



1703 North Beauregard Street
Alexandria, VA 22311-1714 USA
1-703-578-9600 or 1-800-933-2723
1-703-575-5400 (fax)
www.ascd.org

**Written Testimony of
Ronn Nozoe
Interim CEO & Executive Director
ASCD
Submitted to the
Committee on Education and Labor
April 30, 2019**

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Foxx, and Honorable Members of the Committee. My name is Ronn Nozoe, Interim Executive Director and CEO of ASCD. I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony about the progress and unfulfilled promise of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision on its 65th anniversary.

ASCD is a membership organization that develops programs, products, and services essential to educators who wish to learn, teach, and lead. ASCD empowers educators to achieve excellence in learning, teaching, and leading so that every child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. Comprising 113,000 members—superintendents, principals, teachers, and advocates from more than 129 countries—the ASCD community also includes 71 affiliate organizations.

Sixty-five years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court issued one of the landmark legal rulings in our nation’s history and certainly among the most influential decisions in American education. Our association was founded in 1943, more than a decade before the *Brown v. Board* decision. From the start, ASCD welcomed any educator regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or national background. The organization was also a vocal proponent for civil rights during this crucial time between the mid-1940s and the late 1950s.

Then, as now, ASCD viewed educational equity as a core principal of democracy. Public policies, according to a standing position we adopted in 1959, should entitle all children to “safe, healthy, and comfortable school facilities; well-qualified teachers and other staff members; high-quality curriculum and learning materials; and adequate supplies and equipment.”

Despite the tectonic shift in legal support provided by *Brown v. Board*, change on the ground was slow to arrive. More than two decades, additional court rulings, and innumerable political and social changes would occur before America's public schools were fully integrated. ASCD committed to the movement, passing an organizational resolution in 1955 that called for all public schools to be “open and free to children of all people . . . to develop to their fullest potential.” Starting in



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1959, the association passed the first of several resolutions to “recognize, value, and encourage equity and cultural diversity as major goals of education.”

Slow as progress has been, impressive educational gains have been made. Prior to *Brown*, only one in seven African Americans graduated high school, compared to one in three white Americans. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2014, 85 percent of African Americans and 89 percent of white Americans received high school diplomas. The rate of African Americans graduating college also improved. Before *Brown*, only one in 40 African Americans earned a college degree. Now, more than one in five do.

As educators, we celebrate this moment in American history and what the *Brown* decision, as well as the desegregation and integration efforts of the 1960s and 1970s, represented to generations of students and teachers. Nevertheless, we also recognize how many of its promises have gone unfulfilled. We recognize that, 65 years after *Brown vs. Board*, our schools are still separate in many ways. We recognize that our schools are still unequal and do not serve many of our most vulnerable students as best they can and should.

I saw this personally as a young language arts teacher in Hawaii and, later in my career, as deputy superintendent of Hawaii’s department of education. Our native Hawaiian students faced systemic hurdles and lagged behind their nonnative classmates on academic and well-being metrics.

The greatest lesson I learned was to drop my preconceived notions and solutions and listen. We need to listen closely so we can truly understand the perspectives of the students we serve.

So, where do we go from here, both as educators and as a nation, to build a better future and avoid the mistakes of the past? We should listen closely to our students, families, teachers, and local communities, who will tell us about our education system’s successes and failures and how we can make our education system work for every student.

We must acknowledge the deep-rooted and systemic issues that led us here. We must reexamine the promise and potential of *Brown v. Board*. In recognition of this 65th anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling, ASCD published a special edition of our flagship magazine, *Educational Leadership*, that provided extraordinary coverage and insight into this most profound of educational issues. The issue, "Separate and Still Unequal: Race in America’s Schools," includes commentary by acclaimed national experts like Pedro Noguera, Gary Orfield, and Paul Gorski. As Pedro Noguera wrote in the issue, “it’s time to regenerate our commitment to the promise of the *Brown* decision and remind all who doubt its importance why it still



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matters.” I would like to submit this report to the committee to be entered into the hearing record.

To supplement and enliven this distinct written report, we hosted a special event last week inviting experts from around the country to Washington, D.C., to examine the factors contributing to segregation in schools and possible solutions. The conversation was led by panelists Greg Hutchings, superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools; Dawn Williams, dean of Howard University’s school of education; Becky Pringle, vice president of the National Education Association; and Deborah Menkart, executive director of Teaching for Change. Anthony Rebor, editor-in-chief of *Educational Leadership*, moderated the panel. I want to share with the committee six takeaways from this important conversation:

1. We must know the real story.

Hutchings noted that knowing our history is crucial to finding solutions. “The simple fact is that when you don’t study your history, you will repeat your history.”

Many of us, however, learned a simplified version of *Brown v. Board* and segregation in America’s school system—one that erases the role of black educators in fighting for integration and minimizes the difficulty black students faced in the decades after *Brown v. Board*. This abridged narrative reduced the complex struggle for desegregation and integration to the basic account that black children in the south were denied an education until a Supreme Court comprised of white men saved them.

“The legacy of that is we don’t see those adults in the solution to the problem,” Menkart pointed out. We don’t see how we got to *Brown v. Board* and the adults that were accompanying children on that journey, and we then sent those children into school without the very allies who had fought for them, believed in them.”

Not understanding the true story of *Brown v. Board* and the integration efforts that followed the decision has led to mistakes.

2. We must be continuously learning.

If we don’t talk about modern-day segregation and how it affects students, we won’t find solutions. Educators and policymakers must learn from these honest and difficult conversations, and then act to solve our education system’s deep-rooted issues.



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“It is so fundamental, especially for us as educators, because if we don’t learn, if we are not in a state of continuous learning, we will do what we’ve always done,” Pringle said.

Hutchings encourages teachers in Alexandria’s school system to learn from the local story of segregation, including the history of the integration of the city’s high schools into the then brand new T.C. Williams in 1971.

“*Remember the Titans*--there’s a whole lot more to that story than Denzel Washington,” Hutchings said, referring to the 2000 film that recounted the story of the 1971 T.C. Williams football team.

3. We must check our biases at the door.

Bias affects education on every level, from funding to teaching. According to a 2019 report from nonprofit EdBuild, nonwhite school districts receive \$23 billion less than white districts, despite serving the same number of students.

“We have the dollars, we have the money. We’re just not using it wisely and not making an intentional effort,” Hutchings noted.

Similar bias also manifests in the classroom: “It prevents us from allowing kids to be all they can possibly be,” Hutchings said. “Who can tell what level a kid can reach by looking at them?”

4. We must retain and recruit diverse teachers.

As the dean of prestigious HBCU Howard University’s College of Education, Williams is preparing the next generation of teachers to lead America’s school system. Many of Howard’s students have jobs lined up well ahead of graduation.

Williams reported Howard’s relationships with schools across the nation have created a pipeline for African American teachers to enter the job force. Employers know that Howard’s graduates are credentialed and well prepared.

But recruitment is only one side of the issue. Retaining teachers of color is a larger hurdle, especially as black and brown teachers face an unequal and racist system that impedes their ability to progress. Pringle disclosed that the NEA’s surveys with former teachers found that many of them left the profession because of inadequate pay and lack of advancement.

There are few black superintendents and even fewer black women superintendents. Hutchings recalled being the only black superintendent



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among more than 600 superintendents in Ohio. Nationally, the percentage of black superintendents remains in the low single digits.

“I think [our school system] has come to this point because we haven’t been able to have a seat at the table and it is still so difficult for African American superintendents to have a seat at the table,” Hutchings said.

5. We must affirm all cultures.

There’s a big difference between being culturally relevant and culturally *affirming* as we teach students, Williams noted.

Teaching in a culturally affirming way means teaching students from various backgrounds their history. For black students, this includes the rich history of black leaders, black educators, and black scholars, and about the heroes in their own community, including their family members.

“It’s one thing to be relevant, but to affirm students is a more progressive standpoint,” Williams said. “It must be from a nondeficit perspective, making sure you’re bringing up the assets of that child and that child’s family.”

“When you start learning real history, it helps you make sense of the world you’re living in today,” Menkart said.

6. Finally, we must act.

Discussion, while valuable, isn’t enough. It takes a community to effect change and it takes time. Williams argued that educators must build coalitions and speak up to people in power, particularly our elected representatives.

“It’s going to take being in their face often and early,” Williams cautioned. “We have to keep this fight going and make sure it’s not just you, but pulling from allies that are bringing together this progression.”

White educators and education advocates must be allies in this fight. “The role of white allies in this work cannot be underestimated. They need to step up, they need to check their fragility, they need to push, they need to speak up in places where we are not,” Pringle said.

In conclusion, I want to thank you for conducting this hearing on such an important issue at this moment in time. While advances have been made in the past 65 years, there is still much work ahead in order to realize true equality in our schools in terms



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of race, resources, and achievement. Educators can and must lead this multifaceted approach to addressing these persistent inequities.

ASCD is committed to helping address these intractable challenges and stands ready to support our members, the profession, families, communities, and policymakers willing to be positive agents of change. We stand together so that each child, in each school, in each district throughout the country, is safe, healthy, engaged, supported, and challenged and graduates high school college, career, and citizenship ready.

Thank you.