

Leadership ISD TCBSBM MASBAhablemos COVID-19 Conversation

May 18, 2020

Dr. Phil Gore, TASB Board Development Services, 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 18, 2020, beginning at 12:00 p.m. CDT.

The 86 attendees, in order by school district, then by company, included:

- Aldine ISD Deputy Superintendent Selina Chapa
- Alief ISD Trustee Natasha Butler
- Amarillo ISD Former Trustee John Betancourt
- Austin ISD Trustee Jayme Mathias
- Ben Bolt-Palito Blanco ISD Trustee Zelda Saenz
- Brazosport ISD Trustee Jerry Adkins
- Canutillo ISD Trustee Armando Rodriguez
- Cedar Hill ISD Instructional Coach Jocelyn Mays
- Clear Creek ISD Trustee Laura DuPont
- Coppell ISD Trustee Tracy Fisher
- Crowley ISD Trustee Nedra Robinson
- DeSoto ISD Trustee DeAndrea Fleming
- DeSoto ISD Trustee Tiffany Johnson
- Dilley ISD Trustee J.D. Rodriguez, III
- Fort Worth ISD Supervisor Juan Daniel Garcia
- Fort Worth ISD Chief of Staff Karen Molinar
- Fort Worth ISD Superintendent Kent Paredes Scribner
- Fort Worth ISD Trustee Jacinto Ramos, Jr.
- Garland ISD Trustee Linda Griffin
- Grand Prairie ISD Chief Academic Officer Angela Herron
- Grand Prairie ISD Math Strategist Tamara Majors
- Grand Prairie ISD Director of Advanced Academics Tina Moore
- Grand Prairie ISD ELL Facilitator Flavia Romero
- Grand Prairie ISD ED of Assessment Melissa Steger
- Grapevine-Colleyville ISD Trustee Jesse Rodriguez
- Greenville ISD Trustee John Kelso
- Hays CISD Trustee Sandra Bryant
- Houston ISD Trustee Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca
- Houston ISD Trustee Anne Sung
- Kenedy ISD Superintendent Diana Ugarte
- Lancaster ISD Trustee Ty G. Jones
- Manor ISD Trustee Ana Cortez
- North East ISD Trustee Sandy Hughey
- Northside ISD Trustee Karen Freeman
- Palacios ISD Trustee Fabian Marroquin
- Phoenix Union High School District – Stephanie Parra
- Ricardo ISD Superintendent Maria Canales
- Richardson ISD Assistant Principal Marcus Mince
- Riverview School District Director Carol Van Noy
- San Elizario ISD Trustee Sandra Licon
- Sequim School District Trustee Larry Jeffryes
- Tornillo ISD Trustee Marlene Bullard
- Washington State Board of Education Member Mary Fertakis
- West ISD Trustee Leigh Crawshaw
- Yakima Schools Superintendent Trevor Greene
- Yakima Schools Trustee Martha Rice
- Alma Villegas Consulting – Alma Villegas
- BuyBoard – Angel Magallanes
- Cindy McMullen Law – Cindy McMullen
- Cityscape Schools – Elda Rojas
- Claycomb Architects – Francis Zordilla
- Empower Schools – Tori Vasquez
- IDRA – Chloe Sikes
- Illinois Association of School Boards – Lori Grant
- JG Consulting – James Guerra
- Leadership ISD – Johanna Hernandez
- Leadership ISD – Jared Williams
- MASBA – Vincent Tovar
- Massachusetts Association of School Communities – Tracy Novick
- MIND Research – J. Ivan Alfaro
- Oregon School Boards Association – Renee Sessler

- Page Southerland Page Architects – Jim Brady
- Progressive Roofing – JJ Eusay
- Raise Your Hand Texas – Matthew Hall
- TASB – Kay Douglas
- TASB – Robert Duron
- TASB – Phil Gore
- TASB – David Koempel
- TASB – Tami Nagar
- TASB – Jennifer Ruedas
- TASB – Alex Russian
- TASB – Jackie Spencer
- TASB – Erica Stevens
- TALAS – Stan Paz
- University of the Incarnate Word – Patsy Newborn
- University of North Texas – Barbara Pazez
- University of Texas at Austin – Angela Valenzuela
- Vocabulary.com – Jennifer Allen
- Washington State School Directors’ Association – Tricia Lubach
- Westwind Education Policy – Circe Stumbo
- Arredondo, Ellis
- Bonjavanni, Mark
- Algernon Herron
- Eileen Little
- Felecia Peters
- Isaiah Peters
- Zach Thompson

Welcome

TCBSBM President Ty G. Jones welcomed all, introduced them to the features of GoToWebinar, and introduced moderator Dr. Phil Gore of TASB Board Development Services.

Panelists

Phil referred to President Obama’s commencement address this weekend to the graduates of Historically Black Colleges & Universities and to the recent murder of Ahmaud Arbery. Phil introduced the panelists:

- Kay Douglas, TASB Board Development Services
- Mary Fertakis, Washington State Board of Education
- Angela Herron, Grand Prairie ISD Executive Director of Teaching & Learning
- Jacinto Ramos, Jr., Leadership ISD

Their introductory comments follow:

- Mary: President Obama nailed key points. My foundation recently assembled & distributed Iftar food baskets for 450 families. Food insecurity is real, and Ramadan is an expensive month for Muslims. We had to fight for funding: The Seattle Foundation distributed \$10.1M to 125 organizations, and our community received nothing, despite the fact that we’re disproportionately affected by this crisis. Minority communities are invisible and overlooked. They funded us as a recognition that they messed up. They used no data or racial equity lens, so we were overlooked. The Chinese symbol for “crisis” is a powerful symbol: “Danger” and “incipient moments” converge. We have an opportunity to impact systems in ways we didn’t previously imagine—and to have conversations on equity.
- Kay: We need to name inequities. Many boards resist doing this. These conversations require courage. We don’t know when or how this pandemic will end—or whether we’ll be here. We need to listen to students, staff, the homeless. Will our students & staff feel safe enough to come back? Ohio is asking parents whether they’ll send their students back to school under certain conditions. All voices need to be included.
- Cinto: I can no longer kick the can down the road, thinking I have more time to address inequities. My mindset shifted with this pandemic. In Fort Worth, we’re thinking differently: Internet connectivity is a vital necessity and a conduit to empowerment. We’re considering a calendar that moves beyond the agrarian year. We’ll have a survey this week on an intersession calendar that plays to our strengths, not our past. We’ll need to engage the entire community, not just those who’ve traditionally shown up. Like one DFW teacher, who innovatively used Facebook to engage her students, we have to go against the

grain, go against Whiteness, and do what private & charter schools have been doing, to put barriers aside, so that public education isn't pushed aside.

- Angela: Grand Prairie ISD was fortunate: Four years ago, our Board approved devices for students in grades 3-12. We partnered with Bright Bites to see how students & parents used those devices. 20% of students didn't have access to Wi-Fi in their homes. We kept our Wi-Fi on at campuses. We partnered with digital providers for reduced rates. We don't want students without Wi-Fi to miss out. Phone calls and packets were important. We had to stretch our intentionality, to make sure students are learning. Lockhart ISD purchased towers to provide Wi-Fi for all teachers & students. Families without internet access can't apply for unemployment or have instant access to healthcare; it's a systemic denial of opportunities, much larger than education. As Cinto suggested, Wi-Fi is essential for survival.

Phil: While writing your dissertation, what opportunities did you find for improvement in school governance?

Angela: I asked respondents, "Can you give me a policy that specifically speaks to student achievement?" Most responded by noting equity policies, adequate funding & high expectations. I hope people who read my dissertation will consider implementing equity policies in their districts.

Phil: What are essential elements for local equity policies that make a difference for kids?

Mary: It can't be a boiler plate or template. You can't check a box. It needs to reflect your local context. There are examples across the country. Washington has created a template for districts wanting to develop their own policies. Even the name of the policy is important.

Cinto: It has to come from community input. Students, families & educators need to be on the forefront of this work. Share data with them: If you know your data, you have to ask yourself what you're doing on the dais if you're not addressing these issues. You have to connect the closing of gaps & the improvement of student outcomes to your superintendent's performance evaluation. Tie these to your goals & constraints. When we isolate race and/or have courageous conversations, we should expect blowback.

Kay: We must ask how to implement equity in discipline, dress code, the assignment of teachers. We listen to others' voices at the outset, but then often neglect constant, two-way feedback. The community must trust that you're actually willing to improve. Chicago has a student voice committee at every school. People need more than a single opportunity to engage and be heard.

Phil: How can we monitor equity policies?

Mary: We need to ask whether we're allocating money for race/equity work. We fund what we prioritize.

Phil: What 2-3 priorities do you wish every board/trustee would adopt in addition to an equity policy?

Cinto: Adjust your budget to what the most basic needs are, to get students to a level playing field. We need to listen to our stakeholders. We have a hotline & respond to every phone call. We got blowback for the idea of virtual graduation. We've been given power to make decisions, but we don't want to make decisions that cost lives; at the same time, how do we meet our communities' basic needs? We need to meet extreme social-emotional needs as well. I've implemented mental health breaks in my day. The game is changed; we need to revisit our strategic plans. "You can't lead where you don't go." We have to ask: Did we prioritize the needs of our communities? Did they feel loved by a large school system? Self-care, community, budget: They all go hand-in-hand.

Phil: How can we take care of our mental health, especially during this time?

Kay: That'll be different for each person. We need to be able to say when we're not O.K. We're unable to speak about mental illness and give others the grace not to be O.K. We're on day 65 of shelter-in-place, and some people need to get out of their houses. This is affecting all of us differently. My "therapy" is cooking; what's

your “therapy”? People are literally dying; how do we reach out to others and let them know it’s O.K. to cry and not have good days?

Phil: How do we relate this to organizations?

Angela: Organizations are built on people. It’s O.K. to take breaks and take care of yourself. Give people permission to take care of themselves.

Mary: We’re all experiencing this differently. We’re all in the same storm, but not in the same boat: Those in the “battleship” are experiencing this “storm” differently from those in “rowboats.” We’re seeing the inequities in our faces, which makes it more difficult to pivot away from the conversation. In our meetings, we have time for “gracious space,” simply to ask how people are doing; it’s cathartic and allows us to focus. Our bodies are physiologically reacting to the trauma around us. When we return to school, we’ll have to address the social-emotional needs of students & staff, before academics.

Phil: Commissioner Morath has started talking about a different calendar year. Why do we need a different calendar from the 18th-century, agrarian calendar we have?

Kay: None of my kids has harvested; still, the agrarian calendar is based on crops. This pandemic is “summer slide” on steroids. Kids are abused and without supervision. ELLs are not exercising English language skills. Kids are losing math skills and are in homes without books and resources. Gaps are widening. Gaps hurt all. Let’s spread out the calendar & allow for more breaks and provide remediation, rather than wait a year to provide remediation. We thought we couldn’t turn this “ship”—then we did it overnight. “Normal” isn’t coming back, so let’s put this new reality to work for kids. We were doing “balanced calendars” 20 years ago. Every board should ask its community and determine what will work.

Angela: We’re excited by an extended-year calendar, to address gaps. We can target instruction for certain students, increase college-readiness, and be more intentional about closing gaps.

Phil: What other issues are being brought to light as a result of this pandemic?

Cinto: Leadership ISD has begun making phone calls to see how trustees are doing. It’s O.K. not to have answers in an unprecedented time. It’s an opportunity to reach out to others in similar situations. If my children are hurting, your children are hurting: Let’s collaborate & figure this out. Those of us on the forefront of equity issues have long known the reality, but this is no time to rest. We signed up for a job and are now tasked with some of the most trying times we’ve had to deal with.

Phil: In a Latino-majority state, how might we improve services for Latino students and ELLs?

Cinto: In Fort Worth, we’re privileged to have several partners assisting us and filling gaps. I’m concerned for our undocumented population. My Brother’s Keeper has folks in the streets, taking care of others. *Con Mi Madre* is a resource. We should lean into this work and have conversations.

Phil: What has not been said here, to encourage more equitable outcomes in Texas?

Mary: This is a matter of will, not resources. Washington had the first diagnosed case & death from COVID-19. I hoped it would be on the affluent side of the county, so that attention would be paid to it. It did, and attention was paid. Institutional racism persists: The institution to house the homeless from the pandemic was built in our neighborhood. We need to work across sectors and increase intersectionality. Who do we need to work with? We need to work with our chambers of commerce and our departments of health & human services. This is an opportunity to address things that have been happening for years.

Adjournment

The conversation concluded at 1:02 p.m.