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WEBINAR 9 SUMMARY: LEADERSHIP IN A NEW ERA

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A. Carranza,
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Discovery Education *Equity Talks* is a live webinar series featuring our nation's top educational leaders with a focus on cultivating equity and excellence. Moderated by Dr. Luvelle Brown – superintendent of Ithaca City School District – these 45-minute segments are designed to provide guidance and support to educators across the country and internationally who are struggling with issues of equity that, while always a topic of concern, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide civil unrest, and the need to rely on remote and hybrid learning.

Summary

This webinar took place on the same day that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that current presidential administration could not end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Comments throughout the webinar reflected on this as a positive opportunity for thousands of students.

After discussing what this decision meant for DACA recipients, Dr. Jackson of Chicago Public Schools discussed her optimism. She said:

I like to think my agenda is a positive one. It's focused on equity, the rights of minorities, particularly African American students and families, and I just feel an immense amount of pressure to take

advantage of this moment in time – how I see our work accelerating given our new reality, given the fact that we have many more allies in this work. There are many more people in this work who are speaking up and saying what they felt all along. We need to do better as a country. Black lives do matter. That doesn't mean other lives don't matter, but we need to recognize that African Americans are a group of people targeted in ways that others aren't. Schools are in an important place to eradicate those practices. I'm feeling there is a lot of hope, but we have a lot of work to do.

Dr. Cordova of Denver Public Schools echoed this sentiment. She added that these disruptions to the education system have the potential to help us think differently about what it “means

to deliver quality experiences for students and the disruptions that are created by the massive movement that we're seeing for social justice."

Similarly, Dr. Carranza of New York City noted that he was feeling incredibly optimistic because of the both the DACA and LGBTQ decision recently made by the Supreme Court, the latter of which made it illegal for an employer to fire an employee because of their LGBTQ status. He emphasized that the "new normal" needs to address the needs of all students, with special attention to ensuring equity for Black, Latino, and Asian students. He discussed how not every student has access to organized sports or enrichment activities, and how the district continues to work on resolving this problem. In terms of professional development, staff members have undergone implicit bias training and workshops.

In Chicago Public Schools, Dr. Jackson created an Office of Equity. The lead officer has a budget and reports directly to the CEO, so he is more than a figurehead. In fact, Dr. Jackson explained that he is empowered to do many things. The equity office had to approve their district's capital plan and strategize on how to reduce the overcrowding issue. Over the past year and a half, the officer has reviewed more than 150 policies at CPS to ensure that they are current, reviewing them through an equity lens.

The issue of trust was discussed during this webinar. Dr. Cordova described herself as the "face of distrust" because so many times families and students have not been able to trust any part of the society's systems, including school. Dr. Jackson said she tries to explain to her community why certain decisions have been made. She emphasized that one person could not turn the system around, but "you have to spend time working with people, educating people, making decisions that collectively make the system better."

Regarding budget issues, Dr. Carranza noted that resources allocated for equity supports and trauma-informed supports would be preserved. Additionally, he plans

on having nurses in all 1,800 schools. He encouraged the participants to look up the cost for incarcerating youth to see how investing in youth is much cheaper in the long-term. The other superintendents agreed that emphasis on SEL and trauma-informed programs would be the district's priorities. Dr. Jackson discussed how they have been advocating at the federal level to increase funding.

Participants discussed School Resource Officers (SROs) and the role of police partnerships in school districts. In Denver, the Board of Education unanimously voted to terminate their contract with the Denver Police Department. Dr. Cordova said that they "believe they can create safe environments for our students without the presence of police and without having students enter into the juvenile justice system."

Dr. Jackson discussed her own evolving views on SROs within CPS. She said that part of a school system's job is to "disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, and it starts with our discipline policies." CPS updated the School Code of Conduct to include students' rights and responsibilities up front. She wants students to be aware of whether or not their infraction warrants the discipline they receive. They have removed two codes that were "catchall" codes that data showed were used unfairly against African American males and females and Latinx males. Data shows that expulsions and suspensions were reduced by 67% over the past few years.

Decisions to include SROs in schools is a decision made by individual school councils. Approximately 73% of the high schools have them, but that is a decision made by parents and community members.

The panelists also discussed representation from various angles. For example, Dr. Carranza noted that school systems need leaders of color to let students of color know that there are leadership roles and career paths available to them. He said that in New York City, three students sit on a panel for education policy, and these students have full voting powers. Dr. Jackson said, "With community engagement, we must be

present, visible, and get out there as much as possible. We need to make clear what we are going to do, execute it, and remind people that we executed it.”

Pertinent Quotes

- “Systems don’t change because they want to, but because they have to.”
- “We have known the inequities that have existed in our systems for generations. But, finally, just maybe, there is a movement for the collective will, not just people of color, not just Latinos, not just Black Americans, not just Asians, but everyone. Let’s take this on. Let’s really take it on.”
- “We are at a time and place in our country when we listen to each other. The educators I work with are motivated by such deep beliefs to change the lives of students. We will figure it out because no one else is going to do it for us.”
- “I feel optimistic because more people are thinking about the things we educators spend time thinking about. We look for solutions. It’s the right time because it’s the right thing to do. I want people to know that when we take care of the least amongst us, we make our society, our world, our country better, stronger. There is going to be a time when the energy starts to fade. There’s going to be something else popping up on our timeline that we’re focused on. I want to encourage people to remember that this issue around race, this ugly part of our country, is one everyone in this generation can do something about. America is a great country, but we have an ugly past. People are willing to step up and do something. I want to encourage people to stay in this space because it’s the new normal.”

Additional Questions/Commentary

- How are your conversations about changing infrastructures to address a NEW vision/version of education (including distance learning) shaping out?
- What steps are you taking to ask traditionally marginalized group what they need or want to change?
- How are you engaging those stakeholders as opposed to prescribing?
- How will you leverage the community supports who showed up for the immediate needs and continuing the supports school districts needed?
- I hear a desire among district leaders to use this moment to move progressive, equitable education forward, but with an acknowledgement of the strength of various systems. How do you recommend district leaders move forward to forge necessary change despite the stronghold of “the way it’s always been”?
- How are you encouraging your school board members to make decisions that will dismantle some of the inequitable institutional practices in our schools?
- How do we make sure to keep students with disabilities at the forefront of discussions of equity?
- Bettina Love in her notions of “abolitionist teaching” argues against standardized testing. What is your stance on standardized testing and the extent to which it perpetuates inequity?
- How are SROs trained so that, when they arrive, they are de-escalating situations rather than escalating them?
- Wouldn’t removing SROs put them on the outside of trying to build connections with the community?
- How do systems avoid using PBIS/ MTSS to swap one deficit identity for another: how to avoid going from “bad kid” to “sick kid”?
- What structures are in place to affect the culture?

- What is the best way for essentially a lay person like me to convince the head of school here to move ahead?
- What intervention tools are systems putting in place to reduce infractions if students are not suspended?

Resources for Consideration

- Chicago Public Schools. (n.d.). *Student Code of Conduct*. <https://www.cps.edu/about/policies/student-code-of-conduct-policy/>
- Chicago Public Schools. (n.d.). *Student Bill of Rights* [PDF document]. WTTW. https://news.wttw.com/sites/default/files/article/file-attachments/1_SBOR.pdf
- Denver Public Schools. (2020, June 11). *School District No. 1 in the City and County of Denver, State of Colorado, Resolution No.* https://go.boarddocs.com/co/dpsk12/Board.nsf/files/BQGUND783ACE/%24file/Board%20Resolution%20re%20SROs_6.11.2020.pdf
- Denver Public Schools. (n.d.). *Family Resources*. <https://www.dpsk12.org/coronavirus/family-resources/>
- The New York City Department of Education. (2020, June 3). *Together for Justice*. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/togetherforjustice>
- The New York City Department of Education. (n.d.). *Return to School 2020-2021*. <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/school-year-20-21/return-to-school-2020>
- Sneed, T. (2014, December 9). *What Youth Incarceration Costs Taxpayers*. U.S. News. <https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2014/12/09/what-youth-incarceration-costs-taxpayers>