

“When we embrace social justice as a pillar of learning in our classrooms, we declare that we’re all responsible for improving our world.”

Educational Leadership, May 2009

The student voice idea for this edition of the ENGAGE! Journal was born out of a conversation between me and students in my Black Political Thought class that was being taught via zoom in the midst of the pandemic, before a vaccine became available. We were discussing how the collective markings of a generation as indicated by what is experienced through large societal events can shape how you see the world and define one’s journey through life.

While defining the concepts of societal constructs, systemic impediments and environmental struggles, I realized that I was listening to a universal angst in the voices of these students who had been forced to reflect on the #MeToo Movement, #BlackLivesMatterMovement, heightened by the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Brianna Taylor and simultaneously a global pandemic. Their entire life has been digital, shaped by social media, there has been a marked increase in gun violence and environmental disruptions such as hurricanes as a result of climate change, and as remarkable as it seems, these are day-to-day experiences that shape their lives. As young people, they have a lot to say and express as they consider how to problem solve and create fulfilling lives in sustainable ways. My students recognize they are part of increasingly diverse communities and their educational journeys must be relevant to what is witnessed.

The Butler University students contributing varying forms of expression to this edition of the ENGAGE!

Journal were enrolled in a class called “Activism.” At the beginning of the semester the students wrote and spoke about their backgrounds, socialization, and issues very important to them. Along with written pieces, activist posters were created as tools of persuasion, some of which are featured in this journal.

There must be spaces for their voices to be honored and valued. We have to wonder what this generation of our young people want for their future selves based on decisions made by others about them today. Who is looking out for them and protecting their lives and their right to thrive?

– Terri Jett

As a journalism scholar, former teacher, adjunct faculty member, and ongoing freelance practitioner, I view student voices as foundational in the development of community schools. Family and community engagement – particularly their voices – are an evidenced-based pillar of community schools. Collective stakeholder voice and engagement reflects shared leadership practices, another pillar of community schools.

A community school is a time-tested strategy that organizes community supports for student success, where educators and community members collaborate to secure the best supports for all children’s learning and development. Decades of research demonstrate community schools are a proven school improvement equity strategy, focused on student-centered teaching and learning that serves the ho-

listic needs of all students and their families. In community schools, family and community members are considered an asset as their skills, talents, and generosity of time or treasure build on student strengths, engage them as learners, and help them to reach their full potential.

On a bench at the University of Pennsylvania, a statue of Benjamin Franklin depicts the words: “The future of our democracy is dependent upon the strength of our public schools.” The strength of our public schools likewise depends on the collective us. Schools cannot do this work alone. Community schools provide the engagement, the

voice, to address the very conditions necessary for learning. The most significant voice is that of our students and their families.

– Jim Grim



Political Science Activism Course Students – Dr. Terri Jett

Photo:

(Back Row) Paul Ford II, Claire Shaffer, Diana Fernandez, Rosa Clemente, Alex Pulaski, Emily Langston, Fritz Stangler, and Michaela Ivory

(Front Row) Ryile Swalis, Kitarie Fuller-McDade, Justin Deem – Loureiro, Anna Marcou, Sydney Haworth, Rylie Swalis, and Jordan Brown