



# NASS

# News

June 2020 Issue

a publication of the National Association of School Superintendents | #NASS

## A Word from the Executive Director



Dear NASS Members: I hope this finds you well.

In this newsletter, we're excited to shine the light on equity and the power of collaboration.

You'll enjoy reflections from a lifetime of learnings from my friend and mentor Marc Johnson, former Urban School Superintendent of the Year, on the opportunity that distance learning presents to strengthen collaboration in our school districts and communities.

With so much talk of equity, one might think equity is a noun. But real equity is a verb that requires action, and that's why I particularly appreciate Marc's reference to equity as "not something that is achieved by waiting for it; equity is achieved and becomes our reality through action!" Powerful!

In my editorial space, I reveal that equity starts with empathy. How can we begin to address critical issues such as race and poverty if we don't start from a place of compassion, learning, understanding and non-judgment?

I recently discussed with Paul Samuel Dolman in his "What Matters Most Podcast" that if equity is empathy in action, then public education needs to embrace Whole Child / Whole Community approaches. You can listen to our conversation [here](#), and I hope you will be inspired to act!

In service,

Jonathan Raymond

## Thoughts From the Executive Director

### Equity is Empathy in Action

As a first-time author, I've been surprised and grateful to discover how people are experiencing my book. I wrote "Wildflowers, A School Superintendent's Challenge to America" to share the urgent lessons I learned about public education during my four-and-a-half years as school superintendent in Sacramento,

California. I felt the need to reach everyone: parents, educators, voters, policy experts and legislators. Now, I'm hearing from everyone. And learning a lot.

One pre-publication reader urged me to talk more about the concept of equity in "Wildflowers." I'll admit it: I am wary of terminology that goes "viral" from one day to the next. Suddenly, equity is on everyone's tongue — but do we even know what equity really means? (I feel the same way about the term "achievement gap." We'll get to that in a minute.) Wildflowers actually explores the meaning of equity. People tend to confuse equity with the concept of "equal treatment," which means treating everyone the same. In fact, the two couldn't be more different. It's easy to treat everybody equally. In the case of promoting an innovative program, you send out a flyer to every family in the district inviting parents to an open house.

But what if some parents can't read? What if the open house is scheduled in the evening, and some parents work nights? Equal treatment doesn't require empathy or compassion — all it takes is a Xerox machine pumping out as many copies of the flyer as there are addresses on your mailing list. Equity, on the other hand, requires a deep understanding of the community you hope to reach. It can mean unequal levels of effort aimed at the most disadvantaged, and that's okay. It's more than okay — it's equitable.

The book spends a page discussing equity, but not a chapter. And according to my reader, that wasn't enough. Recently, however, my former colleague Monique Miles, a director at the Aspen Institute with an impressive track record of...

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## Featured NASS Partner

### Distance Learning: An Opportunity To Strengthen Our Collaboration!



*By Marc Johnson, Superintendent of the Year and former Superintendent Sanger Unified School District in California*

These are times unlike any we have faced in our careers, but they also provide us a profound leadership growth opportunity. It is important that we embrace the concept of distributed leadership as well.

Teacher leadership within grade level and subject matter teams during this time is essential. Effective and focused team collaboration is needed to generate the learning opportunities for our students and support them through difficult changes. Now is the time to deepen our collaborative culture, not abandon it.

Have we reminded ourselves what real collaboration is, and do we see this as an opportunity to grow? Collaboration is a systematic process, in which we work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practices.

Collaboration is not a meeting; it is a process. If we embrace that concept, we then understand that powerful collaboration can occur even in a time of shelter-in-place and social distancing. Teachers are having Zoom meetings with their students, and districts are staying

connected with site leaders in the same way, but have we set the same expectations that our teams will stay connected?

Here are some thoughts and reminders I have been pondering as I have connected with superintendents and principals during this time:

- How often are our teams actually connecting to develop a collective commitment to engaging our students in learning each week?
- How often are principals engaging in conversations with their teacher team leaders to assure they are still a team, ensure that they have a learning- centered focus, and do they determine...

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## Members Spotlight

**“Oakland Unified School District is my heart. I grew up here.”**



*Dr. Kyla Johnson-Trammell is Superintendent of Oakland Unified School District in California*

“My kids attend our schools. And I have dedicated almost my entire professional life to the district. It is my goal every day to improve the quality of the education we provide our students, and the working environment for all of our employees.”  
— Dr. Kyla Johnson-Trammell

To some, Kyla Johnson-Trammell was destined to lead Oakland Unified School District. She was raised in Oakland and attended OUSD elementary and middle schools before heading to a private high school in Marin County. She received a top-flight college education at the University of Pennsylvania. That’s where she realized she would dedicate her life to education.

Once she set foot in a classroom as a student teacher, her future was sealed. While working in OUSD, she completed her doctorate in educational leadership at the University of California.

For the Oakland native, there wasn’t any question where she would teach. Johnson-Trammell wanted to come home. Since then, she has spent all but two of her 23 years in education in OUSD, rising quickly through the ranks. She was a teacher for just two years before becoming a teacher coach. Three years later, she became an assistant principal in Mount Diablo Unified School District. Two years after that, she returned to OUSD as a principal. From that point on, she became an associate superintendent, a network superintendent and interim deputy superintendent. In 2017, the OUSD Board of Education chose Dr. Johnson-Trammell to be the district’s new superintendent.

In the three years she has been at the helm, she has faced just about everything a superintendent can face. She has led the district through issues such as the discovery of trace amounts of lead in water sources at multiple schools...

[Read the full article](#)

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