



Focus: Student Voice

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Maybe One Day, the Pain Won't Feel the Same

by Earl Williams

Editor's note: When the Texas State Board of Education held hearings in November 2019 to consider adding a new high school African American Studies course to the state curriculum, students from Dallas ISD traveled to Austin to testify about their experience in a district-level African American Studies course. Subsequently, in April 2020, the board unanimously approved the course. The following is the text of one student's testimony. The video and other testimony highlights are available at <https://idra.news/AASvideos>.

I would like to start by thanking you all for welcoming us here today and zoning in on the echoes of a minority group that often goes unheard.

Simply put, African American Studies should be implemented because societal barriers can only be broken down through education of the seemingly uneducated. And with the current climate of our society, this education is needed more than ever.

Maybe one day, the pain won't feel the same. Me and my people won't be lost in tears, dancing in this hurricane. Our blood won't keep getting splattered on concrete as if it's art for their eyes.

What a shame. It is 100-plus years later, and killing Black people is still a consensual crime.

For far too long, we've been told to move on with our lives, because we're no longer shack-

led in chains. Naively, we blindly followed suit and believed in a conditioned lie of freedom that continues to be offered up by the white noise.

For too many years, little Black boys and girls have been robbed of their beautiful history, only being taught the oppression, ensuring that the truth of their crimes is forever left a mystery.

When they teach you, the colonizers don't mention the gallons of blood spilled and countless numbers of bodies that were wrongfully beaten until their tired souls gracefully floated up to freedom.

So, just know when you all weave together thoughts, spitting out syllables from your tongue, asking why this course is needed, you're also asking why an entire race that built this country doesn't deserve to be disgraced.

But hey, maybe one day the system won't be the same. Me and my people won't be paralyzed by their stare, frozen in this hurricane. Our image won't keep being altered, making racial comments awkward. What a shame. It is 100-plus years later, and killing Black people is still a consensual crime.

But really, what do I know? I'm just a minority who is destined to end up behind bars with three or four kids without their father.

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*What a shame.
It is 100-plus years later,
and killing Black people
is still a consensual crime.*

(Maybe One Day, the Pain Won't Feel the Same, continued from Page 1)

I have a brown soul living in a vessel that society treats so cold, destined to end up another name shouted at countless protests because, in America, the land of the free, my melanin makes me a walking target, a consequence of my lack of representation in a classroom that feeds the ignorance of the contrasting students who surround me.

Maybe one day the pain won't feel the same. Me and my people won't be lost in tears, dancing in this hurricane.

But for now, I'll stand here today pleading my case. It's far past overdo that the children of the world learn not only of the horrors, but also of my ancestors' revolutionary breakthroughs, because they were more than secretive affairs or gateway stares.

Africa is more than little boys with dirty faces and girls who are checked off a list of America's capitalistic databases. All of us here today before you are more than jail-bound statistics in our deemed distasteful yet glorified characteristics. And it is far past overdue that these sickening false narratives are debunked and ridiculed.

So, I ask you, as you continue painting a world with our blood, crafting each narrative to your advantage, and framing photos in our skin, tell me how much longer will you all sit up there on your comfortable high horses and let history repeat itself yet once again?

Earl Williams is a student at Trinidad Garza Early College High School in Dallas.

Watch Video

See the video of Earl Williams presenting his testimony:
<https://idra.news/AASvideos>

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Student Voices on Reopening Schools

In early June, IDRA kicked off our series of webinars on reopening schools by inviting students to share their experiences during COVID-19 school closures and their concerns about returning to school this fall. Highlights are below, and you can see the webinar recording along with other webinars in the series at: <https://idra.news/WebinarSeries>.

"I feel very emotional. The way school ended, going from eighth grade to high school, I lost a third of my friends who I won't be able to see or talk to again. We didn't get to say goodbye."

— Lena Rivas, freshman, Northside ISD

"Logically, I know we shouldn't go back to school. And it is horrible to force students to be confined together for eight hours a day in our current climate. But emotionally, I cannot handle the isolation anymore."

— Kennedy Kearns, senior, Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City ISD

"I think that going back to in-person teaching is a good idea. But at the same time, why would you put students in danger of catching COVID? Especially teachers, who have families to go to?"

— Gracie Hernández, recent graduate, Northside ISD

"I've felt extremely overwhelmed with school having to move online so quickly as well as watching the pandemic and civil unrest unfold and the killing of these innocent lives. But I hope that our voices will be heard, and it will bring some light to the situation."

— Clarissa Tavera, junior, San Antonio ISD

"Touching on the topics of civil unrest and immigration, I feel like these topics should be openly talked about in school, considering in my particular environment there are many minorities affected by civil unrest and immigration."

— Juliana Cruz, senior, Dallas ISD

"Along with civil unrest, I believe students should be spearheading efforts to reform school policing policy."

— Melanie Harrell, recent graduate, San Antonio ISD

"I try to focus on being grateful that, though it sadly had to come through violence or talking extreme measures to get lawmakers' attention, we are making change. And I am part of that generation making change."

— Dejia Nunn, sophomore, Judson ISD

We Create Hope Within Our Communities – Before and During COVID-19, Texas Chief Science Officers Advocate for STEM

by Elizabeth Alexander, Shreya Chaudhary & Isela Herrera

The Chief Science Officers (CSO) program emphasizes student voice across the globe for STEM engagement. CSO students create action plans that encourage STEM throughout their community. These action plans enable students to further their STEM education, bring awareness of future career paths, and advocate for STEM. Alongside the action plan process, CSO students network with many different corporations to further advance our future endeavors in STEM fields.

Initially envisioned by Dr. Jeremy Babendure, executive director of the SciTech Institute, the CSO program empowers middle and high school students to enrich school STEM culture and career awareness by bringing STEM-related opportunities to their schools and communities. The SciTech Institute brought the CSO program to Texas upon request by San Antonio CSOs Lexis Ratto and Kelly O’Kane. By the first full year in Texas, IDRA became the manager for the program in Texas and helped spread it throughout the state.

Before COVID-19

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, CSO students would start clubs, plan STEM-onstration days and lead other hands-on activities. Some examples include creating a FIRST Robotic Competition Club, running a STEM week, teaching others about STEM, and hosting a STEM night.

For instance, for STEM nights, CSOs create activities for their peers and/or community to get excited about STEM. McCollum High School CSOs led their peers through a STEM experience to make ice cream in a bag while learning about chemical reactions. The CSOs had to account for not only who their audience was, but also the cost and number of items needed to make this activity. Moreover, CSOs organized this event with a principal and janitorial staff to set up in a space that is easily visible for students to see what is happening.



The goal for action plans like this is to enrich the STEM culture at our schools and communities.

As for how we collaborated, we mostly interacted with our fellow CSOs at the campus level and local cabinet meetings. Multiple CSO groups met in January for a regional cabinet meeting. The meeting featured excellent guests, such as a women in mathematics panel and a civic engagement activity for CSOs to look into careers in STEM fields. Students also had a working lunch session where we could connect with other CSOs’ ideas and past experiences. By using this collaboration as a stepping stone, many CSOs were inspired by what other students were doing.

During COVID-19

With COVID-19’s social restraints, CSOs adapted their action plans and spread STEM awareness and knowledge in different ways. Connecting through the internet, CSOs adapted and created new action plans. Some plans included hosting hackathons, organizing scientists to speak on Zoom calls, and creating other online opportunities for students.

For example, CSO Shreya Chaudhary created a Discord BellBot for her peers to alert them while

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Also Available

Webinar Recordings

Elevate the Voices of Students in STEM at Your School – Q&A on Hosting the Texas Chief Science Officer Program

<https://idra.news/CSOqaWebinar>

Chief Science Officer Students Determined to Promote STEM Despite School Closures

<https://idra.news/CSOwbri>

Classnotes Podcast Episode

Meet the Chief Science Officer Students Who Brought the Program to Texas

<https://idra.news/pod199>

(We Create Hope Within Our Communities, continued from Page 3)

they do schoolwork at home, as a school bell would. This cue reminds students to transition to the next subject's coursework and also gives them quick links to their teachers' online platforms and assignments. BellBot enables students to document each day's homework, like the group to-do list, to ensure everyone is doing the correct homework.

This is one of many innovative projects our Texas CSOs are creating and sharing as a response to COVID-19. CSOs didn't look at COVID-19 with despair and view it as a hindrance; rather, we used our knowledge and skills to reach broader audiences.

Not only did the CSO students adapt, but the entire international CSO organization also expanded its online resources, connecting CSOs on an international scale. We collaborated with other CSOs internationally via weekly Zoom calls. CSO students talked about recent events in their community and how they were coping with social distancing. We also connected emotionally with people from diverse cultures around the world. We talked with scientists worldwide, ranging from engineers to biologists.

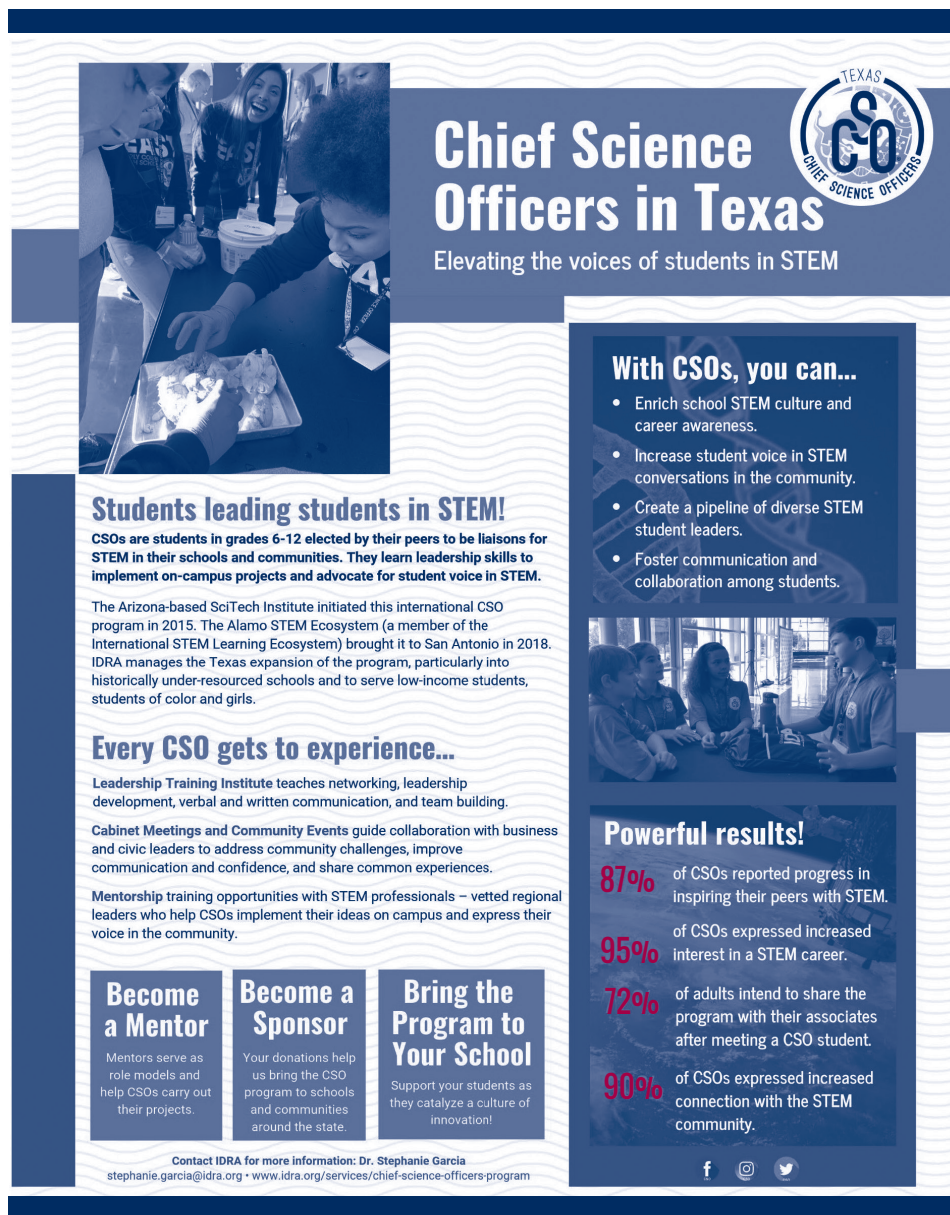
The advantage of these calls is the ability to see how other people are also deeply invested in STEM. With the diverse network pool, our students from Texas can reach out to people from all across the world and talk with students in Mexico and Kuwait.

"Having connections across the globe has personally helped me feel a sense of warmth as of late despite all the negativity that is happening around the world during this pandemic," CSO Isela Herrera said.

Hope in a Time of Crisis

During tough times like these, the entire world is searching for something. Something to take their minds off of the pain that we are seeing all around us. What we are searching for is a four-letter word: Hope.

While hope is something we need at the CSO program, we don't just *look* for hope; we *create* hope within our communities. The CSO motto is, "Don't just *hope* it happens; *make* it happen!" With the COVID-19 pandemic, CSOs refuse to sit around and twiddle our thumbs, hoping for the epidemic to pass.



Chief Science Officers in Texas
Elevating the voices of students in STEM

With CSOs, you can...

- Enrich school STEM culture and career awareness.
- Increase student voice in STEM conversations in the community.
- Create a pipeline of diverse STEM student leaders.
- Foster communication and collaboration among students.

Students leading students in STEM!
CSOs are students in grades 6-12 elected by their peers to be liaisons for STEM in their schools and communities. They learn leadership skills to implement on-campus projects and advocate for student voice in STEM.

The Arizona-based SciTech Institute initiated this international CSO program in 2015. The Alamo STEM Ecosystem (a member of the International STEM Learning Ecosystem) brought it to San Antonio in 2018. IDRA manages the Texas expansion of the program, particularly into historically under-resourced schools and to serve low-income students, students of color and girls.

Every CSO gets to experience...

Leadership Training Institute teaches networking, leadership development, verbal and written communication, and team building.

Cabinet Meetings and Community Events guide collaboration with business and civic leaders to address community challenges, improve communication and confidence, and share common experiences.

Mentorship training opportunities with STEM professionals – vetted regional leaders who help CSOs implement their ideas on campus and express their voice in the community.

Become a Mentor
Mentors serve as role models and help CSOs carry out their projects.

Become a Sponsor
Your donations help us bring the CSO program to schools and communities around the state.

Bring the Program to Your School
Support your students as they catalyze a culture of innovation!

Powerful results!

- 87% of CSOs reported progress in inspiring their peers with STEM.
- 95% of CSOs expressed increased interest in a STEM career.
- 72% of adults intend to share the program with their associates after meeting a CSO student.
- 90% of CSOs expressed increased connection with the STEM community.

Contact IDRA for more information: Dr. Stephanie Garcia
stephanie.garcia@idra.org • www.idra.org/services/chief-science-officers-program

CSO Elizabeth Alexander said, "As a Chief Science Officer, I am proud of the lasting impact we as an organization have left and will continue to embark on the world."

We have CSOs using their knowledge to find potential cures, CSOs working on maintaining the mental health of others. Overall, despite all of the despair COVID-19 has brought, we as an organization of students have decided to make sure to stay connected, innovate and grow as a community.

In 2019-20, CSO Isela Herrera was a 12th grader at McCollum High School in Harlandale ISD, San Antonio. CSO Shreya Chaudhary was a 10th grader at the Keystone School in San Antonio. CSO Elizabeth Alexander was an eighth grader at STEM Academy in Northeast ISD, San Antonio.



IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Students Share their Experiences as Tutors

Tutoring My Kids

by Serenity Nance

In October 2019, we started our IDRA VYP tutoring program at Palo Alto Elementary School, tutoring kindergarteners and first graders. I was a little nervous at first because I didn't know if I was the right person for the job. After about a week of tutoring, I got the hang of it, and I stopped doubting myself so much. Of course, there was still that thought in back of my mind telling me I was going to fail the kids, not help them enough or not even impact their lives. But I pushed all that aside and did my best.

In my experiences with the kids, I feel like I'm becoming a better me, such as taking my time and thinking things through, becoming more patient,

and many more things. By working with my tutees, it makes me happy that I'm doing something to help them understand. I know when I was in their grade, I wish I had that kind of help.

The students impacted my life as well. They have shown me how good it feels to do something for just the benefit of helping others. Seeing their faces light up when they get an answer right, or finally understanding something they didn't get at first, is just such an amazing feeling inside. I'm glad I can do something that involves helping someone in school because education is so important in life.

Serenity Nance is an eighth-grade student at Kazen Middle School in South San Antonio ISD. She was a tutor in the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership this past school year.



How Tutoring Helped Me

by John Tscheulin

Tutoring in the Valued Youth Partnership has improved my leadership skills and my confidence level. Tutoring helped me always remember to be on time because if I missed the bus, I wouldn't be able to go tutor my tutees. My tutees depend on me for a lot of things like helping them with what they need to know.

Tutoring is important to me because it helped me grow as a person and helped me be mindful and responsible. It helps me remember that I must turn in my work on time and be committed to school and future projects. Tutoring has also reminded me that I have to be caring of others and how they feel.

Before I was a tutor, I was not responsible, mindful, caring, etc. I disliked that about my past self, but now that I am a tutor it made me realize that I must keep up with my grades. This is how tutoring has helped me as a student and my life.

IDRA Valued Youth Partnership Tutors Will Lead in New Ways

Now more than ever, reconnecting with students is critical. IDRA can help!

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership provides leadership experiences for students across the country. It increases students' connectedness, academic achievement, self-efficacy and self-esteem by placing students in leadership positions.

During this time of uncertainty, social-distancing and economic adversity, the Valued Youth Partnership's key philosophy of valuing youth's gifts and developing social skills can provide leadership experiences for students who most need engagement as schools adapt.

See this powerful dropout prevention & youth leadership program in action!
Get info on how we are adjusting the program for COVID-19 school precautions.

<https://www.idra.org/valued-youth>

The IDRA Valued Youth Partnership has helped me in a lot of ways like making me want to improve my grades, my attitude, and the way I see the world.

John Tscheulin is an eighth grade student at Kazen Middle School in South San Antonio ISD. He was a tutor in the IDRA Valued Youth Partnership this past school year.



Systems in America Are Set Up to Be Racist

by Alana Price

The Black Lives Matter movement is a protest against police brutality directed toward the Black community. People across the globe fight for equal rights for the Black community and to eliminate police brutality. For many years, Black people, indigenous people and other people of color have been treated differently because of the color of their skin, which led to the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Black Lives Matter movement has shown that it isn't enough to not be *non-racist*. We must commit to being *anti-racist*. The systems in America are set up to be racist toward Black people, indigenous people and other people of color.

Slavery was a system that upheld the U.S. economy in the South. Slavery originates from the financial interest White people sought, so they disregarded the lives of the Black community. Slave patrols were groups of White men who would police slaves, especially those who were trying to escape and seek freedom. They helped the White landowners by capturing and beating slaves trying to escape. The point of having the slave patrols was to protect the White's economy at the expense of the Black community.

Jim Crow laws later made it illegal for people of color to use the same public facilities as the White community. Segregation prevented Black people from becoming wealthy and achieving social advancement. Black people would be beaten and arrested by police for breaking racist laws.

The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s worked to try and end legal discrimination. The United States then employed tactics to obstruct racial justice.

In the present day, prisoners are forced to work and make a few pennies an hour. Private companies are profiting from forced labor. There is financial interest for states and private companies,

The Black Lives Matter movement has shown that it isn't enough to not be non-racist. We must commit to being anti-racist.

which is why more Black males are enslaved in U.S. prisons today than there were slaves in 1850.

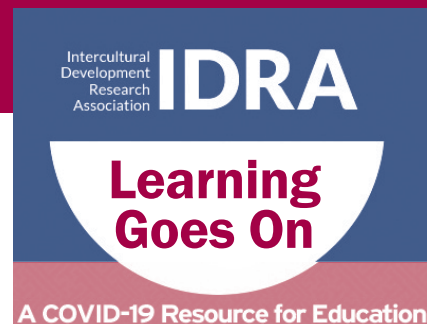
Since the 13th Amendment, policing has had racist practices because there is an economic incentive to over-police Black people, indigenous people and other people of color. Most of the time, people will say "Not all cops are bad," but before you do, remember that our policing system has supported racial segregation.

Alana Price is a seventh-grade student in San Antonio ISD.



See IDRA's Learning Goes On resource!

- ✓ Weekly policy updates
 - ✓ Free webinar series on equitable practices for online learning
 - ✓ COVID-19 Education News Dashboard
 - ✓ Data Map – Texas College Responses to COVID-19
 - ✓ Equity Connection – IDRA's free online community of practice
 - ✓ Online technical assistance academies for school districts
- The eNews and policy updates are available in English and Spanish.



<https://idra.news/LearningGoesOn>

We Are Important, and So is Our History

by Quardasha Mitchell

Editor's note: When the Texas State Board of Education held hearings in November 2019 to consider adding a new high school African American Studies course to the state curriculum, students from Dallas ISD traveled to Austin to testify about their experience in a district-level African American Studies course. Subsequently, in April 2020, the board unanimously approved the course. The following is the text of one student's testimony. The video and other testimony highlights are available at <https://idra.news/AASvideos>.

Why we should approve the standards for this class should not be a question that I should have to answer. This course is one of the most informational, yet intriguing courses to me. Why? Because it is about the history of my people that I once knew little of and the history that is overlooked in the books that we have in school today.

I used to sit in history class and wonder, "Why don't they teach us more about the history of African Americans?" I often get angry because the history that we learn is more than just Christopher Columbus and the people who took land from the Native Americans.

We need to know the *real* history of African Americans because what is taught in schools about African Americans is limited.

In history, we should know more than just Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. Yes, all of them are important. However, like in my African American Studies course, why don't we learn more about Nat Turner, an enslaved African American who led one of the largest slave rebellions to take place in the United States? But we don't hear about that.

Too much of our history has been concealed. And it seems as if my ancestors were just people who worked on plantations and picked cotton. When in fact my ancestors put their blood, sweat and tears into becoming the people that they are today: successful.

Yet, all of that is swept under the rug and is kept away in a bottomless hole that people don't get to hear about either.

We are tired of getting treated as if we were duds. We're tired of feeling like we aren't important enough to be spoken about.

We *are* important, and so is our history. This course is significant to not only Black people but to non-African Americans as well. They are able to see that African Americans are very powerful individuals and that we also are a part of history.

It is very encouraging to learn about what Black people have accomplished throughout the years, rather than just learning about how they were slaves when, in reality, they were more than slaves. And it is important that children in schools should know that too.

We are among the most misrepresented and misunderstood, and that needs to change. Therefore, this class will give us the representation that we need and break stereotypes that many have about us. The obstacles that Black people have experienced are essential to include in education, along with their own perspectives. It is crucial that our schools include a vast amount of academic diversity.

So, please keep this course. It will not only give students a profound amount of understanding about the history of African Americans, but also the contributions made by them that are not taught in American history.

Quardasha Mitchell is a student at Trinidad Garza Early College High School in Dallas.



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Watch Video

See the video of Quardasha presenting her testimony along with highlight videos of other students and adults who spoke about the importance of African American Studies.
<https://idra.news/AASvideos>

Focus: Student Voice

School Reopening Webinar Series

Student Perspectives on a Changing School Climate

Student panelists describe the needs of their peers on issues, such as COVID-19, school safety, immigration, and the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements.

Recording available

Nurturing Students' Hearts & Minds

Panel of advocates and practitioners discuss the needs of students on issues such as COVID-19, school safety, immigration, and the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements that schools will need to prepare for as they reopen.

Recording available

Partnering with Families to Reopen & Reimagine Schools

Connecting with families will be vital for educators as they welcome students back in a changed world. In this webinar, parents, grandparents and caregivers share their concerns about what the future holds for reopening schools and students' emotional wellbeing. They will be joined by Texas Education Agency Deputy Commissioner of Special Populations and Monitoring Matt Montaño.

July 15, 2020, at 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. cdt



<https://idra.news/WebinarSeries>

Getting Schools Ready to Support Students Facing a New World of Challenges

A panel of student advocates and educational leaders will discuss policy recommendations for district decision-makers on reopening schools that embrace restorative justice, ethnic studies and culturally responsive practices.

July 22 2020, at 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. cdt

<https://idra.news/WebinarSeries>

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through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college*