

Leadership ISD TCBSBM MASBAhablemos COVID-19 Conversation

May 4, 2020

MASBA Vice President Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca, 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, May 4, 2020, beginning at 12:00 p.m. CDT.

The 72 attendees, in order by school district, then by company, included:

- Alief ISD Trustee Natasha Butler
- Amarillo ISD Former Trustee John Betancourt
- Austin ISD Trustee Jayme Mathias
- Austin ISD Teacher Monique Rendulic
- Austin ISD Trustee Arati Singh
- Canutillo ISD Trustee Armando Rodriguez
- Clear Creek ISD Trustee Laura DuPont
- Crowley ISD Trustee Nedra Robinson
- Dallas ISD Trustee Karla Guadalupe Garcia
- Dallas ISD Teacher Amy Koch
- Dilley ISD Trustee J.D. Rodriguez, III
- Dripping Springs ISD Trustee Joanna Day
- El Paso ISD Superintendent Juan Cabrera
- Fabens ISD Superintendent Veronica Vijil
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Jacinto Ramos, Jr.
- Frisco ISD Trustee Debbie Gillespie
- Garland ISD Trustee Linda Griffin
- Gonzales ISD Superintendent John Schumacher
- Grapevine-Colleyville ISD Trustee Jesse Rodriguez
- Greenville ISD Trustee John Kelso
- Hays CISD Trustee Willie Tenorio, Jr.
- Houston ISD Assistant Principal Matthew Connor
- Houston ISD Trustee Judith Cruz
- Houston ISD Trustee Sue Deigaard
- Houston ISD Trustee Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca
- Houston ISD Trustee Dani Hernandez
- Houston ISD Trustee Anne Sung
- Kenedy ISD Trustee Demetrio Garcia
- Klein ISD Trustee Doug James
- Lake Worth ISD Superintendent Rose Mary Neshyba
- Lancaster ISD Trustee Ty G. Jones
- Leander ISD Trustee Trish Bode
- North East ISD Trustee Sandy Hughey
- Palacios ISD Trustee Fabian Marroquin
- Richardson ISD Trustee Jean Bono
- San Felipe-Del Rio CISD Trustee Raymond Meza
- Southwest ISD Trustee Florinda Bernal
- Valley View ISD Trustee Corinne French
- Washington State Board of Education Member Mary Fertakis
- 1GPA – Jill Boyle
- Amplify – Paul Griffin
- Arizona State University – Carrie Sampson
- BuyBoard – Angel Magallanes
- Cityscape Schools – Elda Rojas
- Claycomb Architects – Francis Zordilla
- Houston Community College – John Hansen
- Houston Federation of Teachers – Ruth Kravetz
- IDRA – Ana Ramon
- IDRA – Chloe Sikes
- Johnson Controls – Cheryl Aquadro
- Leadership ISD – Gregory Gomez
- Life Long Legacies – Cynthia Rocha
- MASBA – Vincent Tovar
- NALEO – Karina Hernandez
- National Education Association – Andrea Guinta
- Page Southerland Page Architects – Jim Brady
- Progressive Roofing – JJ Eusay
- Schneider Electric – Lizzy Putegnat
- Sodexo – Eddie Noriega
- TASB – Kay Douglas
- TASB – Robert Duron
- TASB – Phil Gore
- TALAS – Stan Paz
- Universidade de Passo Fundo – Denise Tatim
- University of the Incarnate Word – Patsy Newborn
- University of Kentucky – Julian Vasquez-Heilig
- University of Texas at Austin – Olivia Johnson

- Vocabulary.com – Jennifer Allen
- Walsh Gallegos Trevino Russo & Kyle – Henry Bostwick
- Westwind Education Policy – Circe Stumbo
- Antonio Ellis
- Zach Thompson

### Welcome

MASBA President Jacinto Ramos, Jr. welcomed all, introduced them to the features of GoToWebinar, and introduced MASBA Vice President Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca, the moderator of this conversation.

### Panelists

Vice President Flynn Vilaseca introduced the panelists:

- Dr. Carrie Sampson, Arizona State University
- Dr. Julian Vasquez-Heilig, University of Kentucky

Holly: What research work are you most proud of?

Carrie: I researched the role of school boards in the desegregation of Southern Nevada. I looked at policies & practices for English Language Learners. It's not optimistic: School boards confront numerous challenges & barriers. A more optimistic piece I wrote is, "Putting the Public Back in Public Education: Community Advocacy & Educational Leadership under ESSA." We studied major factors for pushing forward equity by three school boards in three states. The major factor was the reaction of school boards to community advocacy. Some of those community advocates became school board members and pushed for change. In that work, I offered concrete recommendations to school board members on leveraging community advocacy.

Julian: I got into this work because of my passion for education as the compass of democracy: The work we do is key for a vibrant democracy. I'm driven to serve underserved students. At a conference in Italy, many thought they needed to create their own "No Child Left Behind." I was flummoxed by this, since my experiences led me to believe we need a new approach to accountability: community-based accountability, with multiple measures of formative & summative assessment. In 2012, I created a working group at UT Austin, and we submitted our recommendations to Linda Darling Hammond, who shared them with a California legislator. Community-based accountability is now the law in California. It's a bottom-up approach to accountability, post-NCLB. It's in pilot stages in Texas. Education reform doesn't have to be about privatization. We can implement community-based, community-relevant, community-engaged policies.

Holly: Given this pandemic, what types of policies and regulations would be most impactful for our students & communities?

Julian: In Texas, we need to be concerned about school finance. During the last recession, education was cut by \$7 billion. Only recently did Texas begin to return to pre-recession levels of funding, if you don't account for inflation. We shouldn't let the brunt of this pandemic fall on the shoulders of our children. Many districts previously stepped back from online pedagogy, to focus on in-person delivery of education. We need to help teachers deliver curriculum and pedagogy in alternative modes. We need to think long-term, since this pandemic will likely last one to two years.

Carrie: It'll be key to fight back against budget cuts, which will be devastating for our schools. We need to reimagine how to co-create educational opportunities with families and communities. Here in Arizona, districts are reaching out to make sure kids have received technology and they're inundating them with assignments, but they're not reaching out to see how families are doing and whether kids have basic needs met. We need to ask how we're managing this and whether we're co-creating a curriculum that is humanizing and responsive to present needs. We need to formulate policies and practices that really

engage our families and our communities. We need to partner with higher education institutions, to figure out online instruction; they've done online learning for a long time.

Holly: Do you recommend scaling up initiatives outside of the health & safety?

Julian: When times get tough, families have to cut their budgets. With charter schools, we're funding two separate systems of education—and three with vouchers. We're funding a separate set of privately-managed schools. It's an inefficient use of funds. We can't afford to scale up with "school choice" right now; we can't afford to fund two or three separate systems of education.

Carrie: It's important to consider the health & safety concerns of our kids right now—and our families and their communities. Everyone's working under limited capacity, and my research on school boards showed that school boards tend to react: to federal & state policy, and to community advocacy. We do well to ask how we might be proactive, rather than simply continuing the same initiatives. We need to think about what education will look like in one to five years, and we need to prioritize equity. Scaling up should be a priority and part of proactively planning.

Julian: We have to make sure we're not exacerbating inequities. Before this crisis, iPads and high-speed internet access were luxuries; now they're key to educating our children. I'm not suggesting that all districts go out and buy iPads; Los Angeles Unified took a heat for that four to six years ago. But we need to think very carefully about how our current mode of learning can potentially exacerbate inequalities and how we'll address those ongoing challenges.

Holly: What can we do to be stronger, more resilient, and focused on equity, given the constraints and many unknowns in the national rhetoric on public education?

Julian: We need to elect school board members that are engaged in their communities, and we have to hold each other accountable. We have to uphold values, even if there's a political cost for our difficult decisions. We need to select superintendents who can build consensus within communities, instead of simply ignore the voices of communities. It takes a different kind of leadership. We need to think about what kind of leaders we need in this era.

Carrie: My work suggests that we need to create pipelines for school board members: that they be representative of and engaged in their communities, that they have equity as a priority. Being a school board member is extremely time-intensive, often voluntary, and with hundreds of hours-long meetings. How can we have more mothers of color from working class communities, who have lived these inequities? School board members tend to be privileged and retired, with flexible schedules. How can we bring more voices to the table? How can we expand the pipeline?

Julian: We have to be careful about the coalitions we build, who we trust, and who we're empowered by. We need to remake the coalition enjoyed by teachers and academics in the 1960's and 1970's. Communities are craving alternatives for children of color; we need to form coalitions for innovative ideas. That's why the privatization of education has risen to prominence in the last 30 years. In Miami Dade, the district is innovating, and those alternatives happen within the district. Houston has created magnets. There's a small school movement in New York City.

Holly: As we navigate this pandemic, what should board members and administrators not lose sight of?

Julian: We have to better tell the stories of our schools, our students & their families, our educators. There's often so much negativity around public education and achievement gaps. We've been under attack for the last 10 years. The ongoing critique of educators leads to teacher shortages. We need to work with folks who can tell our story to different communities—through social media and traditional media.

Carrie: My second-grade daughter's class has a Google Hangout every morning. She doesn't want to do it, and I have to push her every day. What I'm hearing in those hangouts is pretty disappointing. The interactions are not validating. The most exciting thing she did was enjoy a 30-minute virtual lunch

with her teacher. Relationships and feeling validated are important. When this pandemic broke out, a former social studies teacher in Sacramento put together “Teaching for Revolutionary Minds,” a Black-centered social studies curriculum. Students learn Black history, and they feel validated. Board members and district leaders need to prioritize making these spaces and connecting with students, over assembling pre-packaged worksheets and videos. Some districts in Arizona are telling teachers not to contact the parents; that creates barriers. This should be resolved through policy and practice.

Julian: In Texas, Mexican American Studies passed the SBOE last year. I also believe Texas’ Black History courses are the first in the nation. Research out of Stanford shows that kids of color feel more engaged with school when they learn about their history and ancestors. Ethnic studies provides us the opportunity to improve our graduation rates and decrease our dropout rates.

Juan Cabrera: We took for granted all the contextual clues and knowledge we gained from seeing our kids every day. I was a technology attorney for 15 years, but I’m not sure the majority of students, especially kids from poverty, have the necessary supports to learn at home. They suffer most from virtual learning.

Julian: Virtual learning shouldn’t be our main mode of education, but it must be part of our contingency plans. There are more than 200 kinds of coronavirus, and another pandemic could occur in three years. We need to plan for this possibility.

Juan Cabrera: I don’t support full-time virtual learning, but we’re developing plans for rolling closures, micro-closures, the partial reopening of buildings. I have 12 groups working on strategies. Virtual learning is our Band-Aid, to get us through. I started a subcommittee for the TEA Commissioner, with three school districts to start partial reentry of our schools with at-risk and SPED kids only, and my academic regression team is addressing the “summer slide” that began mid-March.

Natasha Butler: We talked a lot about equity policy for special populations. What thoughts do you have on serving our JJAEP & DAEP students and kids in mental facilities during this pandemic?

Julian: The first thing we’ve got to think about is how to avoid putting kids in those situations. Restorative practices and youth courts are possibilities. Texas has a history of punitive discipline. It’s ingrained in our culture. Because of the high number of COVID-19 cases in our prisons, we’re thinking about early releases; maybe we need a similar approach here. Special circumstances have us taking a different tact on some things; maybe we need to think about the special circumstances of kids in these environments.

Carrie: In Arizona, we’re getting together with social workers & mental health workers, trying to navigate these problems and making sure that we’re prioritizing kids at all extremes. We need to partner with those running these facilities.

Linda Griffin: Say more about community engagement for African American communities.

Julian: We really focused on this when I was Education Chair of the California NAACP. We were thinking about community-based education reform. Involving communities and building consensus takes special kinds of leaders. We need to prioritize leaders with those skills. I speak at length on this on Twitter and my blog. Let us be a resource for you as you help us create the coalitions we enjoyed 30-40 years ago.

Carrie: In Arizona, there’s a lot of anti-Blackness & explicit racism in schools. Mothers came together to form the Black Mothers Forum, and they pushed school boards to address inequities.

### Adjournment

The conversation concluded at 1:00 p.m.