**Notes from Academic Track: “Women of Power: Recasting K-12 Educational Systems”** (2:30-3:25 p.m.)

Showcase Oregon 2016 – March 7th, 2016

Chair: **Anselmo Villanueva**, Ph.D., chairperson, Board of Directors, Lane Education Service District

Panel Member: **Shadiin Garcia**, Deputy Director of Policy and Research, Chief Education Office, Salem, Oregon

Panel Member: **Charlene Williams**, Senior Director, Roosevelt Cluster, Portland, Oregon

Panel Member: **Kathleen Jonathan**, Community School Outreach Coordinator, Salem-Keizer Public Schools

Panel Member: **Diane Hanks**, Retired Principal, Bloomington Public Schools

**Notes:**

Dr. Villanueva welcomed the guests and introduced the panelists, whom he asked to share their educational experiences and talk about what brought them to where they are today.

Charlene Williams: Began by noting that she is constantly learning and challenging her own practices. She was raised by her father and his parents. She struggled with the absence of her mother and the challenges her father faced which greatly limited his skill as a parent. None of her family members were able to provide much support as she navigated thru life and school. Today she looks back and considers her “family” story as one dimensional coming from her lone viewpoint and she strives to look at the story from each of their perspectives. They each had their own struggles and every family member had a multicultural perspective. Her dad loved her unconditionally and he and his parents did the best they could. Charlene’s first positive and impactful educational experience came from two white math teachers. In mid high she was encouraged through established programming to experience science and math. She loved the subjects and the teachers were supportive in ways that allowed her to excel and believe she could become a scientist. In high school, she had a white male vocal coach that went out of his way to help her excel in music. These two experiences stood out in her life and made her realize how effective the right kind of support and mentoring can be, and life changing in positive ways. This is when she decided to be an educator. So many students of color experience a lack of support or encouragement which can lead to a lack of hope, motivation and/or ability to succeed. There is much work to be done to change this experience for our students and to help them believe in the power of their dreams. Each child should be lucky enough to have a cheer-leader.

Shadiin Garcia: Identifies as a Chicana and Laguna Pueblo who moved to Eugene 13 years ago. In talking as an educator, graduate student, mom, and an indigenous woman, she believes there are 4 truths relevant for a successful K-12 educational system and they are…

1. What we put in front of students matters
2. The way we talk to students and their families matters
3. Listening to others regarding ‘other’ ways of knowing, matters

Shadiin shared two examples of school work her children were given that had cultural implications that created an unfair learning experience. The firs was a detailed assignment given to her 9 year old that was so bogged down with rhetoric and restrictions it was impossible for him to complete. The teacher fully understood, was apologetic and gave out a new assignment. Many parents or students don’t know they can bring these things to a teacher’s attention or often they bring them to attention but aren’t heard or satisfied with the response. Her 9th grade student was asked to draft a document regarding a country related to his heritage but was told he could not use America. As an indigenous student this was complicated. He drafted a document using America and worded it in a way that the teacher immediately knew what was wrong with the assignment as written and apologized and hopefully will not make the same mistake. There are far too many stereo typing or inaccurate photos of indigenous peoples that need to be corrected or disposed of. In America people are referred to as English learners. Why not refer to them as bi-lingual learners and create more micro affirmations. Intention is important but not enough.

Diane Hanks: is one of 10 siblings (7 girls and 3 boys) that grew up on a farm with her grandfather. She loved to read the many books that lined the shelves in the house. One day she asked her grandfather why her mother never read any of the books and discovered that her mother couldn’t read. This was hard to imagine because Diane loved to read. She hated June because school was closed and she missed the school library. In her 10th grade year Diane had two substitute teachers over a two month period in her English class. Her learning experience was greatly enhanced by these teachers and she decided she wanted to go to a white school and eventually college. After enough begging she was allowed to go to a white school and was thrilled at the magnitude of books in the library. One of her teachers mentored her and helped her prepare for and get admitted into Boston College. She eventually moved to Alabama but felt like to many of her colleagues complained too much so she moved to Indiana. This is where she recognized the three things children need to succeed in addition to a strong curriculum…

1. Schools should be inviting, warm and open
2. Needed changes must be systematic changes
3. A student centered environment needs to be created for children

There are many inconsistencies in the K-12 educational system that are unfair and promote inequity. She believes an expected GPA of 3.8 limits the ability of many to join the honor society while athletes can join their sports regardless of their GPA. She suggested lowering the GPA for the Honor Society a small bit and adding criteria for Honor Society engagements that would encourage more inclusiveness in those selected to join the organization. For example, the Honor Society could host and annual MLK event that would require having members that could bring multicultural perspectives to the planning. Finally, schools need to be carefully assessed from the inside out. Students must always know their best is always expected. Education is the soul of our world and if we mess it up, we mess up our world.

Kathleen Jonathan: Pacific Islanders are all about the family. Kathleen’s mom is one of 8 girls and 5 boys. All of whom are like additional parents to Kathleen rather than just aunties and uncles. Because of this closeness Kathleen did not tell anyone she was going away to college until she was accepted into a program. Her mother was the only one that supported her decision but still didn’t agree with it. All other family members asked her what she was trying to prove and hoped for her to fail so she would return home sooner. Just after WWII, the U.S. military tested bombs in the Bikini islands. This made all of the Bikini islands unlivable and Kathleen’s family was relocated to another island. As part of this relocation a “Compact of Free Association” was signed. Part of this agreement was that the Pacific Islanders affected by the move could attend school in Oregon at Monmouth University. This is where Kathleen ended up. Upon arrival, she immediately realized this institution and surrounding community had no consideration for cultural differences and there were approximately 250 English language learners in the Salem-Keizer area at that time. Although she intended to study science, Kathleen found the unmet needs of 250 people to be daunting and she took a job in education instead. She told a story of a highly publicized “gang” war that took place at the school. It was considered a gang war because it was a large fight and the Pacific Islander students began to chant “island pride” during the outburst. There were in fact Latino’s and others who weren’t pacific islanders but no one cared. The result of this fight was the creation of Kathleen’s current position.

Dr. Villanueva asked the panel, “Given the state of education today, what do you use in each of your situations and what is needed to make a difference.

Diane Hanks replied: Leadership reflecting a vision and a mission that speaks to the needs.

Charlene Williams replied: Leadership and shifting paradigm. Position those who are different as leaders. You can’t serve if you can’t listen.

Shadiin Garcia replied: Switch from sustaining to culturally sustaining.

Kathleen Jonathan replied: Leadership and Accountability.

Dr. Villanueva summarized that to be a professor you have to be culturally competent but systems don’t recognize it.

An attendee commented that cultural competency was relevant but administration got in the way at the elementary level. Friends and colleagues in the high school system believe the community is not ready for it yet.

Kathleen Jonathan concluded that Oregon has great teachers but a poor educational system.