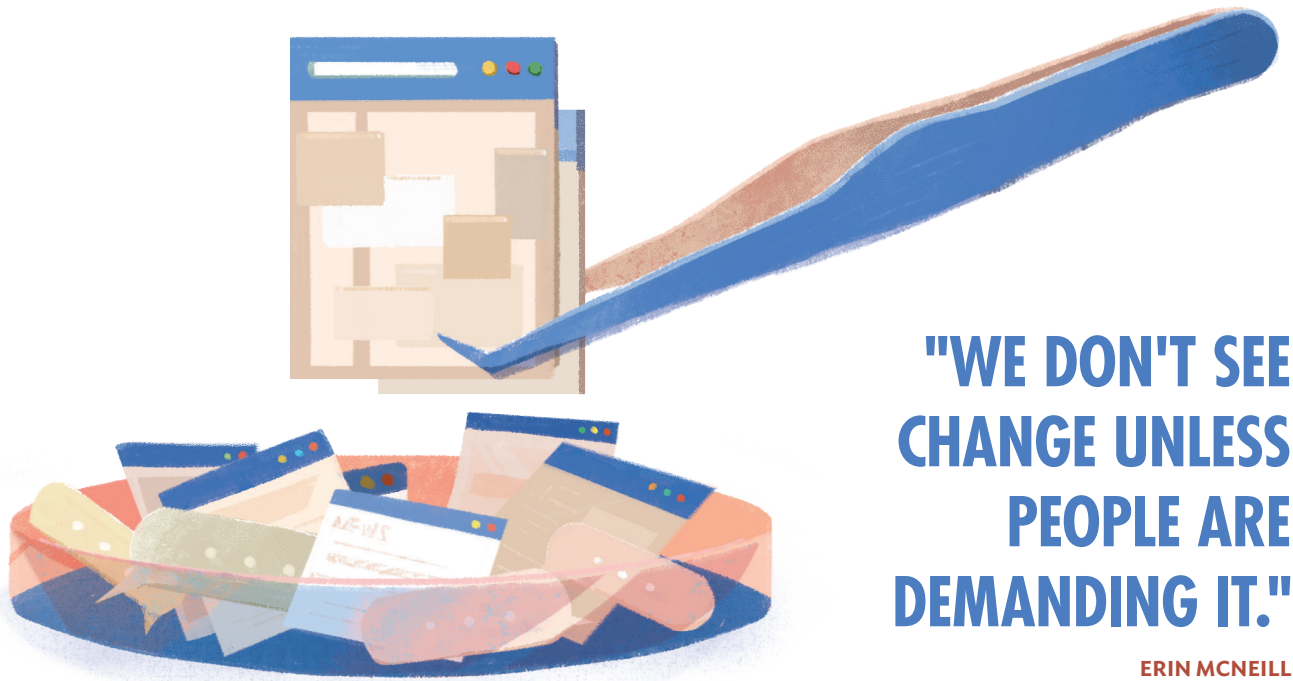
As a transracial adoptee, Flores-Koulish remembers searching for identity role models. When she didn't find them in her community, she turned to television. "And they weren't even there," she remembers.

A more critical lens on digital literacy can help fill those voids in a meaningful way, Flores-Koulish says. She recently worked with a librarian who noticed multiple books in the library glorifying characters of color leaving home to enter predominately white spaces. The librarian questioned what implicit messages that storyline sent. It's an example of the critical thinking that can create more affirming spaces. Flores-Koulish says it's "an eye-opening experience for the kids themselves so that they will see there's nothing 'wrong with me'; it's the way the messages and stories around me are telling me there's something wrong with me."

It gets right to the heart of work Trope and others do at Critical Media Project: "media literacy education that addresses not only misinformation but misrepresentation."

Critical Media Project creates sequenced collections of media called "playlists," for example, that offer students an opportunity to unpack how media narratives entrench stereotypes about identity groups, the power structures at play and how to disrupt those misrepresentations.

"Educators can't change [the misrepresentations]," Flores-Koulish admits. But educators can help students see the systems behind them. "And then, it's the educator's responsibility to provide students with different representations, with more robust, vibrant portrayals of themselves."



"WE DON'T SEE CHANGE UNLESS PEOPLE ARE DEMANDING IT."

ERIN MCNEILL

Centering identity and social justice gives students a fuller picture of how media and information operate.

"Identity fundamentally shapes our experience of the world," Trope explains. "We also process information and perspectives based on the way our identities are presented to us. We, therefore, need to critically see and understand how identity is also a frame used by institutions to structure and deploy power. With that realization and using critical media literacy as a tool, we can not only see our own biases and how they shape our worldviews but also work to challenge structures of power and the way they collectively and individually shape us."

Part of promoting that agency is allowing students to engage in media-making. Truss and Trope explain that media-making helps students understand how stories are made and equips them to critically engage with each step of the process, asking key questions about what was excluded and included. And it gives students tools for action.

"Your students have perspectives," Truss says. "Your students are living in

our society, and they have ideas about all this. I think they're fully capable of unearthing all these systems of power and understanding them for themselves if we give them the space to do that."

Advocating for a New Digital Literacy Providing students that space will likely require coalitions of educators and caregivers advocating for its importance.

"There are steps, big and small, that educators can be taking," says Erin McNeill.

McNeill is the founder of Media Literacy Now, a grassroots nonprofit advocating for policies that would make media literacy "an essential element in public education." She started as a parent advocate.

McNeill says educators can make a big difference by educating caregivers on why media literacy is important. And if caregivers lean into learning more about media literacy and related resources, they can play a huge role in advocating for it to district leaders and school boards.

"We're trying to get more of a grassroots army of people who understand

what media literacy is, recognize its value and are asking for it," McNeill says.

In a time when people opposing inclusive or robust education models are loud, local coalitions are vital to signaling support.

"It's essential," McNeill says. "We don't see change unless people are demanding it."

Despite the massive scale of the problem, experts say change is possible.

"It's doable," Lord says. She cites countries like Ukraine that have successfully integrated this work into schools and communities. Both IREX and Stanford's COR point to data showing tangible improvements among those who learn the skills. It's not a question of possibility, they say; it's a question of scale.

"This is not some unsolvable problem," Breakstone says. "What we need to do is to devote the resources, to take it on and to provide educators with the materials to do that effectively. ...

"It's just a matter of if we have the will." ♦

Collins is a senior writer for Learning for Justice.





We Can Create Change Together

Understanding key concepts about solidarity and the power of diverse coalitions can help students work toward justice.

BY SARAH-SOONLING BLACKBURN ILLUSTRATION BY SENA KWON

THE MORNING OF MARCH 17, 2021, I woke up with puffy eyes, a pounding head and a mouth that felt stuffed with wool. I'd stayed up too late the night before, grieving. Eight people had been killed in the Atlanta area, six of whom were Asian women, and the anger and pain had overwhelmed me. Those women looked like my aunts, like my ancestors, like me.

I fumbled for my phone and was surprised to find it full of unread messages. One was from my cousin who lives in New York, expressing her sorrow and her fear, reaching out to make sure I was OK, for some reassurance that she was OK. But the messages were not only from other Asian people. A multiracial group of friends and colleagues had reached out to say, "I know you are hurting. I know what this hurt feels like. I want to hold it with you. Together, we can change this."

This last belief—*Together, we can change this*—is foundational to the practice of solidarity, to working in diverse coalitions toward positive change.

Over the past year, we have seen massive movements for racial justice. Much of the focus has been on fighting anti-Asian and anti-Black racism, and these struggles have often been represented as separate fights, parallel lines that will never intersect. And yet, all forms of racism, as well as successful efforts against them, are deeply interconnected. Teaching about solidarity, including Black

and Asian solidarity, can help students recognize ways that they can work together for justice.

As educators, we can support students' understanding of what solidarity is and encourage their sense of ownership and empowerment around acting in solidarity with others. To do this, however, we'll need to lift up a few key concepts about solidarity that students should know. This includes teaching and celebrating the history of multiracial solidarity, recognizing with students the ways white supremacy makes solidarity challenging, and stressing for young people the ways solidarity pushes beyond connection or empathy into shared action for change.

Solidarity Requires Relationships

In California, Lailan Huen is Oakland Unified School District's Program Manager for Asian Pacific Islander Student Achievement (APISA). This March, in the wake of recent tensions and violence in the Oakland community—tensions that have long existed and have flared up in the past—Huen worked with high school students to organize a workshop series: *Black & Asian, Pacific Islander & SWANA (South West Asian & North African) Student Solidarity*.

The three goals of the series were "Knowing Our History," "Current Issues" and "Building Forward Together." In the workshop, students

shared and listened to each other's stories with the aim of building stronger solidarity between groups. They started with understanding each other's identities and their communities' histories, an intentional choice.

Huen emphasized the foundational importance of storytelling to solidarity efforts. "A big piece of the recommendations from students and our community," she explains, "is that we have to learn about each other through ethnic studies, through storytelling and sharing across our communities. ... That has to happen before we can really meaningfully build solidarity."

Seeing the ways
that white supremacy
works to prevent or
interrupt solidarity is a
necessary foundation
for recognizing
such tactics.

Deepa Iyer, a writer, activist and staff member at the Building Movement Project, describes solidarity this way: "Some people think it's sort of like a buzzword and it doesn't mean anything beyond a hashtag or a slogan. And that's our challenge: How do we move towards using our sense of connection and common cause with each other to create change, to build collective power, to transform our communities?"

Solidarity Isn't New

As the goals of the Oakland workshop make clear, understanding a shared history—building connections, recognizing what solidarity really is, and understanding the legacies upon which today's solidarity efforts build—is a necessary first step for students to take meaningful action. For educators, that means teaching not only the histories

of individuals and communities but also the history of solidarity movements.

In the last year, we've seen increased public awareness of social issues that affect all of us, with young people showing up to support efforts ranging from climate justice to immigration rights to Black Lives Matter and more. Media coverage has focused on how racially diverse these protest movements appear, especially when compared to similar protest movements of the past.

In news photographs of the Stop Asian Hate marches, for example, the faces I saw in the streets looked like the group of people who had reached out to me privately. And yet, even though multi-racial solidarity might be more visible than ever before, it is new.

One example of historical solidarity to highlight with students is that of the San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) student strike of 1968 and 1969. Led by a multiracial coalition of students of color known as the Third World Liberation Front, the strike built on the groundwork laid by the Black Student Union (BSU) at San Francisco State, the very first BSU in the United States.

This story is particularly valuable because it can help students understand some key points about solidarity itself: that solidarity is built on activism, that solidarity is a necessary response to policies that seek to divide marginalized groups, and that young people have the power and agency to create change through solidarity.

At San Francisco State, the BSU students had previously organized around Black studies and guaranteed admission slots for Black students. When Asian and Latinx students learned about the admissions guarantees, they wanted the same. But the college responded by saying the Black students would have to share their allotment.

In a moment that led to political awakening for many young people, the Third World Liberation Front showed that collective organizing was key to a fundamental shift toward justice, an effective alternative to a zero-sum model that encourages communities of color to fight for a scarcity of resources divvied up amongst themselves.

Solidarity Isn't Always Easy—and There's a Reason Why

"I think it's important to talk about the complexities that are created by white supremacy that put communities in a situation where they feel like

they have to fight for the scraps,” Iyer says. “That enables us to understand the root causes of why the divisions are happening.”

In response to the Atlanta spa killings, I saw some Asian Americans react using anti-Black language and invoking the model minority myth, a stereotype that places Asian people above Black people in a racial hierarchy. I saw some Black Americans react with anti-Asian comments, saying they shouldn’t put energy into pushing back against anti-Asian racism because it’s a distraction from Black liberation.

These responses show how, even today, we often find ourselves divided against each other rather than fighting alongside one another against a system that keeps us all in positions of oppression. Importantly, people on both sides invoked the 1992 Los Angeles Uprisings as justification for this mistrust and division between communities.

Students will have seen harmful language and references to historical divisions, too. When teaching about historical and present-day coalitions, it’s important to share real histories and challenge both the systems and the popular narratives that work to prevent solidarity.

When learning about the L.A. Uprisings, for example, students deserve the truth. They should know that Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old Black girl, was shot and killed by a Korean store owner, who was sentenced to only probation and a \$500 fine. They should know that this verdict—which treated Harlins’ life like it didn’t matter—came in the same month a jury found four white police officers not guilty in the videotaped assault of Rodney King. They should know that during the uprising, South L.A. burned for days. They should know that Korean-owned businesses were disproportionately targeted.

But while educators cannot gloss over the complex, historically fraught relationship between Black and Korean communities in South L.A., students should also recognize that there is an incentive for some groups to maintain narratives of division. They should know that parts of L.A. were on fire, and many people who supported the decades of discriminatory policies that led to the violence watched neighborhoods burn from the comfort of their living rooms. In short, they should know that there’s a reason why solidarity isn’t always the easiest, most intuitive answer to problems.

The website Solidarity Stories is a project of the Solidarity Working Group of the National

Getting Started on Solidarity

For educators looking to learn from and share stories of solidarity with students, the Solidarity Is project is a great place to start. A resource from the Building Movement Project, Solidarity Is “generates tools, trainings and narratives to facilitate transformative solidarity practices for movement building.” The site includes trainings, a youth leadership program and other resources. Their podcast, *Solidarity Is This*, is hosted by Deepa Iyer and lifts up stories of solidarity happening right now, spotlighting coalitions working toward immigrant justice, food justice, safer communities and more.

[Ifj.pub/solidarity-is](https://ifj.pub/solidarity-is)

Another resource for educators to share with students is Solidarity Stories, which includes videos and texts alongside recommendations for ways educators and students can use these resources. Each story includes key takeaways and discussion or reflection questions. Some of the featured stories are contemporary, to help readers better understand what’s happening right now, and others are historical. Using a blend of current and historical examples with students can help drive home the idea that diverse coalition building is not new.

solidarystories.org

For a series of short videos that spotlight both contemporary and historical examples of Asian American and Black solidarity, educators can check out the May 19 Project from See Us Unite. The videos feature examples of solidarity, including the 1970s campaign to repeal the Emergency Detention Act, short introductions to the work of James and Grace Lee Boggs and the collaboration of Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X. It even contains a brief account of Frederick Douglass’ protests of the anti-Asian racism that led to the Chinese Exclusion Act.

[Ifj.pub/unite](https://ifj.pub/unite)



Asian American Leaders Table on COVID-19 Racism. The site features stories of solidarity in action through videos and interviews with Asian American and Pacific Islander community leaders. Their resource “Crises Bring Possibilities to Build Together” includes an important counter-narrative about what happened in L.A. in 1992, one that recognizes the harm while also recognizing the role of white supremacy in encouraging that harm.

“The Uprising,” they write, “was the outcome of structural racism that kept communities of color in poverty, in tension, and conflict.” In other words, Black and Korean communities had been set up to be in conflict. And yet, the Uprising was also a moment of awakening for many Korean Americans who realized an alternative situation, one in which they could “unite in true solidarity with Black and other communities of color who share the same values and vision of an equitable world for all.”

Ultimately, Solidarity Is About Action

While it’s critical that students understand the history and the challenges of solidarity, they must also know that connecting with others and identifying common oppression is a first step to justice, not an end goal.

Seeing the ways that white supremacy works to prevent or interrupt solidarity is a necessary foundation for recognizing such tactics—so that we can take action together to dismantle it. Because action is at the heart of solidarity.

Unlike race-neutral ideologies, the concept of solidarity not only recognizes difference but also sees power in bringing people who are different in community with one another while working toward a shared goal.

Solidarity, Iyer says, is “not just, ‘Let’s learn each other’s histories and stories.’ That’s a big part of it—finding commonalities and connections—but it’s also about taking that knowledge and sense of unity and then acting for systemic change.”

She describes increasing awareness of solidarity this way: “I think when people rise up and they see others from different backgrounds doing the same, there’s a sense that solidarity is like a wave and it’s a movement, and people get excited about being part of that.”

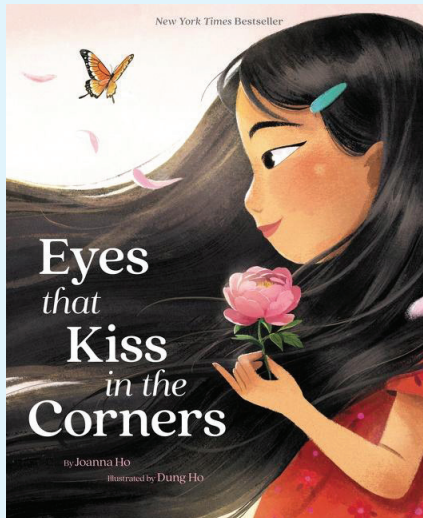
As educators, we can create more opportunities for students to share stories and hold space for each other’s similarities and differences. We can share historical and current stories of solidarity and counter narratives of division that we and our students might have encountered. We can show up in solidarity as well, not only in reaction to bad things happening in the world but to proactively strive for a better, more just society.

For all of us. ♦

Blackburn is the professional development manager for Learning for Justice.

What We're Reading

Learning for Justice loves to read! Check out a few of our favorite books that affirm identities, celebrate diversity and highlight justice.

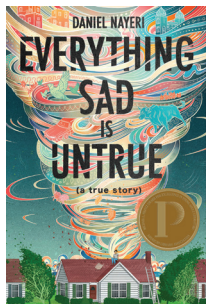


In *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners*, written by Joanna Ho and illustrated by Dung Ho, we learn about a child from an East Asian family who recognizes that her eyes are different from the eyes of the other children around her—and those differences are just fine! Unlike her peers, the protagonist's eyes “kiss in the corners and glow like warm tea,” just like the eyes of her mama, amah and sister. With a sweet departure from identity-affirming books rooted in struggle, this one simply celebrates, and that's a beautiful thing.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

“No existential crisis here—just heart-warming self-love and family pride.”

—Monita K. Bell, Learning for Justice Managing Editor

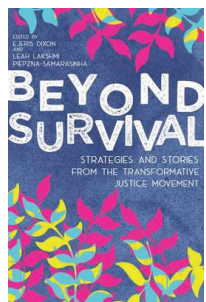


In Daniel Nayeri's *Everything Sad Is Untrue (A True Story)*, narrator Khosrou presents himself as a middle-school avatar of Scheherazade—a figure of Persian legend who told stories to spare her life. For Khosrou, a refugee born in Iran and now living in Oklahoma, sparing his life means holding onto his culture and memories. Khosrou interweaves legends, family histories and often painful, present realities. These stories poignantly illustrate the importance of reclaiming hidden histories and the hurt experienced by students whose truth is discarded—or worse, erased.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

“A gorgeously written book that prizes imagination, reclaims truth and rightly demands love for students who feel far from home or forgotten.”

—Cory Collins, Learning for Justice Senior Writer



Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories From the Transformative Justice Movement, edited by Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, is a vital resource that helps readers more deeply understand transformative justice and learn practical ideas for implementing it in their own communities. The collection of essays provides an intimate look into what has and hasn't worked in diverse communities across the country.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

“A must-have resource for any educator striving to co-create a thriving community.”

—Hoyt J. Phillips III, Learning for Justice Deputy Director of Teaching and Learning

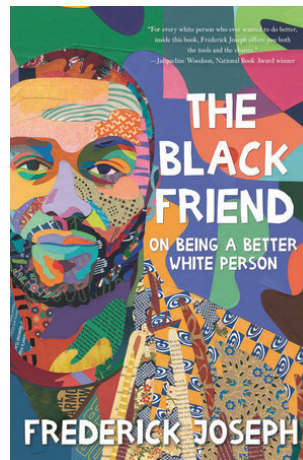


“Beautifully and authentically captures nuanced relationships and what it feels like to navigate self-acceptance.”

—Lindsey Shelton, Learning for Justice Marketing Coordinator

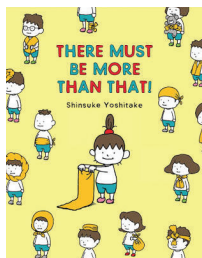
“A great guide for helping students understand the differences among race, skin color, ethnicity and culture.”

—Jey Ehrenhalt, Learning for Justice School Programs Coordinator



“Joseph allows a glimpse into his experiences and helps white people to do better as a result—we should all be so lucky to have a friend like that.”

—Colin Campbell, Learning for Justice New Media Associate



“Subverts the notion of either-or thinking in a way that is accessible and engaging for young students.”

—Christina Noyes, Former Learning for Justice Fellow

Shinsuke Yoshitake’s relatable story follows a girl whose brother tells her the future is doomed in *There Must Be More Than That!* Fearing the destruction of the Earth, she is comforted by her grandmother, who assures her that there are always more possibilities than we are aware of at any given moment. Gentle, lighthearted and honest, this story is sure to captivate young readers and provide ample space to discuss the future that we want to be a part of and steps we should take to get there.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

In *The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person*, Frederick Joseph shares stories from his own life to help white readers understand how race-related issues have affected him and continue to affect him as a Black man—and what readers can learn from those moments. With his infectious sense of humor and guiding hand, and with help from interviews with several artists and activists, Joseph assembles a necessary toolkit to help readers become stronger accomplices in the fight for racial justice.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Jovida Ross and Weyam Ghabdian’s *Turning Towards Each Other: A Conflict Workbook* is a transformational resource for any group engaged in social-change work. A collection of personal and group explorations grounded in embodied practices, *Turning Towards Each Other* guides us in examining what’s underneath our

habitual responses to conflict and their connection to oppressive structures we are so tirelessly working to upend. A critical resource for beginning to shift the ways we interact with conflict and each other.

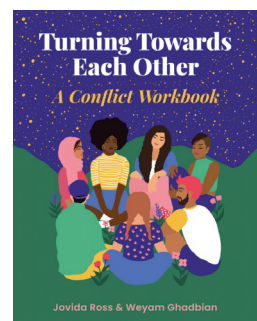
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Daddy Why Am I Brown? A Healthy Conversation About Skin Color and Family celebrates the rich tapestry of human phenotypes, offering a thoughtful guide on discussing skin tones with kids. While skin color may offer clues about where a person’s ancestors came from, we must get to know people to learn anything about their behaviors or background. Written by Bedford Palmer II, Ph.D., and illustrated by Winda Mulyasari, this book emphasizes the joys and rewards of taking the time to do that work. Pick up this book for an accessible conversation starter.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Crystal Maldonado weaves a wonderfully sweet, emotional and funny story about love, friendship and family in *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega*. Charlie is a Brown girl who loves her fat body even when things around her—including her own comparisons to her charismatic best friend—suggest her physical self needs transformation. Charlie is beautiful, charming and delightful with a measure of self-doubt, all attributes that inform her journey as she winds her way through the twists and turns of adolescence.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL



“Makes clear the pivotal connection between our inner work and collective liberation.”

—Christina Noyes, Former Learning for Justice Fellow



What We're Watching

Dim the lights and get ready to learn with these LFJ-approved films!

Drawn to You tells the story of a young girl whose true feelings about her identity come to life through her drawings. In the short, animated film written and directed by Eleanor Davitt, Emily draws two girls holding hands. Her mother responds negatively by tearing the picture in half and replacing one of the girls with a man holding a flower. Forced to conform, Emily feels rejected. She is later elated that the two girls from the picture have reunited—after they come to life and have a quick adventure through her room. From rejection to affirmation, this film captures the real emotions a queer youth experiences when discovering how to express their true self. (4 min.)

Available on YouTube
ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

Discarded in a dumpster and then saved by chance, thousands of photographs chronicle the lives of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco's Chinatown during the early 1900s. Glimpses into the lives of photographers Leo Chan and Isabella May unfold in the documentary **Vanishing Chinatown: The World of the May's Photo Studio**. Recollections from a number of people, including the couple's granddaughter, reveal the richness of Chinatown life. The studio's futuristic response to the Chinese Exclusion Act that kept families an ocean apart and McCarthy-era FBI interference

demonstrates that anti-Asian harassment in the United States is nothing new. Ultimately, this Ephemera Pictures production is a celebration of legacy. (27 min.)

Available on Vimeo and PBS
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

MLK/FBI sheds light on the ways oppressive systems sought to silence Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and quell the civil rights movement. The FBI created a surveillance campaign to reinforce a racial hierarchy in the United States—a strategy that was later implemented to quash the Black Panther Party. With interviews, original audio, documents and vintage footage, the film illuminates how white supporters of civil rights legislation and law enforcement worked to sabotage activists' efforts and maintain white supremacy. Through this damning documentary, students can observe how strategies used by those in power to suppress resistance are still commonplace, and they can realize the power of community organizing. (106 min.)

Available on Amazon and YouTube
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL

The Anti-Fairytale of Gender Stereotyping posits that the perpetuation of career choices dictated by gender norms should be a thing of the past. This animated short produced in 2019 by The Like Minded, a

U.K.-based production company, raises questions regarding whether or not notions of gender-specific careers are genuinely outdated. Animated characters who pursue their passions in the world of work contrast with the results of a University of London study focused on Millennials' gender-based perceptions to encourage children to envision the careers of their dreams. (3 min.)

Available on YouTube
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

"My foster parents told us about, 'Run if you see an Indian,'" Georgina Sappier-Richardson remembers in **Dear Georgina**, "and we did."

She reflects upon her experiences as an Indigenous 2-year-old removed from her family in 1942, placed in the Maine foster care system for 16 years, then returning as a 30-year-old to her Passamaquoddy community. In this Upstander Project documentary, Sappier-Richardson works to make peace with an abusive past and a severed identity resulting from permanent separation from her parents. Sappier-Richardson's discoveries lead to forgiveness and joy. With an accompanying viewer's guide, **Dear Georgina** is a love letter that remains relevant in the midst of recent state-sanctioned family separations. (14 min.)

Available on Vimeo
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

LFJ Discount
Get **40% off**
Dear Georgina and
the prequel, Dawnland,
for one year with code
LJDL40

Kaia SPEAKS UP

BY KAIA M. WOODFORD AND CRYSTAL L. KEELS

NOTE FOR ADULTS This true story addresses police killings of Black people. Ensure that you have classroom norms in place for discussing this subject with children, and be ready to provide support, especially for Black children.

AT SCHOOL KAIA felt like she didn't fit in. Even though her school was in the same Ohio town where she grew up, she still felt she didn't belong.

Not many of the other children who went to her school had chocolate-colored hair with tight curls and golden-brown skin like Kaia did.

I wish that I could just snap my fingers and have straight, sunny yellow hair and creamy white skin, like most of the other kids, Kaia thought to herself. *Then I wouldn't feel so different.*

She felt worse when she saw how people who looked like her were treated—not just in Bexley, her town, but all across the country.

On the news, she heard the names of more and more people who looked like her—people who were Black and Brown—who were killed by police. And when people tried to explain the reasons why so many people died in this way, it just didn't make sense.

Does this happen just because they look like me? Kaia wondered.

She felt horrible inside because it kept happening. It

hurt so much, but she didn't say so. Other people didn't say much about it, either.

Then one day it happened again. But this time, when a video came out and showed how this Black man died, Kaia's stomach ached so much. She knew she had to do something right away.

Kaia wasn't the only person who felt terrible. Lots of people, people of all races and ages, clearly saw that what was happening was wrong.

Many people across the country had to do something right away, too, so they marched in the streets where they lived and spoke up.

Kaia joined the people who were marching in her city. She marched downtown to the State Capitol building with all kinds of people—not just people who looked like her—who said this violence must stop.

Then something happened to Kaia. She now felt like she *did* fit in with the people who spoke up to say that, just like everybody else, Black and Brown people deserve justice.

Kaia no longer wanted to snap her fingers and become anyone other than herself, with her chocolate-colored hair with tight curls and golden-brown skin.

As Kaia heard the crowd grow louder, she found herself saying words she never said before.

"I'm Black and I'm proud!" Kaia cried.

She moved through the crowd gathered in front of the



building. She knew she had to tell people how she was feeling in her heart.

Kaia reached the front, and when she started to speak, everyone grew quiet to listen.

“We are mothers. We are fathers. We are sons and we are daughters,” she said, tears falling from her eyes.

The crowd shouted back, “Black lives matter!”

Kaia spoke about the need to fight for justice and the safety of Black and Brown people who continue to be killed by police.

“My life matters,” Kaia said with more tears running down her face, “and my voice deserves to be heard!”

That night, Kaia saw a video that someone took that day. She saw herself speaking to the crowd.

That video shows my real self, Kaia thought. *I care about what happens.*

Kaia’s friends and family saw her true self, too, and told her to keep using her voice.

“I was there when you were speaking,” said a friend. “You are strong and I am proud of you.”

The next day, people from Kaia’s school invited her to help start a student group, the Bexley Anti-Racism Project, to speak up against the unfair treatment of Black and Brown people.

Nearly 1,000 people came to an event to learn what the students had to say. All kinds of people shouted, cried,

laughed and were quiet sometimes, too, when the students spoke about racial justice. Kaia had never seen her community like this.

Then the crowd went together, back to the building downtown, saying, “Black lives matter!”

Kaia not only learned to speak up for racial justice. With the Bexley Anti-Racism Project, she helped other children like her celebrate their own beauty and speak up, too. ♦

Questions for Readers

RIGHT THERE (IN THE TEXT)

Why didn’t Kaia feel like she fit in at her school?

THINK AND SEARCH (IN THE TEXT)

What did Kaia keep hearing on the news, and what did she think about what she heard?

AUTHOR AND ME (IN MY HEAD)

Instead of keeping it to themselves, what can students do about something that they see and know is clearly unfair?

ON MY OWN (IN MY HEAD)

Kaia learned that beauty comes in many forms. Who would you talk with if you needed help celebrating the beauty that you have being just the way you are?



LIZZO (Melissa Viviane Jefferson) is a musician, singer, rapper and songwriter who celebrates self-love and empowerment. She says, "It's all about getting our flowers and giving each person their own space to be an individual and speak up for that individuality."

ILLUSTRATION BY KRISTLE MARSHALL



LEARNING FOR JUSTICE
A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER



BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL

Black Lives Matter at School is a national coalition organizing for racial justice in education.

In this era of mass incarceration, there is a school-to-prison-pipeline system that is more invested in locking up youth than unlocking their minds. That system uses harsh discipline policies that push Black students out of schools at disproportionate rates, denies students the right to learn about their own cultures, and whitewashes the curriculum to exclude many of the struggles and contributions of Black people and other people of color.

That system is also pushing out Black teachers from schools in cities around the country. Educators in the Black Lives Matter at School movement developed these demands for the movement:

- 1 END "ZERO TOLERANCE" DISCIPLINE AND IMPLEMENT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE.
- 2 HIRE MORE BLACK TEACHERS.
- 3 MANDATE BLACK HISTORY AND ETHNIC STUDIES IN K-12 CURRICULUM.
- 4 FUND COUNSELORS, NOT COPS.

LEARN MORE AT
[BLACKLIVESMATTERATSCHOOL.COM](https://blacklivesmatteratschool.com)



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TEACHING HARD HISTORY

Teaching Hard History covers the long and brutal legacies of Indigenous enslavement and chattel slavery and reaches through the struggles and victories of the civil rights movement to the present day. This podcast brings us the lessons we should have learned in school through the voices of leading scholars and educators.

QUEER AMERICA

Without LGBTQ history, there is no American history. *Queer America* takes listeners on a journey that spans from Harlem to the Frontier West, revealing stories of LGBTQ life that belong in our consciousness and in our classrooms.

THE MIND ONLINE

The Mind Online explores the critical aspects of digital literacy that shape how we create and consume content online. Discover what educators and students alike need to know—and how we can all become safer, better informed digital citizens.



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