PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE MINORITY STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT NETWORK AMHERST, MA, JUNE 25-27, 2003

"It is very important for me to have teachers who want me to succeed. Think what it means for a teacher to tell the parents of a student of color that she's getting a C-plus and doing just fine, while telling the parents of a white student to not let her grade drop below an A."

Amherst student leader, class of '04

Since the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) began five years ago, its national conference rhetoric consistently has declared "we must put race on the table." At the 2003 conference, hosted by the Amherst-Pelham Public and Regional Schools June 25-27, the MSAN put a face on that phrase, giving it substance and direction for the network.

The Governing Board adopted a statement of beliefs and purposes regarding the relationship between race and achievement in the network's schools. For conference participants, the program provided a rich three-day discussion on the history, stories, research, and heart of the struggle of minorities to rely on education for equality in American society. It was the most in-depth experience on the core issue of the MSAN since the network was launched.

The 2003 conference also welcomed the first expansion of MSAN, from the original districts that banded together to collaborate on research-based initiatives to close the achievement gap in their districts. Seven additional districts have joined the effort, all small to moderate-sized districts in urban-suburban areas with traditions of high achievement. Like the initial districts, they are seeking ways to use their resources effectively and to learn from each other with the goal of making sure race is not a factor in student achievement. The new districts represented at the conference included Brookline, Mass.; Green Bay, Wis.; Windsor and Hamden, Conn.; and Princeton, N.J. Other new districts include Bedford, N.Y.; and Bellevue, Wash.

Preceding the conference, the Governing Board adopted a statement, **What Is the Relationship Between Race and Achievement in Our Schools?**, presented by the Research Practitioner Council after 18 months of deliberation. The document summarizes the core beliefs and knowledge base that guide the work of MSAN. The process of synthesizing the research, focusing this network's "statement of purpose" on what schools can do, and wrestling with such issues as pre-school gaps in cognitive experiences required time to work out, members of the Research Council told the Governing Board. "This is something we could not have done even a year or so ago. We

had to trust each other," commented one member of the Council. Laura Cooper, co-convener of the Council, told the Governing Board that "we learned a great deal about ourselves and where we need to go as a group." It is the hope of the Council that the document will be used in each member district to initiate a similar process.

All of the keynote speakers and the break-out sessions for the 2003 conference referred to points made in the document adopted by the Governing Board in some way.

MAJOR PRESENTATIONS

Following a reception and dinner at Valentine Hall at Amherst College, the formal program of the 2003 conference opened with a provocative keynote speech by **Theresa Perry** of Wheelock College, who challenged the participants "to think about the task of achievement for African American students from the inside out." This means understanding the distinctive cultural, social, and historical perspectives of African Americans.

Perry, former undergraduate dean at Wheelock College and author of the recent book, *Young, Gifted, and Black*, reminded her audience that one of the distinctions for African Americans has been their persistent belief that education meant freedom. This belief has endured centuries of perceptions by others that "preferred to consider African Americans intellectually incompetent."

Perry used examples and stories to illustrate her point. She described very dissimilar schools where African American students achieve – but not because of traditional variables such as their previous preparation or the costs of education. On St. Helena's Island in South Carolina the annual family income is about $10,000 a year, but the children have higher academic achievement than African Americans on Hilton Head Island. African Americans achieve in Catholic schools where nuns are paid less than $3,000 a year, and Xavier College sends more African American students to medical school than does Yale University.

These places continue an environment that was present in the pre-civil rights era, Perry said. They create intentional learning communities that provide African American students with a "counter narrative about themselves, one that reinforces the idea of African Americans as intellectuals," she said.

The pre-civil rights schools for African Americans "deliberately tried to pass on behaviors that were understood as necessary to achieve," Perry said. When a child turned in a paper, for example, a teacher always asked: "Have you done your best?" In the post-civil rights era, the ideology of black inferiority permeated institutions, bolstered by the impact of the media. Few schools today, she added, "are organized as intentional learning communities or to give kids an identity as achievers."

Even if schools do not address race directly, "their culture of achievement is so strong that it pushes back on the idea of African American students as intellectually

inferior," Perry said. They need a culture of hard work, commitment to doing your best, persistence and organization for "habitas." Even if the teaching is not very good, they can redefine kids as achievers and give them the tools to learn, she said. Another necessary condition to high achievement is the intentional building of cultural capital among African American children. A study of Boston students, for example, found that only 20 percent of black children reach their grade level in vocabulary, yet their teachers lack strategies for teaching vocabulary and their classrooms have few reading books. On the other hand, the principal of the St. Helena's school exposed students to cultural capital, taking them on field trips all over the country and using a "culturally responsive pedagogy in which teachers were 'warm demanders.'"

Perry also said the curriculum for black students needs to be challenging. Successful initiatives, such as Prep for Prep, "don't see a contradiction in focusing on high achievement while working on skill development." In fact, in none of the successful communities she writes about in her book is there talk about remediation, "but they all do it. They understand that skills deficiencies are not the same as intellectual deficiencies."

External school reviewers, working with a teacher co-leader, can coach schools into creating intellectual identities for minority children, Perry said. Creating such a culture needs to be a deliberate act. She added that schools should create active partnerships with local black organizations and institutions because "it is important for them that their philosophy of education is passed down." A school also ought to impart to black students narratives about what the African American community has been willing to do to get an education. The central theme of every black narrative, she pointed out, "is that literacy means freedom. Remember that we are the only people in this country who were punished if we tried to get an education."

In introducing the keynote speaker on the final day of the 2003 conference, MSAN Program Director Carolyn Ash challenged the participants to "never forget our history and to remind students about it constantly." The keynote speaker, **Carlotta Walls LaNier,** one of the Little Rock Nine who integrated Central High School in 1957, represents a major even in that history. Her parents, Ash said, represented the "ultimate parent involvement, sending their child day after day to be spit on, called names, and escorted to school by armed guards."

LaNier, a soft-spoken person who was reluctant to talk about her experiences at Central High for many years, began by complimenting MSAN for its commitment to high academic achievement among minority students. "Our Little Rock Nine opened the doors," she said. "MSAN is saying that access is not enough."

An epitome of the stories that Theresa Perry had said were so important, LaNier shared her experience and feelings about what happened in Little Rock and why. "To be young, gifted, and black, as in Perry's book title, would have been an oxymoron several decades ago," she said. "It has been less than 100 years since the United States officially

thought blacks were less than human, and it is against this bedrock of hatred that school reform had its beginning."

None of the Little Rock Nine considered themselves gifted, LaNier said. They just happened to be all of the students left from the original 100 who signed up to desegregate the high school.

LaNier wore several hats during her talk to the conference in order to tell her story. The first was a Yankee's baseball cap because it was in 1957 that Jackie Robinson, who had broken the color barrier in professional sports 10 years earlier, was a pivotal player in the team's World Series victory. A second hat was too small. In 1957, she said, blacks were not allowed to try on clothes in department stores, so when her mother took her shopping for back-to-school clothes, they were never sure the clothes would fit. Telling her audience to imagine the black experience – as Perry had advised, too – LaNier described a shopping trip of a black family: "They catch a bus downtown but must sit in the back, they can't drink from the fountains or use the bathroom, the mother must explain that 'I know we didn't try it on, but we'll make it fit;' and she tells her child, 'I'll explain what the clerk called us when we get home;' and she also tells her child that 'I know that white school is closer to our home, but yours is nice, too.'"

The problem with that trip is not only its effect on a person's self-esteem, but also that some was not true. The high school for blacks she attended – built within two years as Central High – cost only a fourth as much, used hand-me-down books, had no athletic facilities, and its library contained only 5,000 books, compared to 30,000 at Central High. "We knew that the road to opportunity was through education," she said, "and we wanted the best in education."

To get that education, the Little Rock Nine each had an escort from the 101st Airborne patrol, heard mothers yell at their children to come out and not "stay in there with those niggers," were spit on, were told "your father looks and acts like a monkey, so he must be one," and heard the crowd threaten "to lynch one of these niggers." Black reporters covering the incident were severely beaten. There were "thousands of them, and they thought we were only nine, but we had our legal, spiritual, and financial community behind us, ordinary people who did extraordinary things."

Her own father was blackballed from work and lives in Colorado today, where LaNier is in the real estate business, because his home was burned. The governor closed the school for a year, "thinking that would stop us." Today, the school is 51 percent minority, academic achievement has stayed high, and minority students serve in leadership positions. "If your cause is a just one, you will be able to stay the course," she said.

One of the observers of the battle at Central High was a 13-year-old boy, "who watched in shock." On the 40th anniversary of the integration at Central High, that boy, former President Bill Clinton, attended a commemoration for the opening of the school year, as did a Republican governor, a Democratic mayor, and the black principal of the

school. Clinton later presented the Medal of Freedom to each of the Little Rock Nine, and a video of the ceremony, played by LaNier at the MSAN conference, caught the drama of the occasion. Clinton told the Little Rock Nine that they were receiving the medal "because they paid a price and have their scars. They taught us that you can turn your cheek from violence without averting your eyes from injustice."

The third hat LaNier pulled from her box carried the logo of the Little Rock Nine Foundation, started by the group to promote academic achievement among minority students and to provide college scholarships.

The foundation and presentations to schools and other groups now consume much of LaNier's time, but they are part of her determination "to stay the course." She urged those at the conference to continue to set goals for themselves and all their students. "Tomorrow's students will span the globe," she said, "and as future leaders, they will need to work with diverse groups. We need to become a model for diversity."

STUDENT PANEL

The comments of Amherst-Pelham Regional High School students who attended MSAN student conferences reminded those at the 2003 MSAN conference that "staying the course" is still a challenge for minority students. The student panel was organized and moderated by Barbara Love, chair of the Amherst school board and instrumental in developing the district's multicultural plan.

The five student panelists agreed that being with other students of color from MSAN districts inspired and encouraged them. "I had a chance to be with others students who were having problems being the only student of color in honors classes," said Valerie Jiggetts, now a senior. And Bryant Lewis, now a junior, said it was helpful to learn "how we all persevere."

For Gabriel (Gabe) Gonzalez-Charlestream, who graduated this year, the two years of student conferences pushed him to finish high school and to consider college. He shared his poetry at the conferences and afterwards with friends he met there and appreciates staying connected. Mary Custard, dean of students at Amherst Regional High School, said what she enjoyed most about the MSAN student conferences "was seeing our own students grow and realize they are not alone in facing isolation and other problems." She had seen a "transformation" in Gabe, for example, because at the student conferences he met other students who were artistic, like he is, but were also achieving academically. She had lobbied to include him on the student roster from Amherst "because I knew he could be a leader, and the conference can be powerful for students."

The Amherst students discussed their experiences and feelings at a panel before the Amherst high school faculty when they returned from their conference, and apparently it was an icebreaker and an eye opener for many of the teachers. "It was a great time to be completely honest and let the teachers know the problems we were having," said Lewis. "We gave them ideas on how they could change." Nicole Coker,

now a senior, said it stimulated further conversations with teachers, who were now asking her about her perspectives as a student of color. Alexis Parent, now a junior, said “I can speak to teachers about how I feel, and some teachers came up and thanked me.” For Gabe, the panel discussion allowed him to see “which teachers were truly interested in changing. They asked questions.”

After the first student conference, the students decided to establish a mentoring program for minority middle school students, known as STRIVE. They admitted it started slowly but gained momentum after the second student conference when the student sponsors became better organized. “Minority students coming into high school have a big transition problem if they are placed in honors classes,” Bryant said. “This is a way for us to share our experiences.” Gabe said he learned as much as the students he mentored and felt he could relate to “those kids who don’t really see a point of going to school. I told them that school is a take-off point for the rest of their lives. Life is always going to be there, but school isn’t.”

The students suggested that the student conferences give them more time “to chill out” with new friends. They were particularly pleased at the chances to share poetry, talents, and keep up contacts (Valerie continued the tradition, sharing her poetry while Gabe demonstrated break dancing). They said it was important for them to have teachers of color to relate to in school. “It’s difficult in honors classes where all the students are white, and a white teacher starts talking about racism, then everyone looks at you. If we had more teachers and students of color in those classes, it would be easier for a lot of us to want to participate in the discussions.” Valerie pointed out that when students designed the “dream” school at their conferences, having more teachers of color “was very high on a lot of students’ lists.”

None of the students were considering a career in teaching. “I have a lot of respect for teachers, but I can teach more through poetry,” Gabe said. They all knew, however, what behaviors good teachers should have. Alexis said a good teacher “would push me and be interested in me as a person,” a sentiment echoed by Valerie, who said that a teacher should know “something about me besides my work skills.” Nicole said that it was very important for a teacher to want her to succeed. She painted a painful scene for minority students: “Think about the message of a teacher who tells the parents of a student of color that she is making a C-plus and is doing fine, while telling white parents that they mustn’t let their child’s grades drop below an A.”

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

Sheryl Denbo, Director, Mid-Atlantic Equity Center

Drawing from some of the themes developing in the conference, Sheryl Denbo, an urban education specialist who was active in forming policies on civil rights in education at the federal level, warned that building personal relationships “is easy to say but hard to do.” Because of miscommunications due to age, culture gaps, performance gaps, and trust gaps, “you have to be careful how you say you want to build minority students’

intellectual capacities." In most places, she added, educators do not talk about teaching African American students as easily as they discuss educating ESL students. This phenomenon is a throwback to the recent past when people tried to move away from a social construct of racism and to see color as a factor. This was wrong, she said, because it denied culture and situations.

Research also does not ask race questions often, Denbo noted, which is why author Teresa Perry had to explore and theorize about the intellectual tradition among African Americans. It would be legitimate to ask if "effective instruction" is effective for everyone, or if "effective schools" are effective for all students. Three factors need to be taken into consideration: those that affect all students such as class size and teacher expectations; those that affect all students but affect African American students disproportionately; and those that affect students with minority status, such as girls on math or boys on athletics. For example, one study found that the performance of white students decreased when they were told that performance depends on innate ability but went up when told that it depends on strategic planning. The opposite was true for African American students.

There are some strategies that are uniquely suited for African American students, Denbo said, listing attributes that have a deep culture base such as artistic performances and folklore. There are societal factors influencing their achievement, as well as school structural factors. These include tracking (totally heterogeneous classes don't always work, either), and, instead, teachers must know a child's specific strengths and weaknesses. Leaving a child in the same skill group for a year is tracking, she said. It is teachers who must change "when something is not working for a child. Other structural factors would be assessments and how they are used, procedures for targeting services within schools and for transitions between schools, and professional development.

"Teachers are very uncomfortable talking about race and very afraid that if they say a minority child is not performing, teachers of color will walk away and charge racism," Denbo said candidly. "It is not wise for white teachers to feel they can't talk about race, but it does mean that they have to be conscious of the issues."

Denbo suggested how to structure factors to create trust. Teaching factors would cover attitudes toward teachers' beliefs, attitudes and expectations regarding race and racism, cultural literacy based on a cultural inventory one student at a time, culturally and personally relevant instruction, and analysis of classroom assessments. Parent factors would include their attitudes and expectations toward school, attitudes toward the white culture, relationships between child and parents, relationships between school and parent, and the black cultural experience. "If the last factor is strong, students feel more secure and can deal with the white culture," she said. The earlier the black cultural experience can be integrated into a child's life, the better, she said, suggesting that a focus on it in black families, clubs/music groups, or Saturday events could build the experience for children.

Student factors would include their attitudes and expectations toward school, skills in negotiating the white culture, their black culture experience, relationships with teachers, ability to set short- and long-term academic goals, and ability to identify strengths and address academic deficits.

Denbo made the interesting comment that whites perhaps are the most isolated of all racial/ethnic groups. While the workplace may be integrated, when whites have fun they tend to do so within their own class, but blacks and other minorities congregate across class lines.

Asked how to overcome white teachers' fear of commenting about race in school, Denbo said it was important to talk to students directly and to establish your beliefs early, making contacts with parents after the first month with positive comments. Use inventories of children and parents to find out what are their interests and talents, fluctuate leadership by interest, talk careers and futures with students early, find student academic deficits individually and be diligent about working on them, and work toward building trust. "You can't assume they know you're not a racist," she said. One strategy would be to help students and parents "manipulate the system."

Laurell Wiersma, K-12 Mathematics Specialist, Arlington Public Schools

With a National Science Foundation (NSF) exploratory grant, the MSAN appointed a committee of K-12 science and math experts from six member districts to analyze the underrepresentation of minorities in advanced math/science courses and to recommend actions. In addition to a literature search on minority student access and achievement in upper-level math courses, the committee developed a report on parent recommendations for addressing the problem. Therefore, the NSF project includes three documents – a committee report, a literature search, and a parent document.

The committee drew from a conceptual framework on classroom instruction that contends instruction is a function of what teachers know and can do with particular students around specific physical and intellectual material. It also used research on enhancing student learning through social support and academic press.

Summarizing the reports, Laurell Wiersma said disparities in average achievement between white and minority students as well as participation in higher-level math courses is of concern in every MSAN district. A chart of the districts represented on the committee compared percentages of students by race/ethnicity and enrollments in AP higher-level math classes; in none did the Hispanic/black enrollments come close to equaling their percentage of student enrollment as a whole.

The committee agreed upon five focal areas for continuous self-analysis to correct the problem: teacher attitudes and expectations, student engagement, instructional practices, systemic support, and equity. For each, it outlined promising practices now in place (though none is a panacea) and questions local districts should ask in their self-analysis.

The committee also suggested how local districts could establish their own self-study committee. The "reflective process" is essential to developing a commitment to making sure minority students are represented equally in higher-level math courses, the committee stressed. In addition, districts must be sure they use quality curriculum and appropriate assessment tools, provide quality professional development for each of the focal points, and look for immediate systemic initiatives to support the goal.

Geoffrey Cohen, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Yale University

Geoffrey Cohen's research focuses on the impact of stereotyping and stigmatization on self-confidence and motivation and often involves studies of minority students.

One such study, of high school students in New England, found no differences by race in self-doubt, social anxiety, or how much school was considered a part of the student's identity. However, the study found significant differences by race on measures of social mistrust and perceived racial bias at school. Minority students, for example, were more likely to be punished and less likely to be called on by teachers. Social mistrust and perceived racial bias also were highly correlated with grade-point averages.

Another study of students at Yale University gave black and white students a difficult graduate records exam. They were told either 1) that it assessed innate ability, or 2) that it was not a diagnosis of ability. Under condition #1, the achievement gap on the test was replicated. Under condition #2, there was virtually no gap. Cohen said a study of women and math produced similar results.

Cohen's summary of these and many other studies have led him to conclude that:

- Stereotype threat hurts the people who care about school the most.
- The effects emerge about grade 6, which is the point at which students develop the required knowledge structure.
- One need not believe the stereotype to experience stereotype threat.
- Stereotype threat disrupts the academic performance of many groups in various contexts, including the elderly and memory, white men and basketball, females and math, and poor kids and test performance.

In light of these research findings, Cohen said that it was a particularly sensitive task to provide critical feedback to minority students without undermining their motivation. One strategy, he said, is to use positive buffers, first giving praise, then providing criticism. One study comparing three approaches - unbuffered criticism, criticism first followed by a positive buffer, and a positive buffer followed by criticism - found that black students cited the third method as being less biased than did white students.

Effective mentoring and interventions, he added, include the use of high standards and assuring students' capacities to reach the standards. These are basic to well-known examples such as Jaime Escalante's calculus students, the accelerated schools approach developed by Henry Levin, and Uri Treisman's calculus workshops. He recommended that MSAN schools use a University of Michigan strategy of open-ended "rap" sessions where students can learn that they all are having the same problems.

Reducing the stereotype threat and its effect on depressing motivation among minority students is possible, Cohen said, "but only if we operate smart."

Mica Pollock, Assistant Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Education

An anthropologist and author of the forthcoming book *Colormute: Race Talk Dilemmas in an American High School*, Mica Pollock dares go where others demure. The question most deleted from talk in education – how and why do different "race groups" achieve differently? – is the one that Americans most think of when discussing achievement, she contends. This leads to "clumsy talk, which can be damaging," she said.

Based on a study of a California high school, Pollock's analysis followed the school through reconstitution, finding the same patterns of race talk reproduced in a new staff. While the school was racially mixed, a majority of the teachers were white. She observed three main patterns in the use of a race label – speakers contest the use of racial labels, they used racial labels matter of factly, or they suppressed racial labels altogether.

Pollock's research found six core dilemmas about race talk:

- People do not see themselves as belonging to simple race groups, but officially and informally, they use only about six preordained groups.
- Race doesn't matter, but it does. It is easily dealt with when it refers to relationships among students, such as lunchroom clichés, but "it is seemingly impossible when adults and students are involved," she said. "The moments when we delete race words are perhaps the moments when race matters most dangerously." Sometimes it is best to use small groups for race discussions, but the challenge is to get whole schools to address it.
- The de-raced words used when discussing plans for achieving racial equality can actually prevent discussion on ways to make opportunities racially equal. For example, district and school reform talk about "all students," but although this is well meaning, "it can itself replace analysis and discussion of improving educational opportunities for specific racial groups in need."
- The more complex inequality seems to get, the more simplistic inequality analysis seems to become. For example, the "zooming out" response is to say "we can't talk about a specific group because all kids here are needy." Or, the issue is generalized to describe it as affecting "low-income minorities."

- The questions we ask most about race in education are the very questions we most suppress. Pollock said the questions that need to be asked are: Do racial patterns in achievement exist? Why? "Americans expect school achievement to be racially ordered," she said. "Yet they tend to name racial achievement patterns only when doing so does not explicitly implicate speakers personally. We have a habit of finding isolated groups to blame instead of assuming responsibility." Racial achievement patterns should not be talked about as abnormal.
- Although speaking in racial terms can make race matter, not speaking in racial terms can make race matter, too. Deleting race can have consequences, she said. For example, not addressing the preponderance of black males wandering the hallways in the school she studied kept teachers and administrators from looking at the fact that these students were expelled from classes more often. "Whispering about it increased the racial importance of what was happening," she said.

Stereotyping was part of the talk at the school. She heard positive things about individual black students, "but as a group, the talk was always about problems." Chinese students almost always were talked about in terms of academic success, but almost never in terms of poverty even though recent Chinese immigrants lived in the lowest income areas.

Pollock advised her audience to not only talk more about race, but "to talk more skillfully." The more race is talked about, she said, "the more it becomes about us and adult development and less about kids. You need to become confidently self-conscious about race talk."

Ron Ferguson, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University

Ron Ferguson's Tripod Project grew out of the MSAN student survey that revealed racial patterns in how students perceived their school experiences and that provided clues on motivation that could help close the achievement gap. The three legs of the tripod are content, pedagogy, and teacher-student relationships.

More than 80 schools in six states and 20 districts, including 11 of the MSAN districts, are participating in the Tripod Project. After one full year of the project, surveys revealed three themes. One is the need to foster more positive peer support for academic achievement. The second theme is the need for classroom conditions where students and teachers are inclined to seek and give help rather than avoid it. The third theme is the need to promote pedagogies that enhance the feasibility of academic success.

The feasibility theme will be a focus of activity in the 2003-04 school year, Ferguson said. Schools are creating Feasibility Working Groups within and among schools to collect or devise potentially effective ways of explaining the

skills and concepts that students find most difficult to master or that teachers find most difficult to help students understand. The main things mentioned so far, he said, were inferential thinking and fractions in math.

Another finding from Tripod Project surveys, Ferguson reported, "is that peer relationships in elementary school are not very friendly, and this starts early, in the first grade among black children." In high schools, teasing is worst in lower performing classrooms. He also has found wide differences in classroom effectiveness within buildings, "meaning that the answers are in buildings and teachers need to observe and talk to each other more."

Rossi Ray-Taylor, Executive Director, MSAN

Giving her first report as executive director of MSAN, Rossi Ray-Taylor outlined progress since the last annual conference including interest generated nationally by MSAN on addressing the achievement gap, continued use of the Ed-Excel student survey data, a document for NSF on minority student access and success in higher-level math courses, preparation of early literacy and adolescent literacy proposals, and plans for an evaluation of the value-added impact on the initial MSAN districts. The Governing Board adopted a business plan, communications plan, and an 18-month work plan. It also approved regional conferences, the first one planned for New Jersey on November 8, and decided to fold the 2004 annual conference into a national conference with other groups to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the *Brown* decision. She urged districts to use the document on race and achievement, presented by the Research Practitioner Council, "as a way to start conversations within your districts." The Research Practitioner Council also has developed indicators to help member districts quantify the impact of MSAN, she said.

At the conclusion of the 2003 conference, Ray-Taylor commented on the common themes of the meeting. It is important to be explicit about the historical experience of blacks regarding education, she said, "and stories are important to that work." It also is important to make schools safe places to talk about race. The progress made by MSAN's math project and Tripod Project is significant. To hear a personal story about the Little Rock Nine was "powerful for many of us here because we have lived it only through our families' recollections, yet it is a narrative that is part of our being, and it is important for our students and schools." The projects, the data, and the research on MSAN's goals are important, she said, "but it is our history, experience, and the voices of students that truly tell us why this work is important."

Allan Alson, chair of the Governing Board, and others thanked the Amherst school district staff for the successful conference and especially Superintendent Gus Sayer, who retired just two days after the conference ended.