

Leadership ISD TCBSBM MASBAhablemos COVID-19 Conversation

April 27, 2020

TCBSBM President Ty G. Jones, Moderator

Leadership ISD, the Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA), and the Texas Caucus of Black School Board Members (TCBSBM) co-hosted a statewide conversation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic on Monday, April 27, 2020, beginning at 12:00 p.m. CDT.

The 100 attendees, in order by school district, then by company, included:

- Aldine ISD Trustee Conception Esparza
- Aldine ISD Superintendent LaTonya Goffney
- Aldine ISD Trustee Paul Shanklin
- Alief ISD Trustee Natasha Butler
- Atlanta Public Schools Trustee Erika Mitchell
- Austin ISD Former Trustee Cheryl Bradley
- Austin ISD Chief Equity Officer Stephanie Hawley
- Austin ISD Counselor Cari Land
- Austin ISD Trustee Jayme Mathias
- Austin ISD Teacher Monique Rendulic
- Austin ISD Trustee Arati Singh
- Austin ISD Principal Alphonso Warfield
- Ben Bolt-Palito Blanco Trustee Zelda Saenz
- Brazosport ISD Trustee Jerry Adkins
- Brenham Superintendent Walter Jackson
- Canutillo ISD Trustee Blanca Trout
- Clear Creek ISD Trustee Laura DuPont
- Coppell ISD Trustee Tracy Fisher
- Crowley ISD Trustee Nedra Robinson
- Crowley ISD Campus Behavioral Coordinator Stefanie Ward
- Dallas ISD Trustee Justin W. Henry
- Denton ISD Trustee Charles Stafford
- DeSoto ISD Teacher Crystal Perez
- Dilley ISD Trustee J.D. Rodriguez, III
- Fort Worth ISD Chief Equity Officer Sherry Breed
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Anne Darr
- Fort Worth ISD Supervisor Juan Daniel Garcia
- Fort Worth ISD Administrator Trevon Jones
- Fort Worth ISD Chief of Staff Karen Molinar
- Fort Worth ISD Equity Specialist Porsché Nickerson
- Fort Worth ISD Equity Specialist Jonathan Perez
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Quinton Phillips
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Jacinto Ramos, Jr.
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Norman Robbins
- Fort Worth ISD Teacher Leo Vaughns
- Frisco ISD Trustee René Archambault
- Frisco ISD Trustee Debbie Gillespie
- Gonzales ISD Superintendent John Schumacher
- Grapevine-Colleyville ISD Trustee Jesse Rodriguez
- Greenville ISD Trustee John Kelso
- Hays CISD Trustee Willie Tenorio, Jr.
- Houston ISD Trustee Judith Cruz
- Houston ISD Trustee Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca
- Houston ISD Trustee Anne Sung
- Humble ISD Responsive Services Specialist Nicole Simpson
- Hurst-Euleless-Bedford Trustee Faye Baeulieu
- Katy ISD Trustee Bill Lacy
- Lake Dallas ISD Teacher Amy Koch
- Lake Worth ISD Trustee Mac Belmontes
- Lancaster ISD Trustee Ty G. Jones
- Leander ISD Trustee Trish Bode
- Manor ISD Trustee Ana Cortez
- Marshall ISD Trustee Helen Warwick
- NYC Department of Education Asst Principal Adam Lustig
- Palacios ISD Trustee Fabian Marroquin
- Richardson ISD Trustee Karen Clardy
- Richardson ISD Trustee Kristin Kuhne
- Spring ISD Trustee Winford Adams
- Spring ISD Dyslexia Specialist Shannon Treadville
- Tornillo ISD Trustee Marlene Bullard
- Valley View ISD Trustee Corinne French
- Washington State Board of Education Member Mary Fertakis
- Wichita Falls ISD Trustee Bob Payton
- 1GPA – Jill Boyle

- ABM – Stephen Ferrar
- A.L. Berry Consulting – Almitra Berry
- Claycomb Architects – Richard Crump
- Ed Elements – Shelby McIntosh
- Edvents – Jaison Oliver
- Girls Inc. of Tarrant County – Becky Balarin
- IDRA – Chloe Sikes
- JG Consulting – James Guerra
- J.L. Powers & Associates – Jeffrey Richard
- Johnson Controls – Cheryl Aquadro
- Leadership ISD – Gregory Gomez
- Life Long Legacies – Cynthia Rocha
- MASBA – Louis Q. Reyes, III
- MASBA – Vincent Tovar
- MIND Research – J. Iván Alfaro
- NALEO – Karina Hernandez
- NSBA – Liya Ameiga
- NSBA – Valerie Carty
- NSBA – Mylah Howard
- NSBA – Kristina Jackson
- NSBA – Verjeana Jacobs
- NSBA – Keith McNamara
- O’Connell Robertson – Danny Cornejo
- Omega Community Development – Dion Sampson
- Page Southerland Page Architects – Jim Brady
- Raise Your Hand Texas – Matthew Hall
- Schneider Electric – Aaron Garcia
- Schneider Electric – Lizzy Putegnat
- Siebert Williams Shank – Geraldo Perez
- TASB – Kay Douglas
- TASB – Robert Duron
- TASB – Phil Gore
- TALAS – Stan Paz
- Tarrant County Democratic Party – Deborah Peoples
- Texas Christian University – Alejandro Mena
- Texas Christian University – Jazmin Rosales
- Texas Ed Tech Solutions – Jeff Dominguez
- University of the Incarnate Word – Patsy Newborn
- University of Texas at Austin – Angela Valenzuela
- Vocabulary.com – Jennifer Allen
- Vocabulary.com – Gregory Facey
- Walsh Gallegos Trevino Russo & Kyle – Christine Badillo
- Fernando Peralta
- Zach Thompson

Welcome

MASBA Executive Director Dr. Jayme Mathias welcomed all, introduced them to the features of GoToWebinar, and introduced TCBSBM President Ty G. Jones, the moderator of this conversation.

Panelists

President Jones introduced the panelists:

- Sherry Breed, Chief of Equity & Excellence, Fort Worth ISD
- Dr. Stephanie Hawley, Chief Equity Officer, Austin ISD
- Verjeana Jacobs, Chief Equity Officer, National School Boards Association
- Zach Thompson, Retired Director of Dallas County Health & Human Services

President Jones shared a definition of equity from the NSBA: “Equity is achieved when all students receive the resources they need, so they graduate prepared for success after high school.” Verjeana noted that the NSBA now has a deeper definition of equity which speaks of disparities and how every child can, will and shall learn. Sherry emphasized that equitable does not mean equal, though the terms are often used interchangeably. She said equitable means giving students what they need to be successful. Stephanie noted that the Austin ISD uses the definition of equity of the National Equity Project, which approaches the issue from a perspective of building on strengths and talents, rather than from a deficit mindset. She emphasized that equity is more than the equitable distribution of resources; it’s about policies and practices that create structural change.

President Jones asked what the greatest impacts of this pandemic are on students of color, communities of color, and socio-economically disadvantaged students. Summaries of responses follow.

Zach Thompson: I commend all administrators and educators for their work during this pandemic. I volunteer at a South Dallas food pantry, and I see how Dallas ISD is providing food to students. Health disparities are concerning. Blacks are dying at alarming rates. Many are not wearing masks, social distancing, and taking this pandemic seriously. This isn't a deficit mindset; it's realism. Community education is needed. Schools are stepping up with social programs, to ensure students can focus on studies. There will be lasting mental health issues after this pandemic. Until then, there's little we can do until a vaccine is ready.

Sherry Breed: We've worked closely with our community to take care of students' necessities. We fed students, then addressed the trauma. Our restorative practices team has developed SEL resources for parents and teachers. "School as usual" is gone forever, and we need to think about what we'll do differently. We're challenging one another to think about how schooling will be different.

Dr. Stephanie Hawley: We're super-proud of our district: We've mobilized school buses as hotspots, we've distributed devices, and our Equity Office is engaging grassroots leaders. This pandemic is a magnifying glass of conditions that already existed. When people ask me about equity, I say our whole district is doing equity right now. Equity isn't an office, it's a mindset. We're engaging the most marginalized groups through grassroots organizations, where leaders are "boots on the ground," with masks and gloves on every day. We haven't reached all our students, especially those who are transient. We're doing great things online, but not all students have access to online learning. Students are working, because their parents have lost their jobs. Not only are they suffering the trauma of missing their classmates; they're stocking shelves to pay rent. These events are having an adverse impact on our systemically-oppressed students. I was speaking with a student with asthma, who lives in an apartment complex with terrible air; this pandemic threatens the lives of such students. Our district is responding with creativity and resourcefulness. Our food services are now providing food to caretakers. Every day, we learn more about who we're missing: immigrant families, Asian immigrant families. Transportation is an obstacle: Families can't get to the spots where food is available. But we're knocking it out of the park in terms of trying to reach marginalized communities.

Verjeana Jacobs: From a national perspective, we've been following what's happening across the country, with weekly calls with state directors. A lot of great things are happening because people are stepping up to support students and their families. We've come to terms with the fact that we need to get beyond traditional ways of serving students. Pre-pandemic disparities are exacerbated. We're asking, "what next?" and "how will we catch up?" We're having conversations on lack of access to healthcare. *The Washington Post* shined a light on my community this weekend: Our wealthy, Black community has the highest death rate in the region. Our children are suffering, we need to dig deeper into the inequities, and have broader conversations on equity.

President Jones asked what the greatest disparities resulting from this pandemic are.

Dr. Stephanie Hawley: Students who have devices, internet access, and English-speaking parents who have the privilege of staying at home will continue to learn. Other students' parents are deemed essential, or they don't have devices or internet access. We'll see the differences. We have to look at where each student is and use personalized, blended learning. After this pandemic, devices and online learning will likely be a natural part of the way we do education. We need to bring the most marginalized to the table when we discuss what that new model of education will be. Some of our students daily lived trauma before the pandemic; this pandemic is now doubling down on them. It'll be crucial not to work with Black, Brown and low-income students as if there's something wrong with them. Even before the pandemic, we used words

like “interventions.” The babies aren’t sick; the system is sick! After this, we’ll need to build on their resilience. They are learning things during this pandemic. They’re learning how to survive. They’re learning grit. Let’s hear their stories and build on their strengths, rather than make comparisons and speak of gaps. Let’s not compare our kids to White, middle-class kids. Let’s look at the generational strength that Black, Brown and immigrant children bring to school.

Zach Thompson: The state is focused on funding and legislature, but we’re moving into hard economic times. School districts may be impacted. We need to educate legislators. They don’t want to touch the Rainy Day fund, but it’s past-raining now. We can’t let equity take a backseat due to financial shortfalls. I’m wondering if school districts will recoup federal monies for their COVID support services. Pockets of Dallas lack internet access. There’s a communications gap. It comes down to money: The governor is opening Texas to bring in sales tax; we need to make sure we’re not left out when the money is divvied up.

Verjeana Jacobs: We need to constantly push the intentional allocation of resources. If we weren’t paying attention to that before, we definitely need to do it now. No relief monies, for instance, have gone to erate or broadband access—which is what we most need. Trauma-informed practices and SEL can’t be seen as extra programs; they must be part of the fabric of how we do business. Politics are local, and we need to make sure we’re intentionally allocating resources at the local level.

Sherry Breed: This pandemic is highlighting disparities. Hopefully, the pandemic will change conversations on equity. How will we make sure our students have access to what they need? We need to ask our communities: What do you need when this pandemic is over? We think we know, but sometimes we come from a place of Whiteness. So we’re reaching out to the community, listening, and educating them on the need to take this pandemic seriously. We’re helping them with SNAP and paying utilities.

Verjeana Jacobs: The lack of trust is real, so we have a greater responsibility to educate and bring people along.

President Jones asked for suggestions for policies and practices both during and after this pandemic.

Dr. Stephanie Hawley: You can’t change mindsets without giving people tools. We’ve found this pandemic isn’t changing minds, and, to use Ms. Breed’s term, some people are doubling down on Whiteness. Leadership development for equity has to be an ongoing part of our culture. Because people need tools, our office has been developing decision-making tools. We need to ask ourselves whether we’ve engaged in equity or charity. If we’re engaged in an emergency charity, we’ll go back to the same mindset afterward, and we won’t change policies. If I don’t see equity in your policies, budget and strategic plan, then you’re doing some real nice things because you feel bad. Every district must put in place leadership development for racial equity and look anti-racism in the face. “Implicit bias” is a soft word, allowing people to skate around the issue. Our systems are showing us racist outcomes. We need to look at our policies. After this pandemic, we need to make sure our teachers have culturally-sustaining pedagogy, so that we don’t do damage. Do you have a policy to make sure all your Title I schools have what they need, including experienced teachers? Or are we sending the inexperienced newbies? To make sure kids have the most experienced and culturally-proficient teachers and leaders—that’s a system-changer. We have to change systems and mindsets as we rebuild trust in big systems that haven’t served people well. If we don’t do that, we’ll slip right back into old habits. We’ll feel like we’re doing equity, and we’ll call it “equity,” but it’s just charity and feeling bad—and that’s not useful for children. We need people to set high standards and build on their strengths—but we need to build that into policy.

Zach Thompson: We'll also need to do better at pandemic planning between school districts and our local health departments.

Verjeana Jacobs: 80% of our U.S. teachers are White females. 78% of school board members are White males, with an average age of 59 and an average income of over \$100,000. We all need to realize who's sitting in the seats making decisions. We have to make sure the decisions being made are in the best interest of children. We have to have policies around cultural competence, SEL and trauma-informed practices. We also need to get past traditional ways of teaching, consider what children need, and stop belittling children for how they show up in the classroom.

Sherry Breed: Fort Worth ISD was one of the first districts to develop a racial equity policy. Four years later, many mindsets haven't changed. After this pandemic, we need to look at our policy, be bold and unapologetic, and have frank conversations on race, inequities and lessons learned from this pandemic.

Q&A

Stan Paz: What can districts do to bridge the connectivity gap?

- Sherry: Partner and see what other districts are doing; don't reinvent the wheel.
- Stephanie: Connectivity goes beyond technology; genuine relationships with students are important. We need to see devices and internet connectivity as fundamental educational rights.
- Zach: It's 2020; why do we still have places where students can't access the internet?

Deborah Peoples: What do you see as the model for education going forward?

- Verjeana: One size doesn't fit all. We need to figure out what each student needs to be successful, and give it to him/her. We must meet children where they are. Talk to the community, get to know what students need, and adjust your budget accordingly. Stop voting on budgets that do not align with what students need.
- Stephanie: Personalized, blended learning.
- Sherry: Ensure that virtual learning is accessible to all students.
- Zach: We'll have another pandemic, so we might as well prepare the virtual learning now.

Kay Douglas: We're in the middle of our 2020 U.S. Census; how might we ensure the necessary allocation of resources for an accurate census?

- Stephanie: We're pushing the census in Austin because of its phenomenal impact on future funding, and our Black and Brown communities are undercounted.
- Sherry: We need to have conversations with the community on the importance of it, and offer to assist.

Chloe Sikes: What do you recommend for advocates, to help school board and district leaders to transition from superficial understandings of equity, toward transformative approaches to systemically embedding racial equity in their work?

- Stephanie: It's hard for leaders to humble themselves, to realize we're engaged in systemic inequities. We need to help people understand the difference between systemic racism and personal racism. We need to talk about structures and systems and history. We need to talk about how Black and Brown people in power benefit from the system. As equity officers, we try to do it with love and persistence and without shaming people. We need to help them understand that we're producing inequitable outcomes by race, so something in the system needs to be studied. Charity is not equity. We won't dismantle a 500-year-old problem overnight; this pandemic gives us the opportunity to take everything down and rebuild from an equity perspective, rather than add equity to the backside of the house.

- Sherry: Fort Worth ISD has been engaged in systemic racial equity transformation for four years, and our Board has established a Racial Equity Committee. We're listening to the community and looking at a number of things.
- Zach: Like our school districts and corporate America, we're not seeing Blacks in the media in response to this pandemic—except for Black ministers.
- Ty: Reach out to your local elected officials; they want to hear from you about problems and potential solutions.

A.S.: What metrics would you recommend districts use to guide equitable academics, social emotional health and implementation during this pandemic?

- Sherry: We've been working on a tool to measure equitable practices and mindsets.
- Stephanie: We have an equity framework. People often rush to measure things and show progress, without paying attention to the whole human being. We have a 10-point equity framework that we've put together with our community during the past eight months; that will help us develop metrics that make sense. In the past, we've had lower standards for Black and Brown students; that's not equity. Any metrics must be developed through an equity framework.
- Verjeana: When we do continuing education with school boards, we talk about intentional allocation of resources, curriculum, effective teaching, and safe/supportive schools. There are data points around all these. If only Black and Brown children are suspended and expelled, you should be asking very specific questions. We need to identify and eradicate disparities.

What significant budget line items are you advocating for in response to COVID-19?

- Stephanie: Invest in high-quality, experienced, culturally-proficient Black and Brown teachers with an SEL background, so students can see themselves in the front of their classrooms.
- Zach: If they don't treat you right, they can't teach you right. We need counseling and support services. We need African American and Hispanic leadership involved and committed to work with our communities.
- Sherry: We need teachers with a heart for building relationships and bringing culturally-relevant practices into their lessons. We also need to focus on the social-emotional needs of our students.

Adjournment

The conversation concluded at 12:59 p.m.

Meeting Data

This conversation was advertised in MASBA eblasts to over 6,400 recipients each. We also spread word of this conversation through social media (Twitter & Facebook). 95 people attended, not including organizers and panelists. The meeting attendance, as tracked every five minutes, follows. Dr. Mathias logged into GoToWebinar at 11:46 a.m. and concluded the meeting at 1:02 p.m. More than 60 attendees were present for the conversation from 12:11 to 1:00 p.m.

