
Introduction

Our Purpose in Writing This Book

It is our belief that all educational leaders, male and female from all cultural groups, have the capacity to be successful when they have an understanding of the importance of students' cultures being viewed and treated as an asset. We are sharing our stories and our lessons of progress and success to inform the practices of current and future leaders and policy makers. It is our observation that the United States and Canada are at a tipping point in their ability and willingness to address the needs of historically and currently underserved groups. However, the barriers to progress are so deeply entrenched in social institutions, such as education, that we must realize educational and social reforms are inextricably interlinked.

Recently, education in the United States and Canada has expanded so that educators are being challenged and have the opportunity to provide high-quality education to all children and youth. Students from historically underserved populations are arriving in our schools in ever-growing numbers, and educators are expected to provide them with the same quality of education that was reserved for middle- and upper-class students even 40 years ago. Today's schools are being challenged to expand the quality of education provided historically to well-served populations in a manner that inclusively values formerly marginalized gender, racial, ethnic, English learning, and special needs cultures. As superintendents, our mission is to lead socioculturally diverse schools in serving students in an equitable manner.

Linking Equity and Inclusivity

Our professional careers began in the early 1970s and have evolved to demonstrate how educational equity is fostered and achieved in

our society. The social and cultural dynamics of preceding generations impacted our careers by providing barriers and enhancements that affected our successes as educational leaders. The social dynamics of exclusion of women and people of color from the mainstream of society are coupled, for us, with the cultural dynamics of growing up Latina in the United States. In preparing this manuscript, we identified dynamics that served as barriers to our progress; whereas, other dynamics served as support systems for our successes. What has been clear to us is that barriers to progress have not been isolated incidents; rather, they have been deeply rooted systemic forces that impact nondominant groups throughout society, not just in education. We found that recognizing barriers to education is an important step in creating educational equity that enhances the education of all students in our schools.

Through sharing our stories with you, you will come to know us as fairly typical educators of our generation who were reared in supportive families, were successful in school, and who became teachers intent on helping all students succeed to their highest potential. You also will learn that we honed our leadership interests early in life and had educational and real-life experiences that made us aware of the context in which we were living. The social and political context of this country in the latter 20th century and the second decade of the 21st century have influenced our leadership philosophies and our dedication to equitable educational opportunities for all children. We are deeply committed to a democratic society, and we believe that our commitment to all youth and adult learners is in the best interest of our nation.

It would have been easy for us to frame this book by vividly describing the discrimination we have experienced and witnessed in our lives and careers. Make no mistake; those events have occurred, as you will see in the chapters that follow. However, our focus is to share with you how we have used those events as motivation to increase educational opportunities for all children and youth.

Our P–12 education, our early experiences as teachers moving into leadership positions, and our current roles as superintendents have provided us with unique perspectives and experiences. Although we do not purport to represent all Latinas or women-of-color superintendents, we believe our *culturally proficient lessons for being successful in diverse communities* can inform other educators who desire to extend the promises of democracy to all cultural groups who attend our public schools.

This book is written to offer you these perspectives stated as benefits:

- All school leaders will benefit by seeing how the improvement of opportunities for those least well served in our society results in all boats rising.
- All educators as nonformal and formal leaders—administrators, teachers, and counselors—will benefit in learning to recognize and acknowledge barriers to equitable educational opportunities and outcomes to create educational equity.
- Educational leaders in schools/districts where students have been historically well served will benefit by recognizing that high-quality education for some students is inextricably linked to excellence for all students in meeting our mission of preparing well-educated citizens. As we progress into the 21st century, we become a country that is more diverse and potentially more inclusive than at any time in our history.

You are invited to use our journey as described in these chapters to think deeply about your educational journey, not only the one already travelled but also the journey that lies ahead with your school, district, and community.