CHARTER CONNECT magazine

JUNE 2021

HOW MY MIND OPENED TO CHARTER SCHOOLS

US Senate RECOGNIZES CHARTER SCHOOLS

MEET DR. HENRY NELSON

ALA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL COMMISSION

NEW SCHOOLS FOR ALABAMA

OUR BOARD

Khadijah Abdullah
Shipt

Dave Borden
Aldridge, Borden & Company

Carol Butler
The Mike & Gillian Goodrich Foundation

Nick Gaede
Bainbridge, Mims, Rogers & Smith, LLP

Brian Hamilton
Trillion Communications Corporation

Charles Jackson
Auburn University - Montgomery

Maria Kennedy
The Daniel Foundation

Miho Kubagawa
New Schools Venture Fund

Dr. Jan Miller
University of West Alabama

Richard Perry
(retired) DuPont

Emily Schultz
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Dr. Jeremiah Newell*
Accel Day & Evening Academy
*ex-officio

CHARTER CONNECT MAGAZINE

JUNE 2021

OUR TEAM

Tyler Barnett, Executive Director
tyler@newschoolsforalabama.org

Tyler began his career in the classroom, teaching high school English with Teach For America. Before returning to Alabama with his wife and two daughters, he worked in multiple nonprofits and for two state departments of education.

Candie A. Price, Communications & Operations Manager, Editor
candie@newschoolsforalabama.org

In addition to founding a nationally-distributed magazine, Candie has led communications and PR strategy for numerous organizations. She is also a Teach For America alum, having taught middle and high school in Birmingham City Schools.

Chris Reynolds, Senior Advisor
chris@newschoolsforalabama.org

Chris is a CPA with an extensive background in charter school leadership, nonprofit management, and philanthropy. He has founded multiple high-performing charter school networks and supported the development of a national facilities funding strategy.

Dr. Mike Brown, Senior Advisor
mike@newschoolsforalabama.org

Mike is a school leader at heart, having been a school leader with KIPP, a principal at the Tennessee Achievement School District, and Chief Schools Officer with Freedom Preparatory Academy in Memphis. He also served as Executive Director of the Freedom Fellows Institute.

Contents

LEAD Academy kindergarten graduates! Congrats to all 2021 Alabama Public Charter School graduates!!!

6

DR. HENRY NELSON

Dr. Henry Nelson leaves his post at the Alabama Public Charter School Commission, but he's not riding into the sunset just yet!

5

MRS. JAMIA ANDERSON

Mrs. Jamia Anderson joins the staff of Life Academy as Assistant Principal. Congrats and welcome, Mrs. Anderson!

New Schools for Alabama
Two 20th St N, Suite 1315,
Birmingham, AL 35203
www.newschoolsforalabama.org

NEW SCHOOLS FOR ALABAMA

IVY CLASSICAL ACADEMY

COMING FALL, 2021, AUTAUGA COUNTY, AL

About Ivy Classical Academy:

Ivy Classical Academy is a Non-Profit Public Charter School that will offer a Classical Education to students in Autauga County and the surrounding area.

charter Spotlight

Classical Education is based on the Trivium, the three stages of learning every child experiences as they grow. A different teaching style and method is used at each stage, resulting in more knowledgeable, intelligent and articulate students. The three stages represented in the Trivium are Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric.

GRAMMAR | GRADES K-5

During the Grammar stage, children are particularly adept at memorization. Young children learn songs, rhymes, and recite facts with relative ease. Because young children are so eager to memorize and they enjoy non-sensical rhymes (e.g. Dr. Seuss), the Trivium challenges them by providing substantial subject matter for them to memorize.

Throughout each of the Grammar stage years, classically educated children are taught the factual foundation of each subject, using songs, chants, and rhymes to help them enjoy the learning experience.

LOGIC | GRADES 6-8

During the middle school years, children begin to think independently and often develop a propensity for argument.

Classical education teaches children in the logic stage to think and analyze critically and to argue well by arranging facts into organized statements. The study of formal logic helps students understand the fundamentals of a good argument. Practice in making written and oral arguments helps to further develop these skills.

RHETORIC | GRADES 9-12

Rhetoric is the art of communicating well. Once a student has obtained knowledge of the facts (grammar) and developed the skills necessary to arrange those facts into organized arguments (logic), the student develops the skill of effectively communicating those arguments to others (rhetoric).

Classical education in the rhetoric stage teaches students to think and articulate concepts to others. Each subject has its own rhetoric, and writing papers, researching, and orating are skills required in all subjects.

LIFE Academy Welcomes Assistant Principal, Mrs. Jamia Anderson!

When innovation, skill, and leadership meet, one has encountered the insight and work of Jamia Anderson. As an educator and administrator, Mrs. Anderson implements creative, targeted approaches to learning and the learning environment. With the steadfast belief that all students and faculty have something of value to offer, she cultivates an atmosphere of unity and fairness within structure and flexibility. Jamia is a firm believer that students don't learn to live or survive in a classroom. They learn to survive in the real world, so she challenges educators in any walk of life to give students the tools to live and breathe in the world around them.

Mrs. Anderson's ability to impact her students, staff, and parents is attributed to her personable disposition and ability to connect within any cultural norm.

Mrs. Anderson's educational journey has been enriching— from her role as a teacher and specialist to now, as a doctoral candidate in Organizational Leadership and Management. She is an alumna of Alabama State University and Amridge University.

Mrs. Anderson is also a wife, mom, and mentor to many.

Alabama Public Charter School Commission

DR. HENRY NELSON HAS SERVED THE ALABAMA PUBLIC CHARTER COMMISSION FOR 3 TERMS. HE IS STEPPING DOWN FROM HIS POST, BUT HE IS NOT RIDING OUT INTO THE SUNSET JUST YET. HE STILL HAS A HEART FOR STUDENTS IN ALABAMA.

Meet DR. HENRY NELSON

THANK YOU, SIR!

ABOUT DR. NELSON

Dr. Henry Nelson earned his Masters in Management from Samford University, a Masters in Marketing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, a Masters in Theology from Emory University and a doctorate in Education Policy from Vanderbilt University.

Nelson was employed as a K-12 Market Manager for BellSouth. He served as the Director of Institutional Advancement for the University of Alabama and as an Adjunct Professor for UAB, Birmingham-Southern College, Huntingdon College, Miles College and Jefferson State Community College.

Nelson has had the pleasure of serving in the following fellowships: Superintendent Prepared Fellow, Center for Creative Leadership, Community Builder Fellow and Harvard University Kennedy School of Government.

Candie A. Price: Tell me a little about yourself, your work, your passion?

Dr. Henry Nelson: Over the course of the last 35 years, I have probably served on the Boards of approximately 10 to 12 organizations that were involved in improving the quality of life in the City of Birmingham.

I have dedicated 35 years in public education working toward improving the education of students in public education at the local and state level. I have served as Vice Chair of a local school board, member of an HBCU Trustee Board; Chair of a local workforce development school; and Chairman/Member of the Alabama Public Charter School Commission.

I have always been committed to helping students get the best opportunity possible to achieve a measure of personal, financial and professional success as adults.

Candie A. Price: Describe your tenure on the Commission – what were your greatest challenges and accomplishments?

Dr. Henry Nelson: After six years, only five schools have been approved and are up and running. Those five schools are performing well and the school leaders have proven to be exceptional.

It affirms that the Commission has been prudent, diligent and careful when deliberating whether to approve a charter school application. Interestingly enough, until the last 12 to 18 months, the overwhelming majority of the Commission's votes have been unanimous, 7 to 2 or 6 to 3 in support of an approval or denial of charter school applications.

Candie A. Price: What do you think charter schools add to the educational landscape in Alabama?

Dr. Henry Nelson: For me, I think well run charter schools offer the opportunity to take more

innovative approaches to educate school children. Charter school educators have more flexibility and latitude to implement the latest educational research to improve outcomes. Charter schools can serve as "educational laboratories" but still operate within the broader state mandated requirements. In my opinion, charter schools broaden and deepen the educational landscape for Alabama school children.

Candie A. Price: Why do you think charter schools are a viable option for students and families in Alabama?

Dr. Henry Nelson: Again, charter schools offer not only options but offer additional education opportunities for students and families that do not have the same resources to make different educational decisions available to families with significant more human and financial capital.

But there is a more important, practical service that charter schools offer for students and families in Alabama. Some charter schools have filled "educational gaps" that had not been successfully addressed by traditional schools.

For example, the University School in Livingston, Alabama has not only been recognized nationally for providing a quality education but for me the goal to be "inclusive and racially immersive" for the entire community is a welcome "externality" that was not present in the community since both public and private prior to its opening were primarily segregated by race.

Secondly, the ACCEL school in Mobile is effectively providing students that had dropped out or given up on a traditional schools. ACCEL is providing opportunities to students that otherwise may not have graduated from high school and/or continue on to college.

And lastly, the Magic City Acceptance Academy will provide a "culturally

DR. DAVID T. MARSHALL

APCS COMMISSION CHAIR

"Henry Nelson has served three terms on the Commission, been the Commission's Vice Chair and Chair, and he has certainly left a positive mark on the Alabama charter school landscape. It has been an honor and a privilege to get to know Dr. Nelson and to work alongside him for the benefit of Alabama's students."

DR. MARTIN NALLS

I3 ACADEMY

"Dr. Henry Nelson is a true champion for students. I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Nelson prior to his appointment to the commission, and he has made a lasting impression on me as an educator. He is a selfless individual who willing to share his gifts and talents to enhance educational opportunities for students who are typically disenfranchised from equitable educational opportunities. Dr. Nelson advocacy for these students on the Charter School Commission will be missed, but I'm sure he will find other methods to continue his advocacy for these students."

DARREN RAMALHO

BREAKTHROUGH CHARTER

"Dr. Nelson has always offered sound advice and thoughtful insights. It was clear from the first day I met him that Dr. Nelson deeply cares about Alabama children and wants nothing more than to see high-quality charter schools flourish in our state. His voice will be greatly missed on the commission."

affirming" environment that responds to students that have found it difficult, if not impossible, to be educated in traditional schools. Its mission is to empower students that have been typically "disempowered" in traditional school settings.

For me, the common thread that runs through those three schools is that for the most part they are not negatively affecting traditional schools but complement or supplement the traditional schools. Their existence "adds to" as opposed to "subtract from" traditional schools by bringing in students that otherwise may not be attending public schools.

BREAKING NEWS:

THE ALABAMA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARD WILL BE NAMED

THE HENRY NELSON AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING!!!

CONGRATULATIONS, DR. NELSON - YOUR LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE WILL CONTINUE.

Candie A. Price: What is your response to the perception that charter schools take away from traditional public schools?

Dr. Henry Nelson: Depending on your perspective, it is understandable that some believe that charter schools have an adverse, negative effect on traditional schools both on student enrollment and the district's finances. But we must remember that charter schools are also "public schools." Since they are public schools and are publicly funded by Alabama taxpayers, parents should have the individual and collective right to choose where and how their children are educated. They should not be captive to a "closed educational ecosystem" simply because of geography and economic status.

As a parent of three adult sons, I have always been a proponent of choice. Over the course of their education, they attended Montessori, Waldorf, Catholic, public and independent private schools. I think they benefited from a broad spectrum of educational experiences.

Both charter school and traditional school leaders must eventually realize that they cannot continue to work in an adversarial manner with each other but rather cooperate/ collaborate and focus solely on the shared goal to provide the best education for Alabama school children.

Candie A. Price: What's next for you?

Dr. Henry Nelson: I hope to dedicate my post Commission years working toward facilitating more collaboration, cooperation and coordination between traditional schools, charter schools and the local community. From my research, the intermediate to long term success of both charter and traditional schools is dependent on their ability to collaborate with each other.

For example, if the Commission approves three to five charter schools a year, traditional schools will lose 750 to 1250 students per year. That does not include the fact that each of the five existing schools admitting a combined total of 125 to 150 students per year, 1375 to 2000 primarily in urban and rural districts.

Since the establishment of charter schools can adversely affect traditional schools' budgets and charter schools are significantly more costly to establish and operate (state funding does not cover the entire cost of opening and operating a successful charter school), a "collaborative educational model" works best for both charter and traditional schools in the intermediate to long term.

Hopefully, I can convince both charter and traditional school leaders that collaboration is the only path forward to long term viability and educational success in their shared, mutual commitment to provide a quality education to Alabama school children. For the sake of Alabama school children, I pray that I am successful.

CONGRATULATIONS

i3 Academy

I3 ACADEMY WAS AWARDED $5,000 FROM THE LAURA BUSH FOUNDATION, WHICH WILL GROW THEIR SCHOOL LIBRARY. I3 WAS ALSO SELECTED AS A BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD OF ALABAMA BE HEALTHY SCHOOL. THIS MEANS THEY WILL RECEIVE $10,000 TO SUPPORT THEIR WELLNESS PROGRAM. .

How My Mind *Opened* to Charter Schools

Too many teachers oppose them because they're bad for unions, not kids.

BY GEORGE PARKER

The hug took me by surprise. I'd just finished speaking to a group of third-graders about my role as teachers union president when a little girl suddenly wrapped her arms around me and squeezed. Confused, I asked her why. She looked up and told me, "Because you said you care about us and you make sure we have the best teachers." She was sweet and sincere. She had no idea my words were mostly detached from reality.

I'd just finished telling her and her classmates that I worked to make sure their teachers had what they needed to do their jobs—that I protected their teachers' rights and tried to help them become the best teachers they could be. But I knew that wasn't always the case.

Like many union leaders, I had relentlessly negotiated contracts that protected not only teachers' rights, but their wrongs. As I drove home, I thought about the $10,000 my union had spent to keep a poorly performing teacher in the classroom—not because she deserved another chance, but because of a technicality.

My own childhood taught me the value of an education. I am the son of a Southern sharecropper who was perennially in debt no matter how hard he worked. My teachers were my inspiration and salvation. When I became a teacher, it seemed natural to become an advocate for the profession. Somewhere along the way I became more of a union leader than an educational leader.

The pandemic has highlighted the need to be nimble, to serve the needs of children and families where they are. We will fail our children and our teachers if we return to a pre-pandemic educational system. Unfortunately, many teacher unions want to limit access to quality education for underserved kids.

"Charter schools are also public schools. All of them. They provide more than three million students, mostly black and Hispanic, access to a quality public education."

I used to oppose charter schools, not because they were bad for kids, but because they were bad for unions. Some call it a binary choice: You either support teachers unions or you support charter schools. Nowadays I disagree. I spent 30 years as a high school and middle school math teacher educating kids in low-performing schools in the District of Columbia. I served as president of the Washington Teachers' Union for six years and recognize the added value unions can bring in securing fair compensation and safe working conditions for teachers. I'm still a union member. But I now work on behalf of charter schools.

Charter schools are also public schools. All of them. They provide more than three million students, mostly black and Hispanic, access to a quality public education. They are innovative and student-centered. They break down barriers that have kept families of color from the educational opportunities they deserve. Another two million children would attend charter schools if there were space for them. How could I work against these kids?

All too often charter critics get caught up denigrating "the system" and forget the duty to do whatever it takes to provide all children with access to high-quality public schools, no matter their race, ethnicity or ZIP Code.

We need more, not fewer, great public-school options for children, and charters are leading the way. If anyone says differently, keep in mind the messenger.

Mr. Parker is a former president of the Washington Teachers' Union, a former math teacher in the District of Columbia Public Schools, and a senior adviser at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

Used with permission. This article first appeared in the Wall Street Journal on May 26, 2021.

This article first appeared on the74million.org on May 6, 2021.
Used with permission.

ANALYSIS:

Stimulus Funds Alone Won't Help Underserved Students. States Must Make Sure They Reach Students Who Are Homeless, Living With Disabilities & English Learners

BY BARBARA DUFFIELD, LINDSAY JONES AND JANET MURGUÍA

For students facing the greatest barriers to school success and long-term stability, the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act was a positive step forward. The law dedicates $800 million to the identification, enrollment and school success of children and youth experiencing homelessness and $3 billion for those with disabilities — in addition to $122 billion for K-12 education. Yet, even with these dedicated funds, there are still significant unmet needs for underserved children, such as English learners, who comprise 10 percent of K-12 students.

State policymakers and agencies must now ensure that the stimulus funding is distributed and implemented to reach students with the greatest needs.

Even before the pandemic, public schools reported a record 1.5 million children and youth experiencing homelessness nationwide — a population that is disproportionately students of color, students with disabilities and English learners. The national high school graduation rate for English learners was 68 percent in the 2017-18 school year, compared with 85 percent for all students. We can only expect more troubling trends, as COVID-19 has compounded the trauma and barriers facing underserved students. But equitable state-level implementation of stimulus funds can make the critical difference in whether they recover from this crisis.

Previous COVID-19 packages provided state and school district funding for a range of education-related needs but did not require any of this funding to be directed to students with barriers to education access — nor did it require agencies to report on how funds were spent. As a result, only 18 percent of local liaisons for the homeless indicated that CARES Act funds were being used to support homeless children and youth, even though an estimated one in four homeless children have gone unidentified and possibly unenrolled in public schools due to COVID-19. Just last month, two-thirds of educators reported that their English learner students are not doing well or are only doing slightly well. Initial research from the Education Trust shows referral rates for children in need of special education and early intervention services have dropped — in some places by as much as 70 percent — and wait times for services have increased, exacerbating pre-COVID-19 inequities.

States must allocate these funds to ensure these students benefit from the rescue plan's unprecedented investment in education. This means reaching vulnerable children and tailoring solutions that help overcome the trauma and the barriers they face to learning and thriving. For example, intensive family outreach is needed to identify and re-engage children and youth who have struggled the most during this crisis. Students experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities and English learners must be able to access and meaningfully participate in activities to address instructional loss, such as afterschool and summer programs. Schools should prioritize meeting the individual needs of students with trauma-informed, wraparound services that are culturally and linguistically responsive to support the whole child.

Meeting their needs also means ensuring that federal funds contribute to developing and supporting programs that are inclusive and universally designed, equipping educators and service providers to implement evidence-based instruction and culturally responsive practices. It means engaging with families in accessible ways, such as in their native language, and building programs that partner with community-based organizations.

Of the plan's K-12 education funding, states are required to allocate 5 percent for learning loss, 1 percent for after school programs and 1 percent for summer school. Local education agencies must also direct 20 percent of their funds to address instructional loss. Students who are homeless, who have disabilities and who are English Learners are specifically named in each of these allocations because of COVID-19's devastating impacts on their education, health and well-being.

Our society was already grappling with converging and compounding crises of education inequity before COVID-19, and now, with a national reckoning with systemic injustice, there has never been a more critical time for leaders at every level to expand opportunity and equity for all students. As the upheaval of a pandemic intensifies the trauma of students who are homeless, living with disabilities or English learners — and their families — state leaders must ensure that federal resources reach the students who need them most. The stimulus will fail to achieve real recovery if it leaves millions of the most vulnerable students and their families behind.

Barbara Duffield is executive director of SchoolHouse Connection, a national nonprofit organization working to overcome homelessness through education. Lindsay Jones is president and CEO of National Center for Learning Disabilities, which works to improve the lives of the 1 in 5 children and adults nationwide with learning and attention issues. Janet Murguía is president and CEO of UnidosUS, which advocates for Latinos in the areas of civic engagement, civil rights and immigration, education, workforce and the economy, health and housing.

U.S. Senate

PASSES RESOLUTION TO RECOGNIZE AMERICA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS

The United States Senate passed a resolution recognizing National Charter Schools Week and "congratulating the students, parents, teachers, and leaders of charter schools across the United States for making ongoing contributions to education." Celebrated annually in May, National Charter Schools Week highlights the more than 200,000 dedicated teachers, 3.3 million students, and 7,500 public charter schools across the nation. This year's celebration marks the 30th anniversary of the first charter school law, which changed the future of public education and student success forever.

SENATE'S RESOLUTION

Here in South Carolina and across the country, charter schools enroll more students and serve more communities every year," said Senator Tim Scott (R-SC), sponsor of the resolution. "The high-quality teaching and innovative approach to education provide a strong foundation for students of all backgrounds. I have long believed what the pandemic confirmed for so many American families: when parents lack school choice, children's education suffers. I am thankful for the important work charter school teachers, leaders, parents, and advocates continue to do in opening more doors to success for the next generation."

Student-centered, tuition-free, and always public, charter schools have changed the American education landscape for the better. The 30th anniversary is a time for the nation to celebrate and highlight the schools, students, education leaders, and advocates who have demonstrated the strength and promise of the charter school movement over the last 30 years.

The National Alliance recently honored 30 exceptional young leaders who are connected in some way to charter schools and are using their ideas, talents, and platforms to advance educational and economic opportunities and promote equality and social justice. The 30 Under 30 Changemakers Awards shine a spotlight on individuals from across the country who are making a meaningful impact in their community.

Here is one of the 30 Under 30 Changemakers from Senator Scott's home state of South Carolina:

Kalan Rogers, 27, Calhoun Falls, S.C. Kalan graduated from Calhoun Falls Charter High School and returned as principal of his alma mater, where he focuses on creating a positive and safe school environment. Under his leadership, CFCS has been recognized by the U.S. News and World Report as a one of the best high schools in the country. Additionally, Kalan coaches cross-country and track and field, drives a morning school bus route, and advocates for his students, parents, and the community.

Read more about each 30 Under 30 Changemaker.

This article is reprinted with permission by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the leading national organization committed to advancing innovative public schools. This article originally appeared on The Charter Blog on May 26, 2021. Jennifer Diaz is the vice president of communications at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

DARREN RAMALHO, FOUNDING HEAD OF SCHOOL, BREAKTHROUGH CHARTER SCHOOL, MARION, AL

Our own Darren Ramalho also received a 30 Under 30 Changemakers Award! Congrats, Darren!

bipartisan support by:

Sen. Michael Bennet, D-CO
Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-TN
Sen. Cory Booker, D-NJ
Sen. John Boozman R-AR
Sen. Mike Braun, R-IN
Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-LA
Sen. Thomas Carper, D-DE
Sen. John Cornyn, R-TX
Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-ND
Sen. Ted Cruz, R-TX
Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-CA
Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-TN
Sen. Ron Johnson, R-WI
Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-KY
Sen. Marco Rubio, R-FL
Sen. Rick Scott, R-FL
Sen. Thom Tillis, R-NC
Sen. Pat Toomey, R-PA
Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-AL
Sen. Roger Wicker, R-MS
Sen. Todd Young, R-IN

your charter school ...

BY TRICIA BLUM

Do you remember why you started your school?

What was the compelling purpose or the unavoidable calling that led you to this work? What did you envision when you started talking about it? When you assembled your team? When you pitched the idea to other educators?

Do you remember yet?

You might remember this vividly. You might have it front-and-center in your mind.

Or maybe too much time has elapsed. Perhaps your school evolved, and your current vision for your school is a much sharper beacon. Maybe a pandemic and a drastic shift in educational format reshaped your vision. Perhaps external factors such as gentrification in the community your school serves forced adjustments or internal factors forced your school to refocus and adapt.

Maybe the current direction of your school, and your school's current offerings, no longer reflect the original Why.

Often Your Why is Captured in Your Mission Statement

When you drafted your charter, you wrote your school's mission statement. Many organizations, from small businesses to non-profits, engage in such an exercise at their inception. For some, it's a profoundly heartfelt ritual. For others, it's a necessary exercise to appease the gods of bureaucracy. Some see this moment as a time of deep reflection, while some may see it as one more checkbox in their journey.

Some leaders post the mission statement in a prominent place and discuss it with their staff regularly. Other leaders may put it in their charter, and seldom if ever, think about it again. Some leaders give it to their marketing person to put up on their website, then get busy grooving along, and get busy with the mundane details, the weight of responsibility, the logistics, and the day-to-day.

Your Why Matters

Your mission statement matters. One key reason is that it informs the public about your school's focus. It tells parents and other stakeholders what to expect as they choose to send their children to your

school. More importantly, it helps parents and other stakeholders decide if they want to send the students to your school, if your school is the right fit, or if your school is an effort they want to support.

But another key reason is that it informs you and your team about your school's focus. It guides your actions and tells you what you want your school to become.

Time and Changes

This can be a little bit tricky for charter schools because what happens is here you are. You've started this great school. You've made this great application, and students are pouring in. The staff is really excited to be here working at a charter school with that mission. Parents are excited. Students may or may not be excited because they may or may not even understand it. But the families understand the mission.

Then suddenly, you start noticing that your recruiting might trickle down a little bit or that some of your founding families aren't as satisfied with the school as they were in the beginning.

I often recommend that schools go back and look at their mission statement and make sure they still provide the same mission. And, if you're not using the mission as your guide, you can decide whether you want to recommit to that mission or want to pivot away and create a new mission.

Recommit or Pivot?

There are internal and external reasons for a pivot. One external challenge is gentrification. Suppose a school opens in an underprivileged area. They have a mission to serve a particular demographic. Then investments in real estate, new businesses, a new shopping center, or some new development begin to change public sentiment and perception. A different demographic begins to move into the neighborhood, prices go up, and the original population is displaced.

Often schools in gentrifying neighborhoods have written a mission, for example, that says that they will serve a specific population of students. And then they find that because of gentrification, their target students are no longer in that area. At that point, school leaders need to decide if they recommit to the mission, move the school to an adjacent neighborhood closer to their intended demographic, or work on somehow attracting the students located outside their immediate community.

Internal challenges also provide opportunities to pivot.

Several years ago, I became aware of a school where a specific foreign language was a crucial part of its mission and reason for the formation of the school. For the first few years of the school's existence, it provided a specific foreign language program, and that program made the school attractive to their community.

Then, the school experienced solid testing results, and it was doing a great job with its curriculum. Parents outside its immediate community noticed and enrollment grew. But the language program became less critical to the school's new population, and so the school gradually decreased its focus on that language. Unfortunately, many of the founding families were disappointed and angered by that shift. The school had to decide if it would recommit to that foreign language program or pivot to something different.

Sadly, for that school, it didn't do either. They just left the mission statement as it was, with the promise of a language they no longer delivered. Over a few years, the school lost enrollment, went out of business, and became yet another example of why a school's mission is so critical to the curriculum it leverages and the community it serves.

Altruism and Practicality

There's another aspect to this. In trying to decide whether you should pivot to a new mission or recommit to your existing mission statement, you should regularly consider the extent to which the mission serves the entire community and yourself.

For example, your mission might be incredibly generous, but it may not serve the population you need to serve. There needs to be some balance to your mission statement to fulfill both the pragmatic and altruistic sides. You must consider the business piece of it because there may be a reason that you need to be in a specific area to serve your mission, but other students might be coming along with those students. Depending on your circumstances, there may be other balances to strike, different tradeoffs to consider. Tradeoffs between the part of your mission that guides your heart and the part of your mission that allows your school to be strong and flourish.

Creating a mission statement, just like determining your why is not always a simple one-direction line. You have to take in all of the competing thoughts and ideas and develop a genuinely powerful, well-rounded mission statement that fully reflects your Why.

This article was used with permission by Charter School Capital and was originally published on its blog on May 25, 2021. Charter School Capital provides Facilities Financing Solutions for charter schools through a long-term lease options that provides schools stable control and security in their buildings and a path to bond ownership without the significant expense. To learn more, visit https://charterschoolcapital.org/

remember your why

The common ground on race and education that's HIDING in plain sight

This article is reprinted with permission. It was first published on May 27, 2021 by The Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

I'm sure I'm not the only one who is depressed and dispirited by the latest skirmishes in education's never-ending culture wars—the tussles about critical race theory, "anti-racist" education, and diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. I've got friends and colleagues on both sides of these battles, who hold positions that are both heartfelt and hardening. I am not naïve enough to believe that they are likely to declare a truce anytime soon. Nor do I have any particular wisdom about the perfect way to address these sensitive issues.

Still, I believe that common ground is there to be found, if not between the hard-liners on either side, then at least among parents and educators out there in the real world of kids and classrooms. I also believe that a great many Americans yearn to occupy such ground. After a crippling pandemic and way too much partisan warfare, so many of us long to get back to working together to help all students make progress. Here are five promising and praiseworthy practices that I believe most of us could get behind, regardless of our politics or our views on other issues, while doing a lot of good for millions of kids.

1. The adoption and implementation of "culturally-affirming" instructional materials. The label is new, but the idea is not: Kids should be able to see themselves and their cultures in the books that they read. Mostly that's about making sure the canon is inclusive and diverse, with authors and characters that represent America's diversity. The good news is that several of the best English language arts programs already do this quite well, especially EL Education, which is purposefully inclusive of Black, White, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native American themes, authors, and characters, and gets all greens from EdReports. But we should keep getting better at this so that all children feel like they're valued as part of the great American story. High-quality professional learning is going to be an essential accompaniment to the materials.

2. The effort to diversify the education profession. This is simply common sense, especially because of the large demographic gulf between our student population and our educator corps. Everyone benefits from teacher diversity. It's a shame that ed schools have made such little progress making it happen. It's particularly important for students of color, especially Black students, given the growing research evidence demonstrating the positive impact on such children in having the opportunity to take classes from teachers of the same race. As we at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute found in a recent study by scholar Seth Gershenson, this may be one reason that urban charter schools outperform their district counterparts. They are simply better at recruiting a diverse staff, and matching their pupils to same-race teachers, and that is showing up in higher achievement.

3. Helping teachers maintain high expectations for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or

BY
MICHAEL J. PETRILLI

Mike Petrilli is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, executive editor of Education Next, and a Distinguished Senior Fellow for Education Commission of the States.

After a crippling pandemic and way too much partisan warfare, so many of us long to get back to working together to help all students make progress.

socioeconomic background. This is right in line with education reform dogma going back a generation, encapsulated by President George W. Bush's call to end the "soft bigotry of low expectations." Simply put, it's racist to expect less from Black children and other children of color. (That's a message that some "antiracism" advocates need to hear, too.) It's also un-American. This is one of the primary motivations for statewide academic standards and uniform assessments. A high-quality curriculum can be extremely helpful here, too, as it articulates what high expectations look like in daily practice. We must also pay attention to grading practices and to the subtle messages that educators send to their students.

4. Teaching students to empathize with and understand others, especially those whose lives are more difficult than their own. This, too, is scarcely new. It's part of "social and emotional learning," or what others call "character education," and has been part of great schooling since ancient times. But there's a case to be made that, given America's growing diversity and inequalities, it's more important than ever for children to appreciate that some kids have it much harder than they do. And in particular, that many Black Americans face particular challenges because of racism that their fellow Americans need to better acknowledge and understand. We also need to help students learn to listen to each other, and engage with views from across the ideological spectrum—essential objectives for high-quality civics programs.

5. Presenting the history of slavery, Jim Crow, and other painful chapters in an honest, unflinching way. Everyone should want all American children to know the evils of those institutions, given how at odds they were with the principles of our founding as well as our current aspirations. This isn't reinventing the past on the basis of today's values. It's correcting efforts to sugarcoat the horrors of those chapters in American history. Of course, instructional materials and methods should be age-appropriate. But nowhere in the United States should these topics be avoided. Nor should we fail to teach the significant progress that we've made on these and other fronts. Instead, we should aim for an approach to teaching history that is both critical and patriotic.

This list covers quite a lot of territory. It is congruent with the education reform movement of the past several decades, and I don't see it as ideological, even as I recognize that some aspects will appeal more to progressives and some more to conservatives. Some should even appeal to the advocates on either side of this issue! Importantly, it avoids both mandates and bans on how schools should address these topics. In a big, diverse country, we should allow schools to figure out the best path forward, especially schools that parents themselves have chosen.

At the same time, let's not let our solutions to old problems cause new ones. Most importantly, nobody should be demonized because of their race, and schools should never seek to indoctrinate their students. About that, the conservative critics are right.

Still, for education leaders that want to advance a positive agenda without alienating parents, teachers, and students, these five actions—embracing culturally affirming instructional materials; diversifying the teaching profession; maintaining high expectations for all students; teaching students empathy; and presenting American history in a manner that is both critical and patriotic—present a path forward. They sure beat fighting each other into oblivion.

CHARTER HEROES

Celebrating Alabama Charter School Champions

MR. GILES, DEAN OF CULTURE & MUSIC STUDIO GUIDE

LEGACY PREP, BIRMINGHAM, AL

Favorite Quote: "Pain doesn't tell you when you ought to stop. Pain is the little voice in your head that tries to hold you back because it knows if you continue you will change". ~Kobe Bryant

What's your why for working at Legacy Prep?: "We are raising Kings and Queens. We want our scholars to be successful humans not only on the job force but also mentally and emotionally. As a Black man, I want to be an example for all of PREPsters."

What's your superpower?: "I am a hard worker. I push and try to do every job as efficiently and effectively as possible. I give 110% even if 100% is not required."

CHARTER HAPPENINGS

Week one of i3 Summer Camp starts next week!! Rising kindergarteners also have camp next week. i3academy.org/

Breakthroughcharterschool.org

We are excited to announce that enrollment is now open for the 2021-2022 LEAD First Class Pre-K. Space is limited.

https://www.magiccityacceptanceacademy.org/

New Schools for Alabama is a 501(c)3 nonprofit, public charity organization created to serve kids in Alabama. The organization supports the growth of excellent public charter schools in Alabama to ensure that every child has access to a quality public education. For more information go to www.newschoolsforalabama.org

Absolutely For Our Kids!

JUNE 2021 Issue 11