



OPPORTUNITY MATTERS

SEPTEMBER 2022

FEATURED PROJECTS

Kingsley Junior High BSU Collaborates with History Museum to Sponsor Black History Month Symposium for the Bloomington Community

'Building Opportunity' cohort member Erin Dobson, along with colleagues Eric Stegemann and McKenzie Adams and members of the Kingsley Junior High School Black Student Union, organized and hosted a Black History Month Symposium this past spring. Dobson said "We worked closely with the local Museum of History and the Bloomington-Normal History Project to showcase local historical black residents like Simon Malone & Merlin Kennedy. The Kingsley BSU student members participated in the event by making flyers, signs and even interviewing with a local NPR station. This gave students the empowering opportunity to hear their voices projected throughout the community! This free public event was hosted at our school. Community members as well as the BSUs from other schools attended to learn more about Black History in our community." Zeniah, one of the leaders of the Black Student Union at Kingsley, said "I'm hoping to learn more about local Black leaders. They've always lived so far away. If I have a project, I don't have to just do it on Martin Luther King or Malcolm X. I can do it on a local leader."



Lake Park Youth Action Council Hosts First Annual “Walking in Unity” Juneteenth Celebration:

Rakhi Mistry, Opportunity Coalition Network member and sponsor of the Lake Park Youth Advocates for Change worked with student community leaders to host their first annual Juneteenth Event “Walking in Unity!” to stand in unity against violence against the Black community, honor Black owned businesses, and educate the community on why Juneteenth is celebrated. Mistry said “The event welcomed over 125 community members, staff, and students. We were surrounded with an evening of uplifting music, inspirational speeches, mouthwatering food, interactive art projects, and so much more. The true essence of ‘lifting ev’ry voice, is to build unity in our community. Yesterday’s event marked the beginning for a future for our community coming together as ONE!”



It all starts with Respect! Building Opportunity in the South Suburbs

Level II cohort member Marcus Taylor worked on developing a student support program for part of his work in the Building Opportunity program this past year. He was then hired by his district to implement this program over the past summer. Taylor said “This summer I worked in the field of Social Emotional Learning, with my program “Respect for S.O.LE.” (Self, Others, Learning Environment). I worked with 300 hundred students, pre-k thru 8th grade on respecting SELF first, then others and finally our community, the learning environment. I focused primarily on the respect for SELF. The focus on self is really a focus on self-confidence and self-empowerment , being the best you that you can be. I reminded the students that you can’t pass a mirror without looking at the “you” , so compliment “you” , and enjoy “you” because I sure do! We must help students develop the ability to be confident risk takers for their learning.” Thanks Marcus for all you do!

Building Community: Partnering with local community leaders to bring people together

As part of her Building Opportunity cohort experience, Ami Rodriguez worked to support the efforts of a dynamic local community member who wanted to conduct an event to honor Juneteenth and build connections amongst community members.

[Click to read full story and view image from the event](#)



PAST EVENTS

On March 15, the Opportunity Coalition hosted an event with Dr. Carmen Ayala, Illinois State Superintendent of Education, Al Llorens, Illinois Education Association Vice President, and representatives from five Illinois districts about their efforts to reduce the negative impact that premature “ability tracking” can have during the crucial middle school to 9th grade transition. Over 250 educational leaders from throughout Illinois registered for the event. The response was so strong that a follow up event, “Beyond Tracking and Detracking: Schools as Sorting Machines” was held on May 10. At this event, participants heard an analysis of relevant research from Dr. Thurston Domina, Distinguished Professor of Education Leadership at the University of North Carolina. A working group has been formed for educators who want to collaborate with other districts who are examining their own practices, procedures, and policies in an effort to build equitable opportunities for all our students.



BRIDGES OF OPPORTUNITY: DETRACKING THE 9TH GRADE TRANSITION



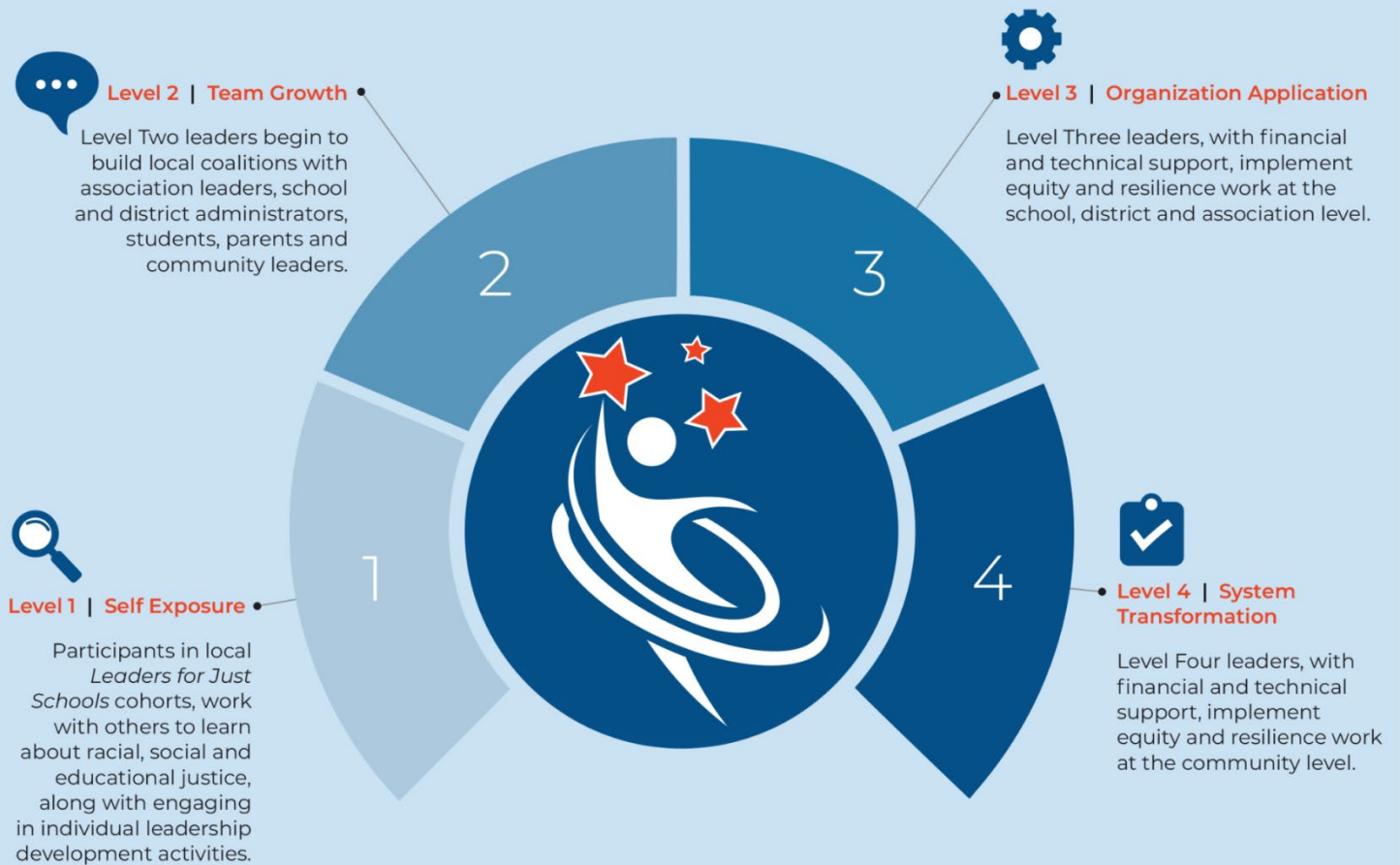
FEATURING
DR. CARMEN AYALA
STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION



FEATURING
AL LLORENS
IEA VICE PRESIDENT

Leadership Development:

The Key to the Opportunity Coalition Organizing Framework



The IEA Opportunity Coalition strives to build equitable opportunities for students throughout Illinois to become their best selves. This is done through supporting and training local leaders to build the coalitions needed to create meaningful systems change.

LEVEL I

This process begins with our Level I program, including our Leaders for Just Schools cohorts. Leaders for Just Schools is a framework developed by the National Education Association in partnership with the Kellogg Foundation. It is focused on internal reflection and courageous conversations with colleagues. Adriana Caballero, a teacher from the Schaumburg area and Karen Moore, a teacher from the Harvey area coordinates our various LfJS cohorts statewide. Adriana and Karen have also worked together to lead the IEA Human and Civil Rights Committee. In addition, Karen is currently both an NEA Director for the State of Illinois and the Vice Chair of the NEA Black Caucus. Local leaders who complete LfJS then continue the work in our Level II program, Building Opportunity. This cohort is focused on helping local leaders develop a team to work with while advancing racial, social and economic justice in their local school, district and community.

LEVEL II

Local leaders who complete LfJS then continue the work in our Level II program, Building Opportunity. This cohort is focused on helping local leaders develop a team to work with while advancing racial, social and economic justice in their local school, district and community. Our Level II cohort leaders are Amber Jirsa, a high school English teacher in Batavia and Ami Rodriguez, an Inclusion coach from District 300. One of the most valuable aspects of this state wide virtual cohort is learning from other like minded colleagues. Rodriguez said “The more equity-minded individuals we know, educators or those who have influence in education, the more opportunities we have to make real change by having reinforcements. More voices have more power.” The Level II program connects cohort members to state and national level leaders who have decades of leadership and organizing experience.

LEVEL III

After completing Level II, our emerging leaders join our Level III/IV Opportunity Coalition Network. The OCN is less of a structured “curriculum” and more a space for leaders to share with each other and learn from each other about their local work. The Opportunity Coalition Network is facilitated by Anne Jacobsen, a high school educator from the Maine Township area and Kristine Micheles, an elementary educator from the Naperville area. Jacobsen said “This work is so important because it benefits everyone. All students have the right to feel like they belong in their school community. They also deserve teachers and staff who value them and want to build positive relationships. This can help students feel included so that they can be their most authentic selves.”

The Leaders for Just Schools and Opportunity Coalition cohorts provide pathways and build connections for educators who share the goal of more equitable schools for all students. The structure allows for all involved to gain knowledge, insight, and strength to make differences in their schools and communities, leading to improved outcomes for all, especially historically excluded populations. The IEA Opportunity Coalition door is always open.

If you are interested in learning more or perhaps joining one of our cohorts, please visit our website at ieaopportunitycoalition.org.

CONTACT US

