

Sponsored by Austin Voices for Education and Youth

# Equity Virtual Town Hall Meeting

Webb Middle School  
December 12, 2019

## **Special Guests:**

**Jitu Brown (Journey for Justice Alliance)**

**Dr. Stephanie Hawley (Austin ISD)**

**Jose Carrasco (Austin Voices)**

## Equity Virtual Town Hall Meeting (December 12, 2019)

The Equity Virtual Town Hall Meeting was held on Thursday, December 12 from 7 to 8:30 pm in the Webb Middle School Family Resource Center and streamed on Facebook Live ([click here to view the video](#)). The theme of the discussion was "Equity is a Verb." In other words, while discussing our beliefs about educational equity is an important step, that talk must be followed up by action. Our guests were specifically addressing the equity issues surrounding school closure and consolidation, and its effects in Chicago, Austin and around the country.

This is the first streaming town hall meeting sponsored by Austin Voices for Education and Youth, and we plan to sponsor further events over the coming months. Questions were submitted by viewers via Facebook and text through a phone number shared during the event.

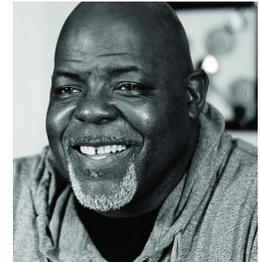
Webb Middle School was chosen for the event because it is one of a group of schools selected by Austin ISD for closure and/or consolidation over the next several years. Webb has fought off closure twice over the past 12 years (2007, 2013), with its community focused on school improvement rather than closure. Community-based strategies have resulted in doubled enrollment and academic gains, which have only slipped over the past three years as AISD has reduced funding and other systemic supports at all of its Title 1 middle schools. These cuts and system issues have resulted in across-the-board drops in district middle school performance.



The Webb community has submitted a "community school improvement plan" to the district in response to the AISD closure plan (which was developed by AISD without involvement of Webb staff, parents or community). In contrast, over 100 Webb stakeholders developed their own proposal over a six month period (April-September, 2019), addressing both inequities from the district and a robust vision for the future. To ready the plan, [click here](#) or go to: <https://www.austinvoices.org/avey-stands-up-for-webb-middle-school/>

## Equity Virtual Town Hall Meeting (December 12, 2019)

Jitu Brown, married and father of one child, is the national director for the Journey for Justice Alliance (J4J). Jitu Brown was born on Chicago's south side and is a product of Chicago's public school system. Jitu started volunteering with the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) in 1991, became a board member in 1993 and served as the Board president for a number of years. He joined the staff as education organizer in 2006. Jitu has organized in the Kenwood Oakland neighborhood for over 17 years bringing community voices to the table on school issues. Jitu helped develop the Mid-South Education Association, a grassroots advocacy group comprised of administrators, parents, teachers, young people and local school council (LSC) members to meet the needs of schools in the area. They were the first group to certify parents as LSC facilitators, which has become a model being replicated across the city of Chicago. In addition, they successfully organized to stop several school closings in the area and secured resources for neglected neighborhood schools. KOCO has served as a resource for organizations nationwide, dealing with school closings and the elimination of community voice from the decision-making process. Jitu also champions the creation of sustainable community schools as an answer to the increased privatization of public education.



Dr. Stephanie Hawley became Austin ISD's Chief Equity Officer in the summer of 2019. Prior to joining AISD, Stephanie served as the associate vice-president for equity and inclusion at Austin Community College. She has also held positions at City Colleges of Chicago, Morton College, Oklahoma City University, and Del Mar College. Stephanie has a doctoral degree in higher education administration from the University of Texas.



Jose Carrasco serves as the Family Resource Center Director and Community School Coordinator at Dobie Middle School, as part of the Austin Voices staff. Jose has been with AVEY since 2015. Prior to AVEY, Jose was a Parent Support Specialist at LBJ High School and Mendez Middle School. He also served in the United States Marine Corps. Jose is a graduate of AISD schools, and has lived most of his life in south and east Austin. He was born in Chicago to immigrant parents, and grew up on both sides of the Mexican border.



### Moderators:

Allen Weeks (AVEY Exec. Director) and Gabriel Estrada (AVEY Asst. Exec. Director)

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Allen Weeks: Welcome everyone to our virtual town hall tonight. Our theme is equity. Equity is a verb and so we're going to be talking about action-what we do that stems from what we believe and we've got a great group with us tonight. We've got, all the way from Pittsburgh tonight (and he'll tell us why he's in Pittsburgh), but really from Chicago, we've got Mr. Jitu Brown, education organizer in Chicago. We've got Dr. Stephanie Holly from Austin ISD, our chief equity officer. We're grateful for her to be here and we've got a community organizer from North Austin. Jose Carrasco is the community school coordinator at Dolby middle school. We have a parent, Veronica Martinez, but she has fallen ill and so we'll be doing this again, hopefully, in January and we'll have Veronica and a couple other parents as well for that session, that conversation, and she sends her regrets.



Allen Weeks: But we're grateful to have Jitu and Stephanie and Jose. My name is Allen Weeks. I'm the director of Austin Voices. I'm here with Gabriel Estrada, our assistant director, and we're going to be taking your questions. If you'd like to text us a question, a comment, something for our panel to talk about tonight, we'll be here for the next 90 minutes and you just text it to 512-900-2526 and it's on the board behind Jose's head. It's also there on Facebook. You can see that. So send us your questions, but we're going to start off tonight. This is a very interesting time in education and it's been interesting for a long, long time. And so I'm going to give our panelists a chance to start telling us their story, how they got to the point where they are today, and about equity. So why don't we start with Jitu, if you would tell us a little bit about yourself and your journey.

Jitu Brown: Yes. I want to say thank you to you and Austin Voices for, you know, including me in this important conversation tonight. I'll be strong, but I promise not to be long. I jumped into it now. My name is Jitu Brown. I'm a native of Chicago, Illinois, a married father of one. I have most of my adult life been a community organizer. It's an interesting journey, I always thought that I would be playing defensive end for the Chicago bears, played football in high school and college. Got approached, tried out and in a week, I realized that dream had changed.

Jitu Brown: It's interesting that I began volunteering in a local community-based organization. I did everything from being a classroom teacher to training teachers to do a youth leadership development program and that sort of morphed into community organizing work. Because I worked in different schools, I realized that there was an equity issue. That schools on the South side of Chicago had children that had a completely different reality than children that lived further North in the same city. When you went to Lincoln park around DePaul university, their neighborhood schools, every teacher had a teacher aide, smaller class sizes, after school programs, world language . . . basically young people had things that inspired them to invest in education. Whereas I just had a repeated experience of young people that look like me and schools that did not have those same opportunities for inspiration.

Jitu Brown: And so I began being a community organizer and, unfortunately, as early as 1998, began to see schools close in Chicago as housing projects began to come down. And in 2004 former Mayor Daley initiated a program called the Mid-South plan, which was a plan to close 20 out of the 22 schools in my neighborhood and turn them into either charter schools or contract schools. Now what we do in 2004, when they labeled our schools as failing and people that worked for Chicago Public Schools somehow said that by closing our schools, this was in the interest of our children. We were very clear that the neighborhood that we lived in was prime property, 10 minutes from downtown Chicago right off the lakefront. So we knew in 2004 that this was not about education, that it was really about removing us from urban spaces and by creating schools that did not have to take every child, that can take the children they want and kick out the ones they don't, they actually diminish the education opportunities for young people in the neighborhood.

Jitu Brown: And so we struggled with not only the mid-South plan and being able to beat that plan back since 2004, but the closure of over 120 schools and 40 other school actions like school turnaround, where private companies are able to come in and the children don't leave. But these private companies come in and run your schools. So as we fought against school closings, we realized that we had to begin to advance our own vision. They couldn't just be what we were against. But the way for us to organize people is to do something that no one else does, which is talk to black and brown parents and ask them and young people and say, "What is your vision? What do you want? What would you like to see in education?" And by doing that, we began to build the base of people who were prepared to fight for their vision because we knew that we didn't have failing schools . . . that as a public, we've been failed.

Jitu Brown: We believe that in the United States of America, every child should have access to a world class pre-K through 12 system of education in their neighborhood and in safe walking distance of their home. And if not, then we have to ask "Why not?" And we know that America ranks 19th amongst countries around the world in education. But when you take out poverty, America ranks number two, which means that we know how to educate children. It's just a particular group of children that we refuse to educate. And so, doing that work, I began to make connections with community organizers around the country who wanted to learn about this issue as it began to spread across the country. And one of the things that was really, I think, pivotal, was a desire to no longer feel isolated. A desire to have someone else who saw the world like you, who understood your perspective. And so that was the birth of the Journey for Justice Alliance in 2012.

Jitu Brown: We started out with 12 cities and today we are in 34 cities around the country, including Puerto Rico. And then also we have membership in Johannesburg, South Africa. And again, our focus is using community organizing as a tool to win equity in public education. So we believe in community-controlled schools. We believe in sustainable community schools, which is an evidence-driven model. We believe in more teachers of color in the classroom. We believe in stopping the over-reliance on standardized testing. We believe that W. E. B. Du Bois understood in 1940 that standardized testing was about proving the illusion of white supremacy, it's inexcusable that this is the primary way today our schools are labeled as failing and then continue to be starved and closed. We are very clear that school choice to us is a scam. It's no more than really a hustle that over the last 20 years, we see, has not improved education outcomes for our young people.

Jitu Brown: You know, we know that only one out of five charter outperforms traditional public schools. I think people should keep that in mind that no matter how much people talk about the gains at charters, that when the smoke clears, they're batting 20%. Only one out of five outperform traditional public schools. And to quote Dr. Charles Payne from Rutgers university, the charter movement does not deserve the word reform. They are really mediocre interventions that are only accepted because of the race of the children served. So what I would say to your audience is that we cannot adopt the language of those people who actually colonize our communities by taking over our education institutions. We have to realize again that we don't have failing schools. We've been failed and we have to demand more from decision makers because the failure to provide equity in public education is a bipartisan failure. You know, there will be no Betsy Devos if there was no Arnie Duncan and Arnie Duncan was just as unqualified as Betsy Devos. So we believe that it's very important that we push those that claim to be in our corner to shift the focus from the illusion of school choice to one that it really strives for equity in public education. So that's who we are and why I do the work that I do.

Allen Weeks: All right. Thank you. And, a little bit later, I think we have a chance to talk about particular examples and I know you'll talk to us a little bit about your experience at Dyett High School and the transformation and the struggle with Dyett High School as well that you guys fought. So Dr. Hawley, now I'd like to turn to you and the same question . . . how your background, how your story informs where you are on equity today.

Stephanie Hawley: Well, I could listen to the previous gentleman for the rest of the evening. I'm really compelled by that story and I often feel this work around equity is a calling. And it's one that I've run from for many years. And I'll tell you why. As a 38 year educator, I've taught first grade, fifth grade, I've taught people who thought they wanted to be teachers. And I've taught community college and I spent probably the last a little over 10 years in community colleges and recently came back home to the P through 12 system. But this work usually gets marginalized. So if you work in a formal way inside of a school system, usually, it's underfunded, and it's under-supported. And one of the things that I found when I decided to take this job and leave community colleges was that this particular district had a description for an equity officer that looked like one that I would have written myself.

Stephanie Hawley: And so I say all that to say that over the years in education that we use the language and we have a wonderful cultural proficiency and inclusiveness facilitator at Austin Independent School District. His name is Bavu Blakes and he often says that we've got to move from the language of equity to the labor of equity. So the first time in 38 years, I'm actually seeing people who are attempting to move from the language to the labor. Unfortunately in this process, a lot of the language is getting hijacked for labor that is not necessarily useful for children of color. And so my story begins in the mid-sixties, where about five of us integrated as school in Northeast Texas. And that was my educational experience. My dad was in the military. I went to kindergarten on a military installation in the Philippines, but he got stationed in Northeast Texas in the mid sixties and wound up . . . I realized that that's the beginning of my story around equity . . . In the military as a kid in the Air Force, dad enlisted. We lived with everybody, you know . . . my mother's best friends were Japanese and German. And so I grew up in a space beyond that desegregation space. I grew up in a space where I was not overwhelmed by or believed that white culture was superior.

Stephanie Hawley: I didn't feel that as an adult. And as I moved into college, I began to see that the system was never designed to work for me. I didn't know that I was allegedly at-risk until I was working on my master's degree. And a lot of this had to do with my family, my parents. My parents always spoke life into us. But I began to encounter people who had grown up in segregated spaces and actually believed white culture and white ways of doing things were superior. And I say that because that's the the foundation of the problem that we deal with. Gentrification, which is nothing more than colonization, and school closures and consolidations are a part of that phenomena. But it comes from a place of believing that white culture and this white supremacy . . . people often think white supremacy is the Neo Nazis and the skinheads.

Stephanie Hawley: But it really is what we've all bought into. We've been socialized to. We've been taught. The commercials teach us who's beautiful, who's not. When our kids go to school and the teachers are forever white, even white children are learning a lesson about who has power and who has intelligence. So equity work to me is about, as a member inside an organization, is about breaking down those structures, but doing that collaboratively with the people who are internal, who are leaning into this work. As an internal organizer, it's very difficult, not easy work, to be inside of an organization trying to, with empathy and compassion, develop a, what we call it, a critical community. A community of people who help to transform because I don't think we'll ever dismantle, but I do think we can help people to see what they can't see because I work with some amazing people. But they had been beautifully socialized to believe that white ways of doing things are the only ways of doing things.

Stephanie Hawley: And so therefore the only answer you have sometimes to structural problems, financial problems, is to close schools and close schools of black and brown children. That seems really feasible. And my work as an equity officer is to make sure that's no longer even an option to think that that's possible. And a lot of that comes out of not believing. So that's a belief gap. People talk about, you know, the academic gap, the opportunity gap. Yes. But we have a belief gap because if you can look at Latino children and many whom speak two languages and not see strength, and when you can look at African-American boys who are just amazing in the way they come together in teams and they collaborate . . . but the system is not designed to build on Latino children's strength. It's not designed to build on black boys' strengths or black girls' strengths.

Stephanie Hawley: And so we have people who have a mindset that they're going to do something good for these children, which is to shut down the communities. And in our case, in our district, you know, we're building new buildings. However many of our parents are disgruntled and they're leaving the district. And so those buildings are not going to be for the children that we say we're building them for and we're well intended and we believe that these buildings are useful. But in my trajectory through this work as a six year old kid and to present date, I see that we've got not just an Austin issue, but as the gentleman was talking earlier, we've got a national and international phenomena of new colonization and we're using the word equity to justify it. And so it is a challenge and, but I don't feel hopeless about it because I do believe organizing people internally and externally to be able to see what they can't see and to stop allowing people to hijack and appropriate this term.

Stephanie Hawley: Because you can be engaged in tokenism and say, we're gonna, we're going to build a new building for black and brown kids and call it equity. But equity is not just about the goal. Equity is about the way you get there. So the way you go determines where you go. So you can't get to equity by being inequitable, shutting out the voices of parents, ignoring research. And so those are some of the challenges we have internally with amazing people in our organization. So I'm grateful to be at this time in history where it looks like we're moving from language to labor and the grappling that goes on and, and doing it in community.

Allen Weeks: I like what you just said, that you can't get to equity by being inequitable. That the means, you know, you can't justify the means you're using by some end you're hoping might happen. And we've done that time and time again in our history. We've said, well, this'll be good for you. Right. Just trust us. This pathway is good. And it rarely is or very rarely is.

Stephanie Hawley: That's, I mean, that's the basis of Indian schools, right Yeah. Literally it was said we're going to kill the Indian and save the man. And that is something somebody thought was useful and it's diabolical. Genocide. Well-meaning, allegedly well-meaning genocide. And that's what we have to be careful of in this day and age.

Allen Weeks: And I do want to say we're holding this tonight at Webb Middle School and the Family Resource Center where in 2007, this school came within weeks or days of closing. And if it hadn't been the community organizing, community voice, but also as Jitu said, having a positive vision and detailing out that vision and then doing the hard work, this school would not exist. And the children that have been educated over the last 12 years, a lot of them would have disappeared, dropped out. Same thing at Reagan high school on the other side of the community where it had a 48% graduation rate and today they have a 98% graduation rate through the same community-based hard work belief. And I just want to emphasize that as we go through this tonight, belief and vision are vital. If you don't believe in children, all children, if you don't believe in teachers and you don't believe in community, if you judge a community you've never even been in, then the game's over.

Allen Weeks: And I, I think that's a lot of what we end up doing. But if you do, you see the kind of beautiful change that we've seen at these schools. Every time I go to Reagan and I see, you know, they've doubled enrollment. I hear stories. I lived in St. John for 18 years, and the neighbors I know who very well might've been dropouts and now are finishing college and have gone on to all sorts of, you know, I mean, they're having thriving lives. It's those things. So Jose, I'm going to talk to you because this is your reality. Every single day, as a director in the Family Resource Center, being a community school coordinator at Dobie, you see these kids and families that, you know, come from here to here, and you're a belief person.

Jose Carrasco: Yeah. And I just want to say I'm just humbled to be next to you all. I mean, just hearing you talk is, it's amazing. You know, I, I think I started thinking, talking about community, I mean, at a very young age, I was born in Chicago, but I was like six months or eight months. My mom talks about the day that my dad got caught by immigration, so we were deported to Mexico. And then I kinda started my educational system in Mexican, you know, like in Mexico, which was a very small school. And then, you know, I mean, my dad came back to the United States, but he came back to Austin. So when I was about seven years old . . . so it took a while for my dad to be able to bring. So I was first because I mean, I was born here, so it was easy.

Jose Carrasco: So it was just me and my dad for like, I remember a year and that first day of going from this really rural part of Mexico to a school in the U. S., I mean, I still remember the feeling of am I even worthy to be here. Because I remember coming from such a small village that I mean, I was born in 1980. Right. So this is like 1988, '87. And my cousin, you know, we were outside and he was giving me a haircut and then my other cousin brings out this box and somehow, some way, there's like a soccer game on this box. Now this is 1987. It's not like I'm talking. So that was the first time that as a seven year old, I had seen TV, so we're from a very rural part of Mexico named Santiago, Mexico.

Jose Carrasco: So for me, I was like, I get to come to school in this beautiful place. I don't even know if I will. I mean, legal, not legal. I just didn't understand why my mom couldn't come. I didn't understand why it was so easy for me. So I mean, as a kid you don't really know. You know, you're just trying to try to go with it. But I remember that when my mom showed up, I wanted to learn English so bad because I wanted, I wanted everything like I wanted to learn. Especially coming from a very rural place. So I think I became like a translator at the age of nine. I think it took me two years, a lot of Sesame street, to kind of pick it up. So sometimes I still remember those days, so I became like the family translator.

Jose Carrasco: Right. And I think I started my community school coordination work there because every time we went somewhere I was the link between the person and my parents. So growing up, you know, in East Austin, because that was the first place . . . So it was like rural town East Austin, that's all I knew was 78702 was first street through 12th street. That was my world, you know. So it was very interesting to kind of see that phase of my life, like going through elementary and then I get this opportunity and I, and I say opportunity because not everybody in the neighborhood got it. For some weird reason. I got bussed to West Austin, I got bussed to Murchison so I was at Brooke Elementary, so Brooke Lions, if anybody's out there, Brooke Lions. But then I got to all of a sudden, you know, I guess there were still kind of, experiments happening I guess or something.

Jose Carrasco: They wanted to kind of put some Hispanic and African-American kids in Murchison and Anderson. So I got to go in a bus for 45 minutes every morning, all the way to Murchison. And I remember the first time we went to Murchison, we got out of that bus and we looked at the grass and we said, "Is this real grass?" Like, is this like, Oh my Lord, and it's, and it's so interesting because here I am growing up in East Austin, at that time, I mean East Austin, I mean everybody was trying to get out of East Austin. I mean, I remember being a fifth grader, approached by gangs, drugs, alcohol, guns. I mean, so there was, now you're talking about 1995, '96. So Austin had this like, you know, East Austin was just like one of these places that nobody wanted to touch.

Jose Carrasco: Nobody wanted to go around East Austin. So I remember going 45 minutes away and not being able to, my parents couldn't, I mean, they were literally detached from my education. My dad didn't drive, my mom didn't drive. So I'm coming back to my neighborhood and seeing all the stuff that was different from 45 minutes away from the same city even. I mean, even the grass, I mean, I remember we used to play football in this, you know, piece of dirt that was kind of available to us and then just go, I mean, even something as simple as, as the grass, right. So I'm coming back home, starting to realize that there's something not right about the situation here. And of course the neighborhood kind of changing and the neighborhood kids that were going to Martin kind of seeing, you know, talking to them and understanding the different levels.

Jose Carrasco: So I was like, it was all kind of like opportunity, but also I felt kind of sad about it because now when you go to East Austin, I mean now of course East Austin has changed so much. I mean, I can't even, I don't even know where I'm at in my own neighborhood. And the member I was seven when I, when I got there and now I don't even know East Austin, but there's bike lanes, there's beautiful spots. I mean safe neighborhood, people walking left and right. People walking their dogs. It wasn't like that for me. And it kind of troubles me because why wasn't it like that for me. Why didn't I get the bike bikeway or the art shows or the exposure to all the stuff that's happening in East Austin now. You know why? And in talking about Chicago, I mean when you were talking about Chicago and you know, in 2004 here, I was in the military, I was in the Marines.

Jose Carrasco: I joined the Marines after I graduated, from 2000 to 2005, and I remember my dad calling me around 2002, because I had just bought property next to his in East Austin. He called me up and he goes, the neighborhood's changing. There's this lady that wakes up earlier than I do. My dad wakes up super early and she has, she has this rope and her dog is almost like dragging her and she runs like all over the neighborhood. And he was just amazed by this situation because that wasn't normal in my neighborhood. They closed down the recycling center that, you know, there was a lot of transient people. So that got closed down. They closed down all the bars. So I'm thinking, wow, they're really changing this neighborhood. I wished that I would've been exposed to all the stuff that's happening now when I was a kid.

Jose Carrasco: So I dunno. I think my journey through East Austin and through family resource centers, like I grew up in a family resource center. You know, I, I was picked up in this van and I was, you know, exposed to like the movies. I had never gone to the movies. I was still like 13, 14 but luckily for a family resource center and Deacon Willie Cortez, he had a youth group and he would take us to this family center on Sixth and Chicon. And that's how I kinda, that was my first family center. And I started getting exposed but then, you know, moving out and then coming back from the Marines is really, really when I saw the effects of money and the effects of privilege and the effects of just, yeah, it's some, some of it you just, you're really saddened by the situation sometimes.

Allen Weeks: You know, I think you've kind of pointed out something that sometimes there's a piece of property that nobody cares about for a long time and then suddenly somebody cares about that piece of property. You want to know what happened, why is, why is everybody want my piece of dirt that nobody wanted before. And I think, you know, we see that time and time again, you know, we give a name, gentrification, it's a positive thing. It's going to make it look prettier. But we don't think about people and we don't think about children. And I think what you've described, describes a lot of the kids, the dislocation of kids and families, but it also describes something in Jitu. I'd like all of you to talk about this, you know, this idea of community schools and I know there's people who would like . . . I've been in education for 40 years and people want a magic something, a magic wand, a magic solution.

Allen Weeks: If we only have this curriculum, if we only have this. And all those pieces can be good and all of them can be important, but none of them are magic. But we constantly want something magical. Community schools is not magic. It doesn't solve or change anything. It's just a way of thinking about schools that organizes the best of people and gives you the best chance to build something that's deep and strong. Really it is the old-fashioned idea. (Stephanie Hawley: It's relational) Exactly, it's a very relational place where we're, instead of looking at Jose, who's new to new to this culture, a new American . . . instead of looking at you in a deficit way . . . instead of saying, you know, you're strange, it says, we welcome you, we welcome your family. We welcome. And you guys have a lot to offer.

Allen Weeks: I'm not on the panel, but I just want to say I lived in St. John's for these years and my neighbors had all sorts of skills and knowledge that I didn't have and I had skills that I could offer them. But the generosity I found in the St. John's neighborhood . . . I had a friend who told me, "Don't move in there. It's dangerous." I grew up in a neighborhood similar, I'm a military family, so similar and I just knew people would be generous. I had a tree in my front yard that was dead and a family came over one day after work. They did landscaping and we had helped them work with a drug problem on their street. And they came over and were just talking after work and we were leaning on the dead tree and he went and got his crew and spent an hour and a half cutting the tree down into wood and doing all that after work at no cost, just because we were neighbors and just that kind of kindness. And you see that over the amount of times you get invited around food, birthday parties, all those different ways that are community, I think a community school captures all that. And, and so I want you guys just to talk a little bit about your experience in those kinds of schools and how with the families that we have in Austin, how those, more than charter schools and more than some of these other answers, really can be a positive solution.

Jose Carrasco: I think one of the biggest things is trust. Trust. So I mean trust is one of these words where, as a community, you have to be able to build your school. I mean, it's interesting that the people that are being educated like the kids, and I mean when we start doing community school planning dinners, we include everybody, teachers, students, parents, and, and we make sure that everybody understands that this is not my school. This is not your school, this is OUR school. So how do we grow and how do we build this trust and how do we put as much as we can back into that neighborhood, into that school. Not 10 years from now when that land becomes worth something. But now.

Allen Weeks: And you know, you just said this is our school. I think that's a really important concept. A healthy school is where people are saying this is our school. But if you're always saying to a community like St. John or other communities that you don't deserve a school, while other communities deserve a school. But if you're constantly having to fight for the right to just have a school as St. John has had to fight for its elementary, its middle and its high school continually, then what are you saying? What's the message that comes?

Jitu Brown: Allen, I will add this if I could. As we began to try to organize our vision, this Journey for Justice Alliance, we had to develop our own set of definitions in regards to so that we can have our own independent lens that we could see through. And so the first question we asked ourselves is what is education And the definition we came up with is inspiration and information that prepared people to positively impact society. And we did that because we knew that that goes far beyond standardized tests, that goes far beyond winners and losers. He goes towards the work of reaching every child. He'll be helping every child find that light that's already been that we know exists inside of this child. And that's the work of an educator, right Then you talk to any educator, worth their salt. They'll tell you that was not about the bubbles that children fill in in a test.

Jitu Brown: It's about the moment of self-discovery. It's about that child beginning to challenge their own habits because they see that they can do more. That's what education is. And when we asked sort of what is equity, because we're not even at equality, let alone equity in the United States, right. And so when we talk about equity, we're talking about supports that really a deficit or a harm that's been caused, right So equity is not about the same. Equity is about what is needed. And we'll never fix education in the United States unless we deal with the baseless hatred that has been exhibited through white supremacy towards black, brown, and indigenous families. That this baseless hatred infects every quality-of-life institution that we can think about. I mean, you just think about this that how many millions of people that look like us on this panel have had their lives ruined because they had a drug habit.

Jitu Brown: So when the crack epidemic, it was about they're monsters, they're animals. Lock them up. But now that it's the opioid crisis, there's a completely different approach because many of the children, the young people that are addicted to opioids look very different from the people who sit on this panel, so there is a perspective problem. There is an issue of a deep-seated racism that has never been addressed. I'll give you an example. We just put an equity bus tour in Little Rock, Arkansas where we compared two middle schools. One middle school called New Pinnacle, which was in a white community and a middle school called Cloverdale, which was in the middle of the black community. Little Rock, Arkansas, now, which was home to the Little Rock Nine. And of course we looked at course offerings. We looked at how discipline is administered. And it was two completely different realities. Now we don't have any acrimony towards young people that have those resources.

Jitu Brown: God bless them, we're glad that they do. But did you know that when this equity bus tour was on the news, the organizer of the equity bus got all types of hate mail from white people who were angry because we were pointing out these inequities. There is a sickness that has to be addressed. And the job of the community organizer, part of it, is to expose that sickness and we have to make America face her ugly. So that when we're having conversations around, you know, what should happen in education. We're not, we're not dealing with people who are blinded, don't want to see. There's an old African proverb that says not to know what's bad but not to wish to know was worse. And I think it's very important that when we talk about community schools, here's why we believe community schools are so important.

Jitu Brown: If you look at how education is administered in our communities, or our institutions are administered in our communities, the thing that happens is that our voices are ignored. People or systems implement these institutions based on their opinions of us. And what happens is that they locked out our voices So as Stephanie said, who will appear to mean well. You can't tell me that you love my child if you don't the voice of the parent You can't tell me that you care about my child, but you don't care about the communities that we live in and the things that we go through in those communities. We developed a model called sustainable community schools because imagine this, imagine if an expert like Stephanie is convening a group of students, parents and young people, and then looking at reimagining the school. Let's say you're looking at Webb School.

Jitu Brown: Then they say, how can we improve Webb. In sustainable community schools, we look at six pillars: curriculum that is engaging, relevant and challenging support. Supports for high quality teaching, wraparound supports for every child, a student-centered school climate, transformative parent and community engagement, and inclusive school leadership. So imagine if you're actually getting real input from all school stakeholders in all six of those pillars. That is actually reform. The status quo is what they're proposing in Austin, saying that we know what's best for you and we're going to shove these ideas down your throat. That is the status quo. What would actually be reform is communities being able to envision and be active participants in their own education and liberation. So my experience is I was the first resource coordinator, I was the resource coordinator for the first community high school in Chicago, which was South Shore School of Entrepreneurship, and that experience taught me that it's community wisdom and academic expertise that leads to school improvement.

Jitu Brown: That you need the voice of everyone impacted because if not, then you have a perspective that is often blurred because you don't see. I'll give an example. When we did our community school at South Shore, one of the things we did is we put on our school leadership team the pastor in the neighborhood had two medical clinics in his church. He also had a soup kitchen where he fed 300 people a day, and so what the teachers did as part of the young people's social studies, is they actually interviewed people from the church who the pastor had selected . . .

Jitu Brown . . . to learn about homelessness, why people become homeless. It was a powerful experience because the pastor realized that he could actually participate in the young people's education. But if you have a system that does not respect the institutions in the neighborhood, the heroes in the neighborhood, the men and women in the neighborhood, the history, then what you have is invader institutions. You have people coming in the community and they colonize our communities. So I believe that sustainable community schools is not a panacea, but it is an opportunity for us to use education reforms that are evidence-based, and that brings the force of everyone involved. And what happens is when people help build something, they'll fight for it. When people help build something, they'll own it. But if people are customers, customers come and go. And that's the flaw of the privatization movement. You know, you said, Stephanie said earlier that these people use civil rights language, but you can't eliminate democracy.

Jitu Brown: It said you're about civil rights. You can't eliminate the voices of the people directly impacted and say you're about civil rights. And that's one of the flaws of the charter movement because they, you know, even in their decision making. They stack these governing boards with 15 people with primarily business people would a couple of token parents. So what I would say to your listeners is that we cannot believe the scam called school choice we have. We have to realize that education is much more, is much too important to just say what's needed in education is the choice of more schools. If you think about it, it's really unintelligent art. You really think about it because what community schools provides is an opportunity. Well, I need an example. When we deal with the planning for Dyett, we were planning our vision for Dyett High School as a hub of a sustainable community school village.

Jitu Brown: We have young people in focus groups getting input on science, school discipline. We had parents talking about what they want their children to learn and we have expert facilitators who respected community knowledge and content knowledge and they brought all that together and we developed the plan that the American Education Research Association said was the best academic plan that they had ever seen and excuse my slang. That plan came from the hood. That plan didn't come from an ivory tower. That came from respectfully engaging people in our communities or around what if you could dream, what would you want for your child. And then community organizing is important because every right that we have as black, brown and indigenous people, as women. Every right that we have in this country has come through community organizing because we've had to push a system that was not intended for us to prosper in in the first place. So I'll just add that in in regards to community schools.

Allen Weeks: That's it. And I do want to say at Webb, we have done that kind of planning and at Reagan. We just started last April. We updated our community school plan. We had over a hundred parents, teachers, students, community partners involved throughout the summer. We didn't know what was coming, that this school closure thing was going to touch this school and we finished it in September. It is a great plan and it just, it continues to build. It addresses some of the inequities. The school, all the middle schools, the Title 1 middle schools in Austin have been . . . there's been disinvestment over the last three or four years. You can talk to every principal and talk about the cuts in tutoring, the cuts in staffing, the cuts in all sorts of things and are , , , supports so much. We're sitting in a family resource center that the district provides about a quarter of the funding for.

Allen Weeks: We have to go out and find the rest to keep this thing going. I mean, it's, it's hard. We appreciate the district, but at the same time we sent that plan off at the end of September and it's been crickets from the district. And I know the district's busy, but I expect when you do that hard work in community to hear more than crickets from the district. But despite what we hear or don't hear, we are implementing that plan. You know, we're, I mean, we've already got things that have happened and we've marched for that plan. And . . .

Jose Carrasco: So one of the biggest things we do when we do these community schools is planning dinners is just, I mean, it's amazing because I was thinking, I was thinking of the word and it's dreaming. Like how do you give a community in those students, you know, how do you let them dream again, not this small dream about no, the big dream, the American dream. Like I remember when I was growing up, for me, education was going to be the equalizer. If I got educated enough and if I was able to make it, then I was going to be able to be somebody. Right And education needs to be one of those things that is so important for a family. And it's so important for that neighborhood, you know, because education opens so many doors. But how do we get people to dream again about education and trust education and be a part of education and be a part of community schools.

Jose Carrasco: Because we need kids to want to be educated. We need communities to understand the importance of education. So growing up, the importance of education was my dad coming home and you know, he, he worked in a junkyard and my mom worked at the Capitol at nights as a cleaning lady. And when he came home, he used to look at me in the eye and said, look, I, I'm not gonna leave you with a bunch of money. I'm not going to leave you with, with money for you to go to college, but I'm going to make sure you go to school every day. I'm going to make sure that, that you use, you get your butt over there and that you work hard. You need to be educated. And he used to tell me that all the time. I mean, of course, you know, sometimes I would listen and sometimes I wouldn't.

Speaker 4: But now I find myself saying that to my kids. The importance of education. My 13 year old and me just had this conversation. And really we were talking about equity the whole entire time without me even realizing it. I'm telling it, I'm trying to tell him, I'm pushing you because I'm pushing you to be, you know, this educated person. Because could you imagine if somebody and my parents, I love my parents, they're hardworking, you know, they just didn't get the opportunity to get educated. I mean they have, you know, up to sixth grade. But could you imagine if I was at the same level at those, you know, like those families from Murchison, or those affluent families that if, if you know, I knew a doctor or an engineer back when I was growing up and somebody was able to say, you can be this, you know, and even though my parents were trying to get me to go and to graduate high school and I thank them every day for that, but the playing field, I mean I was right here, so I'm trying to get my kid right and an education for me is, is so dear to me because I feel like it could be the big opening to everybody's dream of this American dream that we all kind of aspire.

Jose Carrasco: Right So, I mean I just . . . community schools for me is, is that third question we ask, the third question is, and we always do this. What is your, what is your dream for your school. What is the dream for your, for your student, for your kid, what is the dream. So I think when you allow a community to dream and a student to dream and that staff member and that teacher to dream, guess what. If that dream comes together, then you're building something. Because education should be the most important thing. But we defund it, we take it away and we close it down. We leave it over there. And gosh, if, if, if we can understand how important it is and what if we can make our, our, you know, how, you know, just to want it so much because it's super important.

Stephanie Hawley: It's the community schools to me are . . . the most beautiful thing are they are disruptors, right. Because the thing that we never talk about are the systems that are complicit are in play because you don't close schools and you don't consolidate schools in isolation. There are other systems, invisible hands. And I'm back to my, my original white supremacy, right. White supremacy is invisible. And I often say it's like carbon monoxide. It's killing us all, but we're all breathing it, right. And so all these systems that are rooted in white supremacy, which means white culture, white ways of being, white dominance, stay in place. The school system is the arm of white supremacy. And so you have to be careful that your kids aren't getting schooled instead of educated. We often say education has to take place at home so that I can teach you how. So I have four adult children. I had to educate them at home so they could navigate schooling because schools are designed to uphold what is already in place and to have you chasing what white people value, right.

Stephanie Hawley: So if you get schooled, you want to change, you want that which white people have. If you get educated, you want relationships, right, and you want people on the margins to come to the center. So if you get educated, right, you want things for people, you want to be a bridge. You want to, just like you were saying a few minutes ago, the work that you do, right, you're educated because you care about people and you want the world to be different. If you get schooled, you're like, I'll often say it's like the matrix, right. And you're a battery for somebody. And if you can, a community schools disrupts systems. And one of my favorite writers and some of my staff have heard me say it too many times, my colleagues at AISD. Audrey Lorde, phenomenal writer, black lesbian writer, she said many years ago, she said, you will never dismantle the master's house with the master's tools.

Stephanie Hawley: And so often we try to do equity work. We try to interrupt the privatization of schooling with the same destructive tools that built the system. And so we have to do the opposite. If we're going to interrupt school closures, we're going to have relationships. We're going to have to . . . right now to AISD, we have a, I have to give a shout out to Dr. Angela Ward who's been doing cultural proficiency work and doing this word before anybody was talking about it. But she right now has organized a group of students and it's called SOAR (Students Organized Against Racism). And we are building leaders in various schools and many of these are white kids that we're teaching about racism. We know that young black children, they learn about racism very young. We have to teach them how to interact with police, how to interact with white teachers. We have to teach them all this.

Stephanie Hawley: And a lot of white kids walk through the world without even thinking about being white. And so the work that Dr. Ward is doing in our district right now is we're trying to prepare young people to do this work, to lead and to see what they can't see. And so we want, if we want people to be educated, we've got to do the opposite of what the system has been doing all this time. And so this community schools relational and that's all that you've got, right? And the children can learn anything when they know that you believe in them and they care. And so there's a reeducation of teachers. And then there's something called internalized racial oppression where we start thinking we are less than and deserve less. And part of the undoing and undoing white supremacy often talks about the unlearning. They have unlearning circles where white people can sit and start to learn what many of us have known.

Stephanie Hawley: People of color had to know for survival and to navigate schooling so we can come back educated. We have different paths. So community schools has the ability to disrupt systems and that to me is the power and it's, it's one of the models we're using. I've been four months in the equity office and AISD, but it is one of the models we're going to be using as we go forward because it requires leadership development, it requires student and family voice. It requires that you look at the data. It requires that you look at resource allocations. If I see different resource allocations for different schools in East Austin and West Austin, we have to disrupt that. And so this model that we're engaged in, so that's what gives me radical hope. Yes. Because right now there's a seed, right, I'm sitting in a space that says what's possible in this district And it's not like we don't have an example. We have this and so we have to in love engage the people who can't see what love looks . . . 'cause this is what love looks like. We don't talk about love, but this is what love looks like. A community school.

Jose Carrasco: . . . and families, you know, growing up in, in my neighborhood, all I remember is knowing that is my neighborhood, my family . . . and trusting. So I think it took a lot of people to get me to where I'm at today. Right. And it took a lot of pushing, right. So education for me and community schools is everybody is backing up, is backing that student. It's not just that student going alone at it. You know, I was the first one to go to middle school. I was the first one to go to high school. I was the first one to join the military, but I had people, somebody had my back, right. So when I started, when I came back from the Marines, I just wanted to make sure that, you know, other kids that kind of had that similar or other kids or any kid that, that really understood like, Hey, you know what, this education thing, you know, they can really get you out a level.

Jose Carrasco: But if you trust it and if you love it and you bring people to your table and you make them understand the importance of it, then we can really change, change the world, change your community. My dad always said, I want you to be 10 times better than me. Not, he didn't mean like in money. He didn't mean like in wealth, he meant like in, I want you to be 10 times better than me in making your world better. Like your community. I want you to come back. And if you see people struggling, or if you see people cold, you give them your jacket. If you see somebody hungry, you know, you don't ask them why. You just feed them and then you ask them why. So I was in the Marines where we honestly believe in, you know, you stop the bleeding and then you figure everything else out.

Jose Carrasco: So I, I bring that model to the Family Resource Center because if somebody is hungry, then as a community we need to feed them and then figure out how, you know, how to teach somebody to fish, all that stuff. But, but you know, if they're cold, just give them the jacket right there and and then figure it out. Bring them in, bring them in into this family and then make them dream that it could be a reality. So when I started with community schools, I really was thrown back by, by its dynamic and how really how it takes a village. It really does takes, you know, it does take a village and how easy that can become.

Stephanie Hawley: Because you've got the beautiful work. So we . . . the beautiful work of someone's hungry, right. And we feed them and then we figure out what it's, so, why they're hungry. And you, as you said, teaching them how to fish. And so my work is, I need to figure out how you, you were hungry in the first place, right. I need to figure out what is it in this system that allowed anybody to be hungry. Yes. We have to teach them how to fish. So we have to do this both/and work. And my work is about trying to make sure that people . . . charity does not have to exist. We have to ask ourselves, why is charity necessary, right. Why are all these fixes necessary. And so everybody's got a role in this thing called equity because as Jitu just said, you know, it's about making sure everybody gets what they need to be successful.

Stephanie Hawley: And I mean the national equity project, that's what it's all about, making sure you get the unique thing that you need. And it's also about building on the strengths of people and not assuming their deficits. So we all have work to do in the sense of, some of us have systemic work to do. And then some of us have to build those relationships so we can help people build a self-efficacy and this self-advocacy so that they can survive to organize, to transform the system. And so it's complex work and there are days when it feels overwhelming and then there are days where you just need to feed the hungry, you know you can't fix the system. They created hunger and so we all have to know what our roles are and community schools gives everybody a role. There are some people that they've got to look at the policies and the practices that are creating problems for the school and then there are other people that have got to work directly with the children who are impacted because these multiple systems are so destructive to the children and then they get to us and yet another system in the school system has the ability, and that's why I'm in in K through 12 right now is because I believe that the K through 12 system is the place where we can turn this around, but it's going to be done collaboratively. I believe that this is a social justice arm of America. But we've got to do it internally and externally. You've got to work together to transform the system.

Allen Weeks: And I, I think you've just described perfectly our philosophy. You have the Family Resource Center. I mean, that's exactly . . . you know that people come, they come and need you don't ask, but at the same time you say, how can we, how can we help you get from here to here, but you're the one who's in charge of your journey and you're the one who' . . . and you know, we're helping, we're coaching. But you're the one, you always own that journey. And some families come to us and the problems they have stem generations back. You know, where you get a dad who's got a serious felony on his record that's going to be there because of our system and it's going to prevent them from getting the apartment they need and on and on. And you know, we work with that and those things, but you have to change the larger system.

Allen Weeks: I just want to tell a very quick example of something we did at Reagan High School is community school planning. We sat down with parents. They (the district and state) were about to throw Reagan in the trash. Everybody was, the state was, the district was, and it was, it was on its last legs. Kids were fleeing but alumni, parents, students, everybody said we're not going to give up. And that was about 150 people. I remember we met five weeks in a row just to talk and listen and just in groups, just to kind of get what's going on here. But one thing we learned in that year was that 25% of the girls at Reagan were either pregnant or parenting. And that Reagan, while it had a childcare, it did very little to support those girls, and we did the numbers. 11% of those girls would graduate.

Allen Weeks: So 89% of that 25% of the school would drop out with children. And we perpetuate the cycle and we got everybody we could think of. And when I say we, it's the big us. Everybody it took to just think through, to take that apart. And what do we do to make sure, and by the way, just I think four years ago was the first year that 100% of pregnant and parenting teens at Reagan high school graduated on time. And they, I mean, you know, because of these intentional things you learn about the system was we learned that the state system education code said that a parent, if they miss school because of an, a child's illness, that was an unexcused absence. So we did ran the numbers and we found that those girls had on average about 10 absences a year due to a child's illness.

Speaker 1: And that alone caused them to fail. They can make an A in a class, but with 10 unexcused absences, they were going to fail classes. And so we got a team, it took us three tries, we went to the state legislature and we got that changed in the law where with a doctor's note, and they could, it became an excused absence. (Stephanie Hawley: That's systemic change.) It's all of those pieces. It's hard work, but it is great work, but it's only the community. You know, an institution like an AISD or a city of Austin, it's all broken up into little cubicles. You know, nobody has the power (Stephanie Hawley: That's no accident.) A lot of good people, but they're stopped and it's community that can run around those cubicles and sometimes help those really good people within the system. You can carry the water around us, around the side and, and break the system, break the cycle. But I, you know, I think the system part you're talking about is really, really important and it's something they don't want us to talk about. I've found with community schools, I want you all to comment on this, but I've found the more success we've had, the more resistance, it took me a while to realize it, but the more the hand pushes back in a sense as well.

Jitu Brown: This might sound conspiratorial. I really don't care. I think what we have to recognize is that folk for black, brown, and indigenous people, everything is political. Every song, you know, on radio, every, every . . . Why is there a liquor store on the corner of my block instead of a grocery store, everything is political. So, you know, what we learned in Chicago, and I will say this, a lot of people know about the fight we had for Dyett High School that resulted in a four year campaign to save my last open enrollment neighborhood high school. And after we developed our world-class plan for Dyett and six of its feeder schools, district reneged on their commitment to support it. And we ended up going on a hunger strike. The hunger strike took 34 days. My members were hospitalized as a result. And ultimately we won. The school is open today with \$16 million in brand new investments.

Jitu Brown: And this is sustainable community school. It's still wonderful, but I will say this, what we found out as we were fighting for Dyett was that this was the proposed location for the Obama Presidential Center. And that if the Obama Presidential Center comes in our neighborhood, they're not going to put a check cashing place next to it, they're not going to put an African hair braiding shop next to it, but they're going to put next to it institutions for an international tourist destination. And so when you say, why do people resist, because in my humble opinion, because you know, some people take like some elements of our society, like people that are in control and other folks think like consumers and we tend to think like consumers. So we don't think about how to control our community over the next 20, 30, 75 a hundred years.

Jitu Brown: But the local governments and the corporations that often tell them what to do, they do look at society like that. And so I have, we have members in Benton Harbor, Michigan right now. Benton Harbor, Michigan is a small city, about 10,000 people. Very prime real estate and they're trying to close schools in Benton Harbor because they want to, they want it to become a much more San Francisco-like space and they want the people that live in . . . So I think is really important that we recognize that what's happening in our schools is not about education. It's not about education, sadly. When they fought us over Dyett High School, we couldn't, you know, it took us a long time to really understand that what they really wanted the Obama Presidential Center to be was, it was a death blow in regards to the indigenous population staying in Dyett.

Jitu Brpwn: So I would just offer that in regards to why they fight back so much is the work . . . I want to reiterate, I think that we have to realize that we could be building infrastructure for speaking power to power has to be things that we put in place now. Because while we are operating as if, you know, we all have the chance to live the American dream, there are interests at play, that work to make sure that we no longer live in those areas. If you look at Hurricane Katrina, what happened after Hurricane Katrina, despite the fact that thousands of people drowned and lost their lives, what they did after Hurricane Katrina is they closed the County hospital, they did not rebuild the affordable housing. There's this promise and they gave all the schools to the charter lobbies. So now that the district is 100% charter and the black population in new Orleans has gone down just like it's gone down in Chicago, in Washington, DC, Oakland . . . I can go on and on. Philadelphia, Cleveland, all of these places where we are, the loss of education institutions and affordable housing has resulted in the removal of us from those spaces.

Jitu Brown: So if we build community power and we're able to carve out a place for us in those communities, and I think that's just a . . . it has to be part of our thinking when we look at why these things that happened to us.

Stephanie Hawley: Yeah. I, I certainly agree with you that . . . one of my . . . as we were going through this school changes process in Austin, we weren't talking to a lot of black and brown families because they couldn't, many could not come during the times that we had identified to have the conversations. And so I had to go and have my own conversations with folks in East Austin. And one of the first interviews I had with an African-American man was, he told me, he said, Dr. Holly, what they are doing is that this is an evacuation and the evacuation has been going on for years. So every few years they call out the names of certain schools and people go away and they go to the charters. And then we have people complain and say, well, black people and brown people are leaving Austin because of affordable housing.

Stephanie Hawley: However, there are like 27 charter schools in East Austin. So black and brown people are remaining, many are remaining in Austin, but the children are walking to the charters, are being driven or catching the bus. And so affordable housing is a problem. But the bigger picture we have to see is, as you said a Jitu is this whole piece about being able to look into the future. So the Iroquois people have a saying that says every decision you make, you make it for seven generations. And so when the district first engaged, when I first got there in August, I started looking. I said, what does East Austin look like in seven generations? And then there's a, a gentleman named Dusty Harshman who's active in the community and with the school, and he's also a sociologist. And so he put together a map that showed that when these proposed elementary schools closed, we were going to have a public school elementary desert.

Stephanie Hawley : And when I looked at that, it chilled me too to the bone. And so if you don't have elementary schools, then you don't need public middle schools. And if you don't need public middle schools, your high school, your feeder schools are disappearing. So what, how are, what is the architecture of East Austin? And so that whole piece you have about the future, we do have to have that thinking because a lot of times black and brown people, we look at the history. History is critical for us. History is critical to getting to equity too, because that's where you see where people were disenfranchised, however. And you have to be present. So you can have relationships with people and organize and see into seven generations later. So in order for you to be effective at community schools, at this reorganization and transformation, you've got to have the past, the present, and the future in mind because there are definitely people who are totally future-focused and they don't care who they have to remove.

Stephanie Hawley: So you think about, and I always go back to the Trail of Tears, the way Native American indigenous people were removed from the very land that we're on right now, where we are sitting and people were moved. And so when that gentleman told me, this is a long-term, multi-year evacuation plan, and I just looked at him and I was fairly new and I thought that's an interesting theory. And then later as I went back and looked at what we had closed, what we were proposing to close, and I thought, and you know, and he didn't have a lot to say to me, a lot of African-American people I approached they, they were very much dismissive. Dr Hawley, they're going to do what they're going to do. I had one black woman, she told me, "Hey, this black and brown dirt is worth more than the black and brown children in the building." I had to sit with that. I had to sit with the idea that there was a belief in the black community that this, these complex systems value the land more than they value the community because what happens with closures and what happens with consolidations is the destruction of the school community and we have a couple of situations where we're breaking up school communities and they're going in four or five different or even more directions, some of the schools.

Jitu Brown: Stephanie, can I ask something. I just wanted to share with your audience. In the year 2000, the black population of Chicago was 53%. After over 160 school actions, today, we're at 29% of the population. Not even 20 years. I want to say that if you look at Washington, D.C. Our nickname for Washington, D.C. was "chocolate city" and there was a time when black people was 76% of the population of Washington, D.C. Today, we're 47%. Washington, D.C. is the second most chartered city in the United States. School privatization is directly connected to the purge of black and brown people from American urban spaces. Now, some people say that's because census data is saying that by 2030 white Americans will be minorities in the United States are those that are in power are reshaping . . . that also an explanation as to why the immigration policy is what it is. Because what's happened is as the white population diminishes and the population of color goes up, there have to be moves to make sure that the power remains in the hands of those who have it right now. Now folks can believe that or not, but I know that what we're seeing in cities over there in California . . . and it's the most chartered district in the state of California, so you have to realize that fight for public education is not just about public education. It's about our right to live and thrive in these spaces because it is at risk. So I think the notion of community schools is so important because, you know what you can actually do with community schools? You can actually educate young people about how communities are structured. You can learn leadership development. How do you get a stop sign if you want a stop sign? How do you move a piece of legislation if you have to move a piece of legislation?

Jitu Brown: Why is it important that this school is named after Paul Robeson? Who was Paul Robeson? You can put those types of things in place. Make sure that our young people learn what they need to learn in order to be people who can actually contribute to the future of this country . Stephanie Hawley: You're talking about education. That's education.

Stephanie Hawley: You're talking about education. That's education.

Allen Weeks: Stephanie and Jitu, I just want to say while we're having this town hall, the school has been full of parents. We're in a portable building right behind the school. The school has had a literacy night tonight planned by parents. They've, they've had a petition to go on around to get a dangerous stop near the school crossing to get that fixed to get a crossing guard. The parents are actually doing that kind of action even tonight. And that wouldn't have happened 12 years ago because people were, 14 years ago, because people were so discouraged and disenfranchised and not made to feel welcome in their own school. But people feel welcome in a community school. I've been kind of watching you guys and have actually followed the texts pretty well. What people have been asking.

Allen Weeks: You've been answering those, but somebody just texted, if AISD believed in equity, they would revamp the transportation policy and help low-income kids get to school with buses within the two mile radius, which I know charters have offered a lot of, you know . . . that's one reason a lot of parents have chosen charters because, they've picked up . . . proximity, they'll get there. So anyway, that was a comment that came in. I know we're almost out of time for this discussion, and we're going to continue, but our theme was equity is a verb. It's about action as well. It stems from belief. One thing I've heard loud and clear tonight it's also about relationship and relationship is not how the school changes process has worked heretofore.

Allen Weeks: But there's always tomorrow and one thing we have in our neighborhood is hope. We have HopeFest, too. We had 4,000 people over at Reagan this last year, 3,500 people in October from the community. The spread of community schools and relationship is indeed possible. But I'd like to just finish the, we've got about six minutes before Facebook says we're done. Shuts us down. But just what would be an action or two that you would say we need to take out of tonight

Jitu Brown: So I think two things I'd like to invite our panel and our audience is, I want to say that there is an education justice movement happening in the United States. There's a fight, a movement for sustainable community schools. Several cities, people are fighting back and winning community schools. There are, there is a fight against the school to prison pipeline and the last thing so we are no longer isolated . . . that's half the battle. So I want to invite your audience. This Saturday we're actually holding the first presidential forum on education equity. Our work is to make public education a wedge issue in the upcoming presidential election. So folks can tune in this Saturday on MSNBC. It's livestreamed and you can watch it on MSNBC as well. This Saturday from 9:00 AM to about three o'clock with a series of town halls of presidential candidates around their position on public education. These questions will be asked by parents, young people and educators and on the agenda is school privatization. Charter schools, community schools, full funding of Title 1, standardized testing and a number of issues that are important. And I bring that up.

Jitu Brown: Because this is one of the steps that we're going to be using to make sure that presidential candidates, people that aspire to be president, have to speak to the breadth of the education justice movement. And the last thing I wanted to do is invite you all, and Stephanie, if I've got to come get you I'm coming to get you, to come to the Journey for Justice National Conference. It's going to be May 22 through the 24th in Baltimore, Maryland. The theme is transnational unity and action. And we will have people fighting for education justice from all over the world, including Chile, an organization called Alto al SIMCE (Stop the Standardized Test), Equal Education from Johannesburg, South Africa. Federación de Maestros de Puerto Rico, and also a group called MST out of Brazil as well as folks from around the United States. So I would love for Austin Voices to be present there and love for your listeners to check us this out this Saturday.

Allen Weeks: Awesome. Thank you. Those are great. Stephanie.

Stephanie Hawley: Right. Action. So my action is probably a lot less activist, but what I would encourage people to do, particularly in Austin is one, start to think about how to build bridges, right, build bridges inside the school district and build bridges within the school and in the community. And I say this because I believe this work can be done peacefully. Yes. There's resistance because people don't like to change a system's default to what they do. But I think it's really critical that we approach this work from a place of humanity and assume that people are doing the best they can with their current mindset, but fiercely holding people accountable for the change that's necessary. But if we . . . everyone here that's in this conversation, if we understand that people within systems have been conditioned and socialized to those behaviors, they are deeply ingrained and invested in being right. I could do a whole podcast on white supremacy culture, but part of the culture is "I have to be right." And there's a lot of ego involved. And so those of us who are in community need to try to be in humanity and community with the decision makers inside. Because a lot of times the vitriol, the anger, the backlash comes from decisions that are made inside of institutions, calcifies people. And it dehumanizes the people who are making the decisions that we don't like. And that's not getting us to what we're trying to get for students. And so that's why I encourage you to build a bridge with

Stephanie Hawley: people inside the system that you don't agree with, people that you don't love, don't like their decision. You've got to build bridges because this work has to be done with humanity and it doesn't mean because you're a part of an oppressive system that we get to dehumanize you. You may be wrong, but I, we cannot dehumanize one another and vilify one another. We've got to build relationships.

Allen Weeks: Jose, you literally have one minute.

Jose Carrasco: One minute. I just want the communities to see . . . let's stop. We know what's going to happen. We're in Austin and we know what's going to happen. You need to come to the table. You need to speak out. You're worth, you are worth everything. It's okay to come to the table to voice your opinion. You know, if you want a community school, just say you want a community school. If you want schools not to close, then come on down and speak up. You know, we already see what's happening. It's going to continue to happen. St John's, Rundberg, it's going to continue until we're out of Austin. So either we stop it and we learn and we don't get fooled again, or we just let it continue and then we're calling some other place our home so we see what happens. So it's time to stop it.

Allen Weeks: Thank you guys so much. We're going to continue this conversation. Thank you so much and good night to our listeners. Thank you.

# Austin Voices for Education and Youth

Austin Voices for Education and Youth creates community collaboration to strengthen families, support kids and improve schools. We believe our public schools can serve as powerful hubs for bringing neighborhoods, families and students together to achieve positive change.

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