



# Creating Culturally Affirming Spaces: School and Classroom Practices

## Presenters:

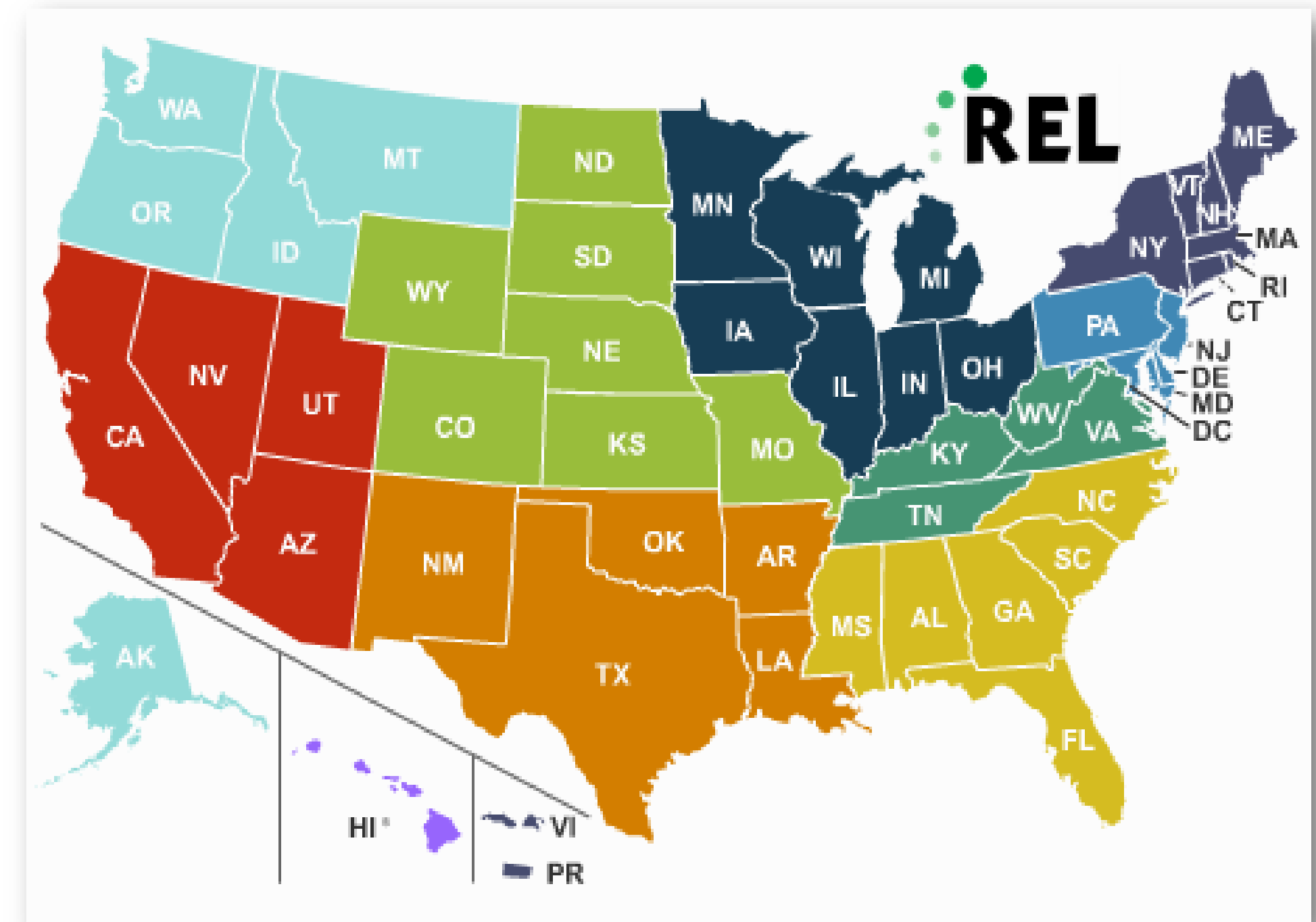
Erin Browder  
David Lopez  
Rawlin Rosario  
Lori Van Houten

## Panelists:

Marco Cenabre  
Ayanna Cooper  
Brian Knowles  
Alexis Patterson Williams

# Regional Educational Laboratory West

- Conduct applied research
- Provide technical support around data collection, evidence use, and research
- Facilitate dissemination of actionable research evidence



# Objectives

- Deepen understanding of culturally affirming school and classroom cultures and climates and how they shape student learning and social and emotional well-being
- Examine practices, policies, and conditions that hinder student belonging and inhibit the academic and social well-being of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students
- Learn about promising practices and behaviors that foster culturally affirmative schooling experiences for students

# Agenda

- ❖ Culturally Affirming Spaces – What they are and aren't
  - ❖ Research, data, and definitions
  - ❖ Participant engagement and reflections
- ❖ Panel Discussion: Making our schools and classrooms feel and be safe
- ❖ Q&A
- ❖ Closing and Survey



# Today's Presenters



**Erin Browder**  
Senior Program Associate  
REL West



**David Lopez**  
Senior Technical  
Assistance Specialist  
WestEd



**Rawlin Rosario**  
Program Associate II  
WestEd



**Lori Van Houten**  
Senior Program Associate  
REL West



# Today's Panelists



**Ayanna Cooper**  
Educational Consultant  
and Professor



**Marco Cenabre**  
Teacher Leader  
New Haven Academy



**Brian Knowles**  
Manager of the Office of  
African, African American,  
Latino, Holocaust, and Gender  
Studies within the School  
District of Palm Beach County



**Alexis Patterson Williams**  
Equity & Systems Improvement  
for Multilingual Learners  
REL Northwest

# Who is on the webinar?

## Polls:

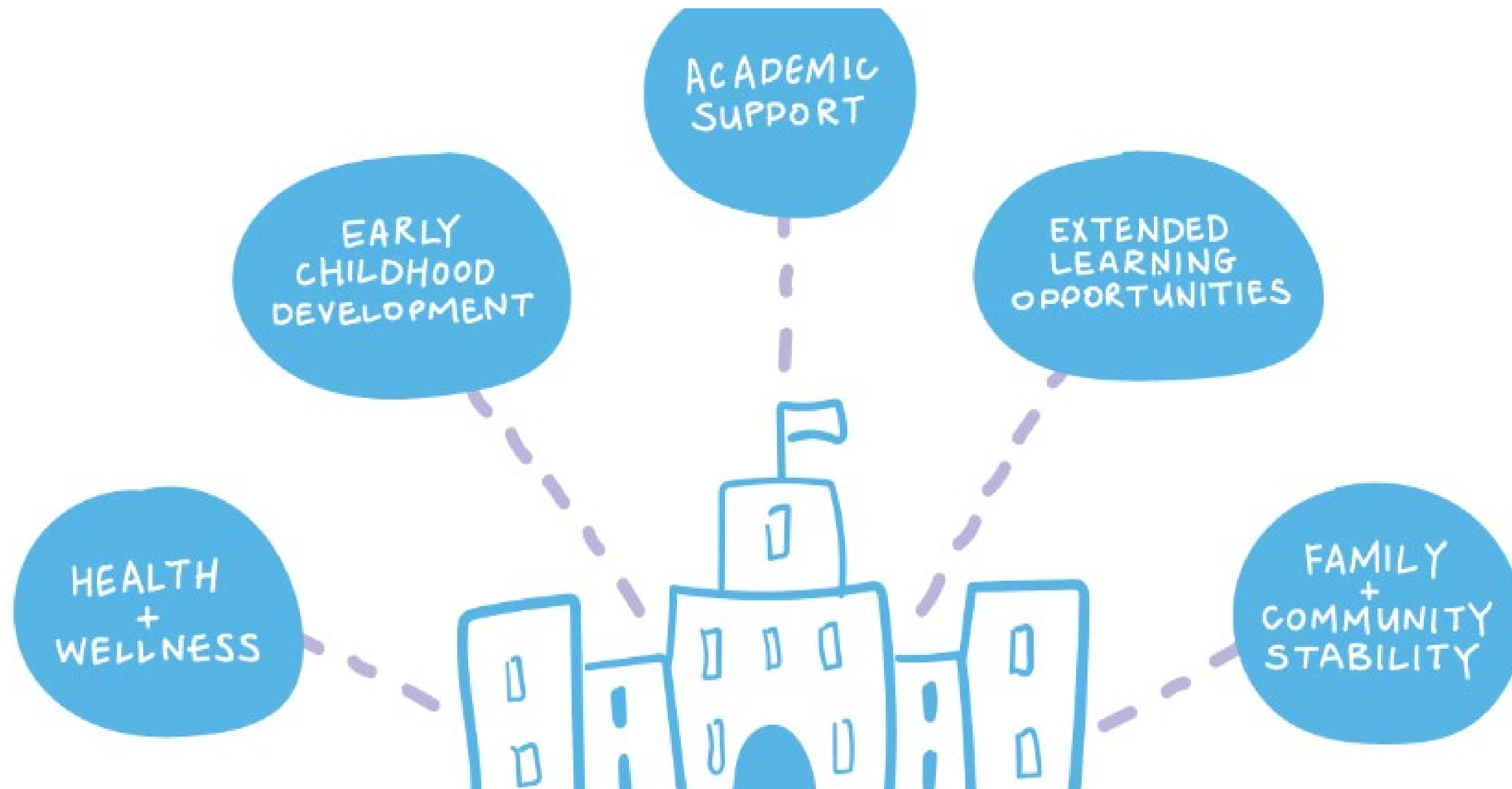
- What is your role?
- In which region of the country do you work?
- Is your community an urban, suburban, or rural community?
- How familiar are you with culturally affirming practices in schools and classrooms?

# Working Agreements

- Keep confidentiality
- Focus on intent v. impact
- Knowing when to step forward and step back
- Stay in the room (struggle together)
- Interrogate self and systems
- Accept lack of closure







*“Public schools are the living rooms of our communities.”*

Dr. Miguel Cardona, U.S. Secretary of Education

# Culturally Affirming Spaces





# Culture in Schools





# Ways we see culture in schools



- Language
- Non-verbal communication: gestures, body language, and facial expressions
- Clothing, fashion
- Curriculum materials
- Instruction
- Learning
- Hairstyles
- Physical appearances
- Greetings
- Social interactions
- Music
- Vocabulary
- Spatial reasoning
- Relationships
- Perceptions of time
- Artifacts and objects
- Values and principles

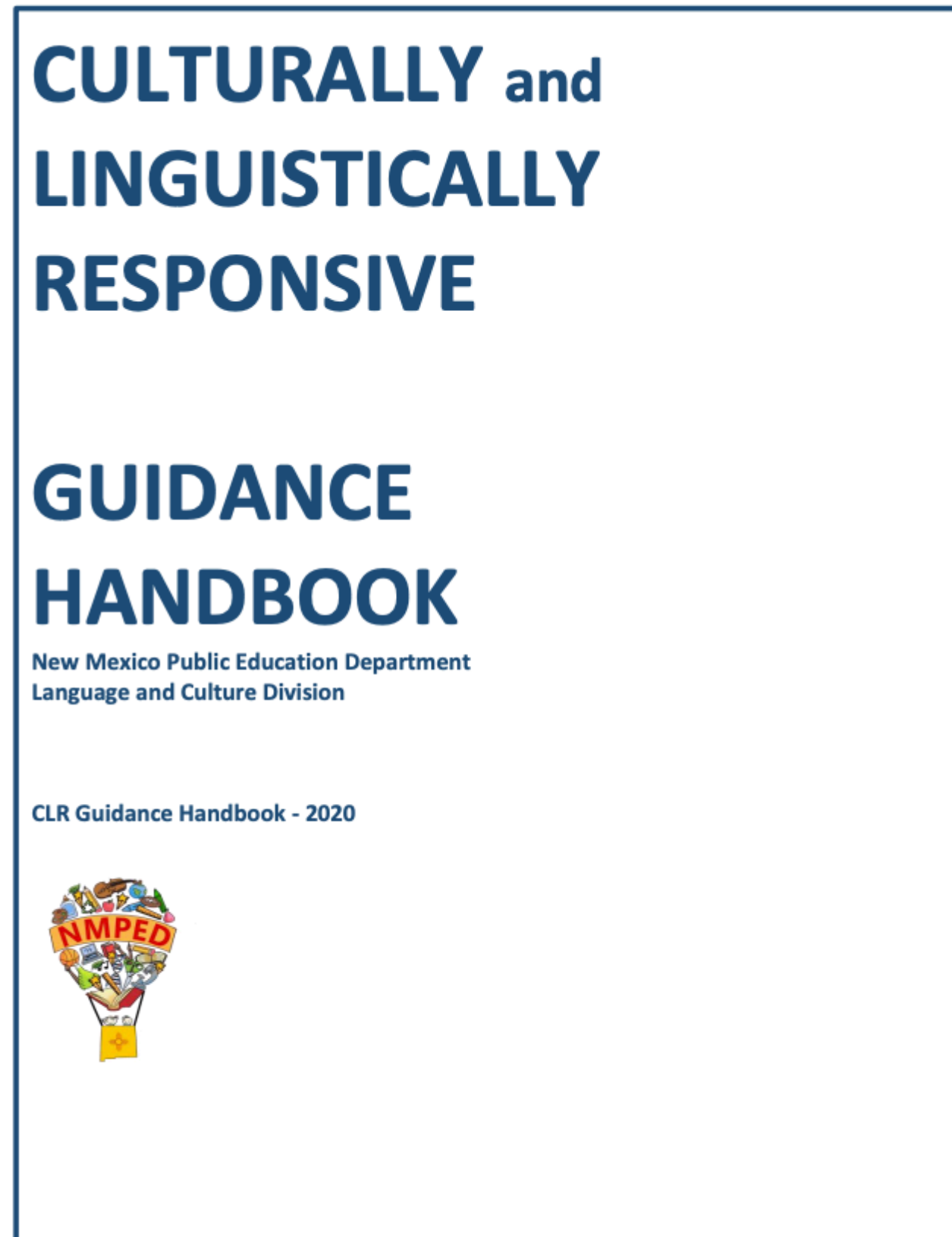


# Defining Culture

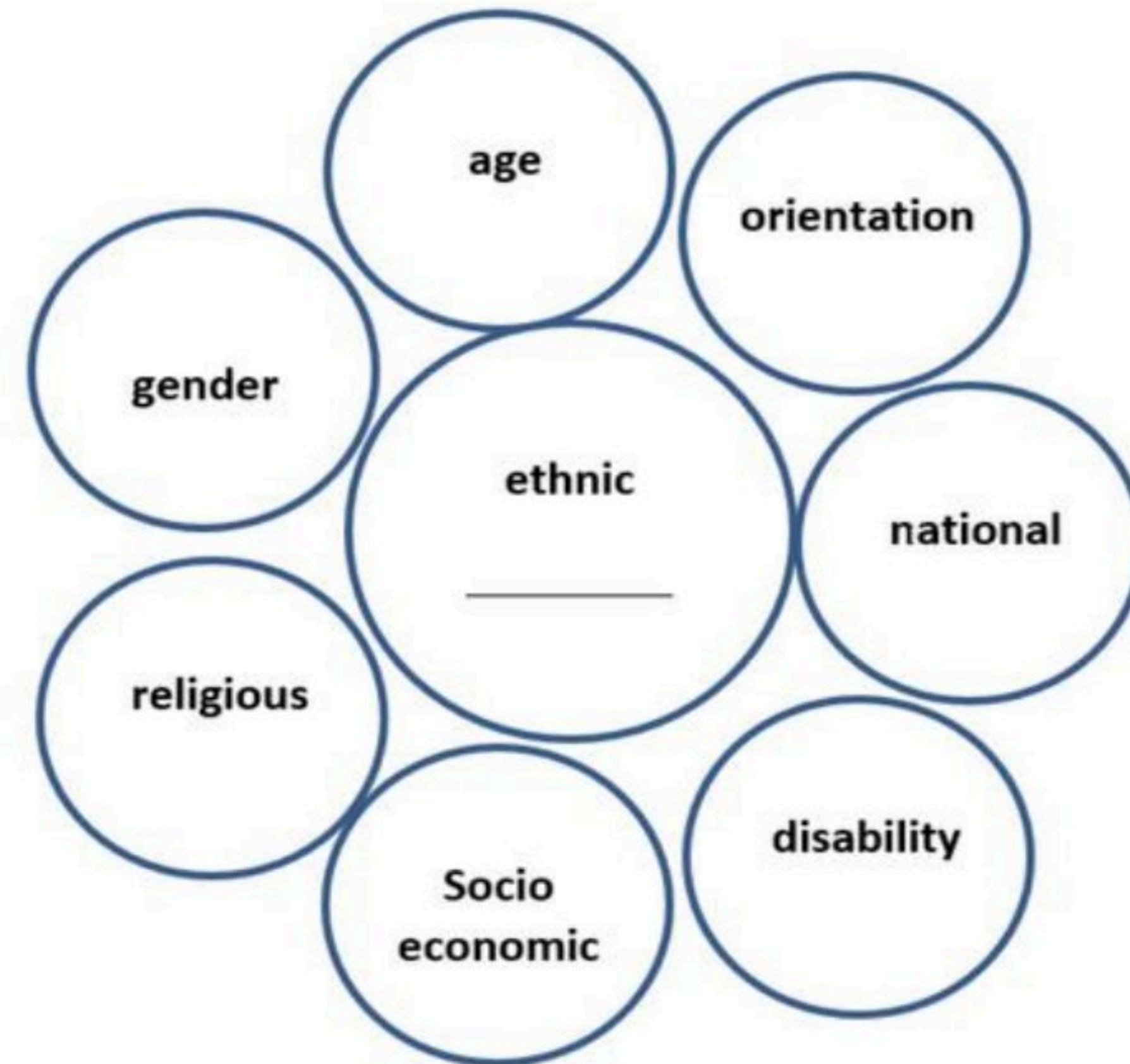
An integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relationships, and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group.

National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004

# Activity: Rings of Culture



## RINGS OF CULTURE



New Mexico Public Education Department, 2020



# Call to Action: Teacher and Student Data

- In the United States, 50 percent of our students identify as being a person of color, compared to only 20 percent of their teachers.
- In 17 states, more than 95 percent of teachers are White (compared to an average of 82 percent of students being White in those states).
- Additionally, 40 percent of public schools do not have a single teacher of color.



Snyder et al., 2019; de Brey et al., 2021; Hansen & Quintero, 2018

“The American education system was not made for me. Being an AfroLatinx, Queer, and Non-Binary person, I am used to being othered in the classroom setting. I was only ever able to see myself once a year, in February.”

– Brandon Gonzalez

From NYU Metro’s “Interrogating, Interrupting and Eradicating Disproportionality Through Youth Voice and Action” (Malone & Rizkilla, 2021)



*Schools become a meeting place for cultures, containing children and adults who bring with them multiple facets of their identity, along with unique experiences and perspectives.*

NYSED Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework

It is important to understand the system of advantage is perpetuated when we do not acknowledge its existence.

Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum

# Culturally Affirming Spaces

Schools and classrooms that promote adult practices, behaviors, and policies that thoroughly acknowledge and proactively seek to affirm students' cultural identities and cultural assets as integral to their positive self-concept, academic and social well-being, while being mindful of reducing harmful cultural experiences and occurrences of microaggressions to students and families.

Price-Dennis et al., 2017; Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ferlazzo, 2017

# What culturally affirming spaces are

## Values and Knowledge

- Practice race consciousness and self-awareness
- Learn what the community desires and wants to sustain through schooling
- Commit to value and sustain community languages, practices, and ways of being while providing access to the dominant culture (white, middle class, and standard English speaking)

## Instruction, Curriculum, Engagement

- Validate students' lived experiences and identities
- Integrate cultural assets into classroom instruction
- Active and socially engaging
- Connect to the histories of racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities both locally and nationally
- Teach *criticality*—reading and writing to understand truth and power
- Enact mutual respect with accountability between students and adults

Price-Dennis et al., 2017; Alim & Paris, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ferlazzo, 2017



# Culturally Affirming Spaces - Examples

- **Set discussion norms** with students and facilitate student conversation that foster critical consciousness (e.g. analyze multiple perspectives, ask critical questions, advocate for social change).
- **Incorporate students' home language** (e.g. heritage language, vernaculars, code-switching, translanguaging) into instruction and include materials in students' home language.
- **Value, respect, and express the asset of students' language(s), culture(s), and communities.**

del Carmen Salazar, M., & Lerner, J., 2019

Culturally responsive teachers build bridges between students' cultural assets and instruction in ways that affirms the identities and cultural backgrounds of their students and minimizes the occurrence of harm and microaggressions.

Gay, 2018; Nieto & Bode, 2018

# The ways we experience culture: The Culture Tree

## **CONCRETE: Observable elements**

food, dress, music, holidays

**Low emotional charge**

## **BEHAVIORAL: Unspoken rules, social norms**

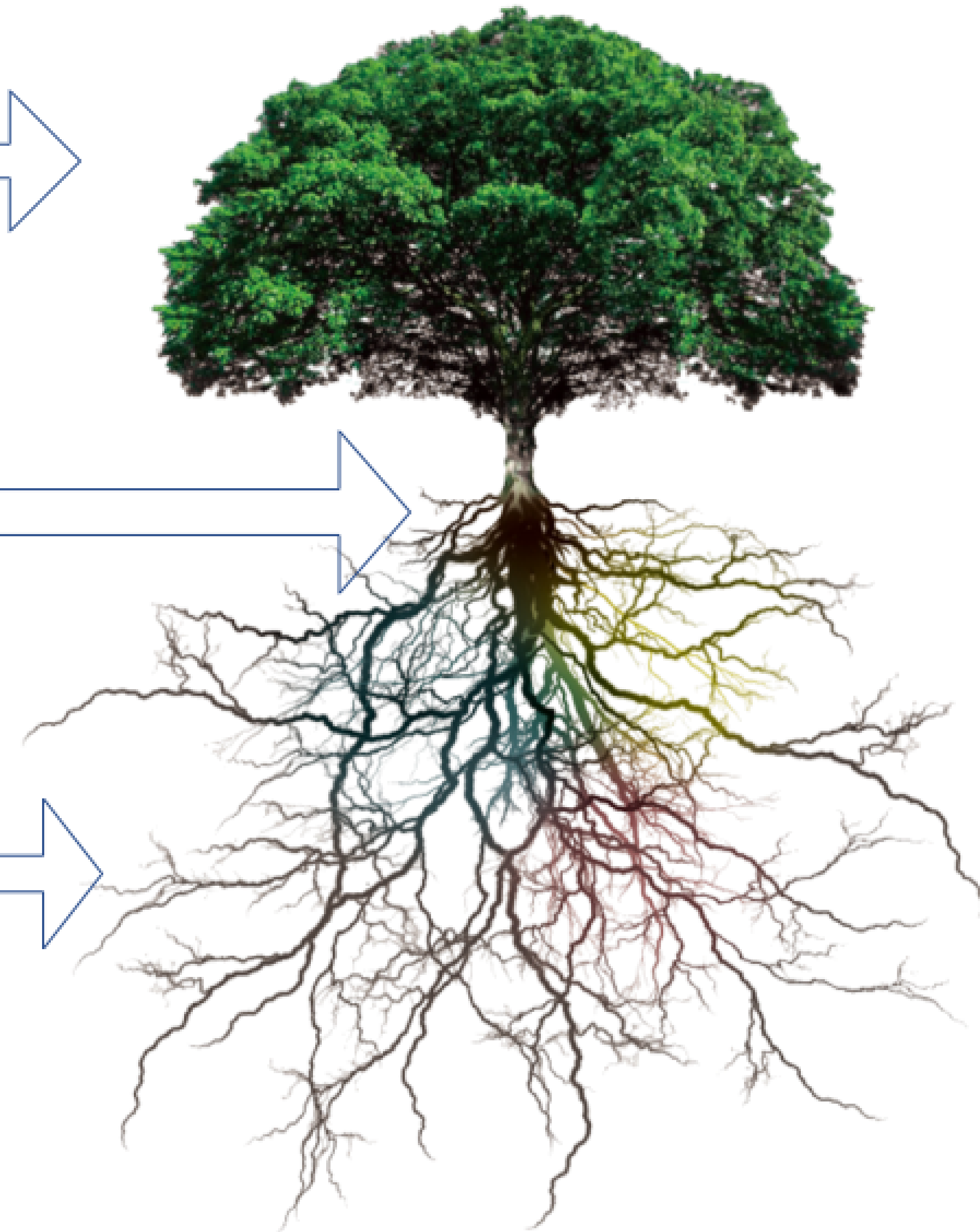
Nonverbal communication, eye contact, personal space, parenting, handling emotions, concepts of time

**Strong emotional charge**

## **SYMBOLIC: Abstract, values, core beliefs**

Worldview, spirituality, fairness, concepts of self, decision making, cultural archetypes

**Intense emotional charge**



Reference: Hammond, 2015; Hidalgo, 1993.





Even English, my favorite class, was a battle because of race. I slumped and contorted and snarled and cowered as my classmates plowed through the n-word when we read *Huckleberry Finn* aloud in seventh grade.

— Chad Sanders



# Types of Microaggression

Verbal	Behavioral	Microassaults	Microinvalidations	Microinsults
A comment or question that is hurtful or stigmatizing to a certain marginalized group of people. For example, saying, <b>“You’re so smart for a girl.”</b>	Someone behaves in a way that is hurtful or discriminatory to a certain group of people. For example, <b>a teacher ignoring a Black student who raised his hand first and instead calling on a White student.</b>	A person intentionally behaves in a discriminatory way while not intending to be offensive. For example, a person <b>telling a racist joke then saying, “I was just joking.”</b>	A person’s comment invalidates or undermines the experiences of a certain group of people. For example, a white person telling a black person that <b>“racism does not exist in our school.”</b>	A comment or action that is unintentionally discriminatory. For example, a person saying to an Indian graduate student, <b>“Your people must be so proud.”</b>

Allen et al., 2013; Nadal, 2014; Goodman, 2011; Harrison & Tanner

# Other common microaggression examples

- Name shaming or dismissing correct pronunciation of names
- Being color-evasive
- Disproportionality and harsh discipline practices
- Lowered expectations
- Treatment or public behavior towards other teachers, non-teachers, and staff of color
- Tokenizing students' culture to “connect with them”
- Holding contempt for a child and/or not working through your own emotions that negatively impact a student

Allen et al., 2013; Nadal, 2014; Goodman, 2011

# What is the impact of culturally harmful experiences and daily microaggressions?

## Internalized Devaluation

- Feelings of unworthiness or underserving
- Feeling unaccomplished or that have little to no talent or skills
- Low self-esteem and confidence

## Assaulted Sense of Self

- Unhealthy worldview
- Inability or struggle towards goal setting
- Narrowing sense of time
- Increased arousal
- Mistrusting

## Internalized Voicelessness

- Not speaking up for themselves
- Limited demonstration of agency
- Appeasement or fawning as a stress response
- Limited emotional expressions

Hardy, 2013



## **Personal and Professional Reflection:**

In your schooling, were culturally affirming experiences prevalent? Culturally harmful experiences?

*In the chat, feel free to respond and share examples from your schooling experience.*





# Reflect and Respond - Educator Examples

*I was forced to reflect on how my actions... subject some of my students to be excluded... I brought back more of a willingness to learn about my students—to reach them in a way that is not only inclusive but also genuine.*

Kendrick Morris  
Middle School Science Teacher,  
Miami-Dade County Public Schools

*I connect the curriculum to my students lives'. I teach in a neighborhood that once exclusively was Latinx, but now facing overwhelming gentrification. In one unit, we relate Westward Expansion to gentrification in the area...*

Aaron  
Teacher  
In del Carmen Salazar, M., & Lerner, J. (2019)

# Reflect and Respond – Student and Family Examples

*My first-grade teacher gave me a new set of treasures that included U.S. cultural ways of knowing and the English language. Her learning environment, curriculum, instruction, and assessment made it blatantly clear that English and whiteness were prized. As a result, I wanted desperately to be White and worthy... (p. 31)*

Dr. Maria del Carmen Salazar  
(del Carmen Salazar & Lerner, 2019)

*The 4th grade teacher started using poetry and hip hop to get him to fall in love with writing and to find his voice. He starts getting fours in writing and I'm just like, oh my God! And now he's so arrogant about his writing as if he's always been good at it. But it's like that's just an example of being able to bring in curriculum that is relevant and that is culturally relevant and means something to kids. That's been really important for us.*

Parent  
Baldwin Hills Elementary School  
Los Angeles Unified School District



# Panel Discussion: Making our schools and classrooms feel and be safe





# Marco Cenabre

High school English teacher at *New Haven Academy*, a public high school in New Haven, CT and one of the flagship schools of the *Facing History and Ourselves* Schools Network; leads the schoolwide advisory and student mentorship program.

Actively engaged in work connected to anti-racist pedagogy, including leading teacher communities of practice on a district, state, and national level; publishing two humanities curriculums under Yale University.





# Ayanna Cooper, EdD

- Educational consultant, author, professor, and advocate for culturally and linguistically diverse learners
- Held positions as an English as a Second Language teacher, ELL Instructional Coach, Urban Education Teacher Supervisor, ELL/Title III Director, and ELL/Bilingual Program Specialist



# Brian Knowles, M.Ed.

- Manager of the Office of African, African American, Latino, Holocaust, and Gender Studies within the School District of Palm Beach County
- Instrumental in supporting schools to create environments that are conducive to the academic success of Black students and eliminating systemic barriers and interrupting practices rooted in racism



# Alexis Patterson Williams, Ph.D.

- An associate professor in science education at the University of California, Davis who is focused on the intersection of equity studies, social psychology, and science education
- Former assistant director of an after-school program, a middle school science teacher, and an intervention instructor at an elementary school





# Discussion Prompts

- Introductions — Why is this work important to you?
- Provide an example of successful implementation and how this shifted outcomes for racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students.
- What is a question we should be asking as we begin this work?





# Questions and Answers



# Let's Hear From You...

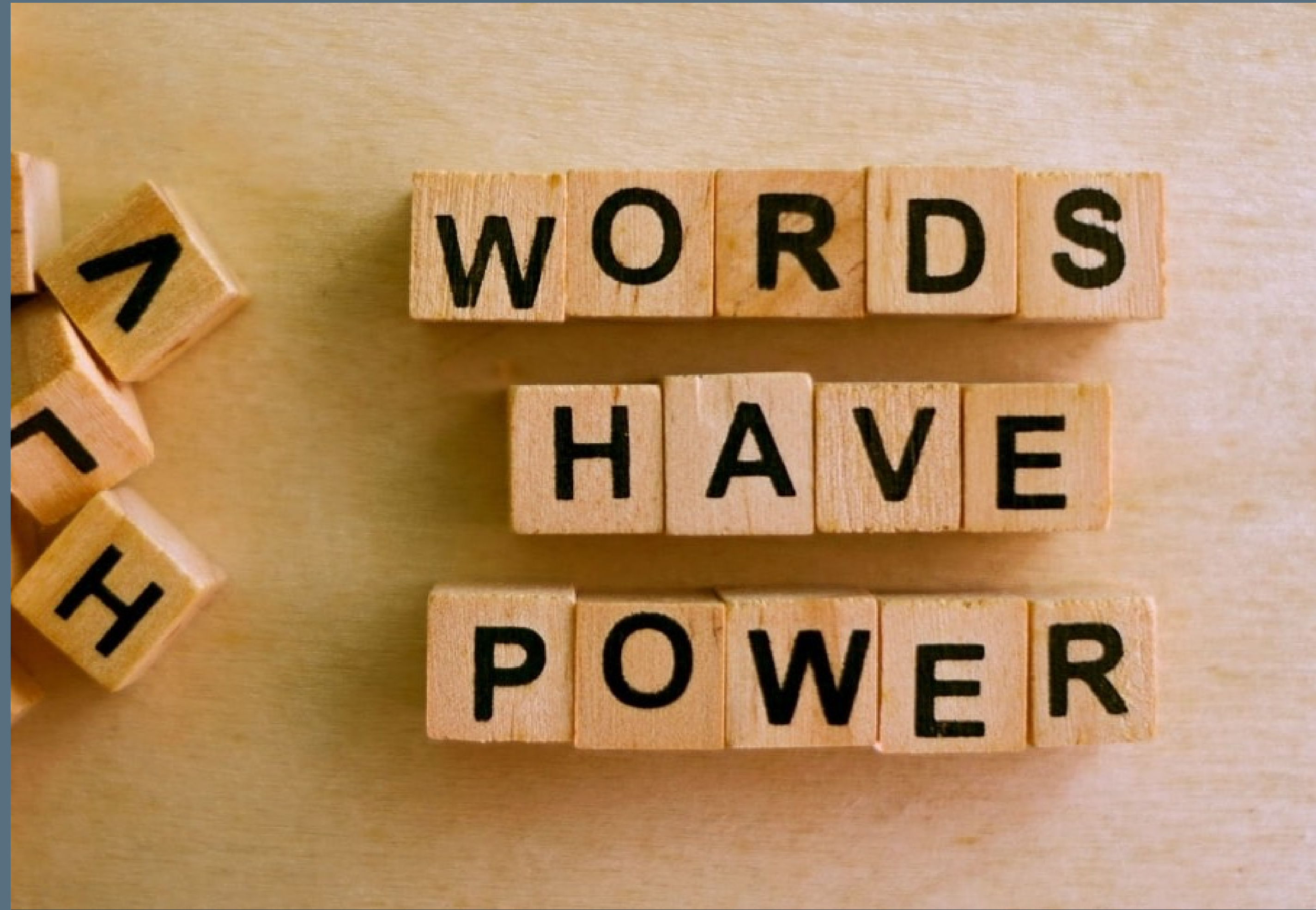


*Type into the chat box*

Questions? Reflections? Insights?



# One-Word Closing





# Closing Thoughts

- Join us for the second webinar on October 27, 10:00–12:00 PT
- Reflection between sessions
  - Observe
  - Take note of
  - Ask yourself...





# Check Your Email

- ❖ Survey link
- ❖ Registration link for webinar 2
- ❖ Webinar 1 slides
- ❖ Webinar 1 recording

Watch for emails from  
**[relwest@wested.org](mailto:relwest@wested.org)**







# Thank You!

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