

How Do You Continue to Make Racial Equity Work a Priority with New Leadership at Community Colleges?



Guest Host

Dr. Gianina Baker

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign



Dr. Reyna Anaya

Community College of Aurora



Dr. Michael Baston

Cuyahoga Community College



Dr. Pamela Eddy

William & Mary

How Do You Continue to Make Racial Equity Work a Priority with New Leadership at Community Colleges?

Dr. Gianina Baker: So, hello! I'm your host, Gianina Baker, and I'd like to welcome you to our discussion today, which asks the question, How do you continue to make racial equity work a priority with new leadership at community colleges?

I'm joined today by four of our REACH Collaborator Equity Champion Consultants. First up is Dr. Reyna Anaya, who's the senior student affairs officer/dean of student success at the Community College of Aurora. We also have with us Dr. Luis Ponjuan, who is the research director of the IDEAL: Investing in Diversity, Equity, Access, and Learning research projects, as well as associate Professor in higher education administration in the School of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University. We also have with us today Dr. Pamela Eddy, who is a professor at William & Mary; and last but not least, Dr. Michael Baston, who serves as the president of Cuyahoga Community College.

Thank you all for joining me today. I am super excited to have this conversation and have your perspectives. Your fears, perspectives lend themselves to some of the questions that will be asked, and so, in wasting no time in jumping right into it, the first question I'd like to hear your response to is, what do new leaders to our states need to know about racial equity work happening? Particularly in relation to the REACH Collaborative? Who would like to jump in and start? Dr. Baston, please!

Dr. Michael Baston: The idea that we want to make a more equitable and just world. You have to determine if that is the value set of the institutions that you're working with, and if not, what are the cases that you have to make to really bring this to the forefront? You know, I think that oftentimes we can come with the toolkit of all of the things we want to do around racial equity. But if you haven't done the work of understanding the institutional readiness, the where you are, the pin in the map in terms of the continuum of equity awareness, you can missfire. You can have a missed start. So we've got to start with understanding the institutional context. Understanding the readiness of that context to actually advance racial equity opportunities and most specifically pick a framework, pick a strategy, pick an approach that then you stay consistent with so that you're not all

over the place. Because if we're concentrating on everything then we ultimately find ourselves not concentrating on anything that matters.

Dr. Gianina Baker: Way to start us off. Who would like to jump in? Dr. Anaya?

Dr. Reyna Anaya: Absolutely, you know, I think one of the things that's really critical to the REACH Collaborative, is it's focused on increasing the completion rates of adult learners of color. And particularly, you know, when I think about the importance and the value around community colleges is their open-access mission, right? And so it's important, though, along with that to also understand that it's only the first step when we're looking at really creating opportunities that are equity-minded in our institutions.

It's also important to know who's coming to our institutions. Fifty percent of Latinx Hispanic-identified students are enrolling in community colleges. Forty percent of our black-identified students are enrolling in community colleges in terms of the higher education sector, and if we're not aware of that's who we're serving in our colleges, we need to backtrack a little bit more to understand our open-access mission and why we've chosen that, and how we're going to make sure that our institutions are ready to serve these students that are entering our doors.

Dr. Pamela Eddie: I'm going to piggyback on that because I think the importance of understanding the data becomes really critical to knowing who our students are, and then also understanding that there's research that we can draw from, that it's not as if no one knows nothing about how to increase equity or the kind of strategies that work.

I think to Dr. Baston's point, the idea of understanding your context is really important because there's certain language that ends up being more useful in some communities than others in terms of being able to draw people into this work.

Dr. Luis Ponjuan: I would like to echo everyone's really critical perspectives because it highlights the many different ways that we come to the arena to talk about these issues. I want to provide a slightly different conversation point that I think bears note, because when we talk about context, I recognize that the REACH Collaborative was created in a time where these were really important issues. But the very core elements of what the REACH Collaborative is trying to accomplish is under an immense scrutiny, now more than ever.

And so I want to add the idea that when we continue to address this issue with community colleges at the forefront, or I call the on-ramp for these communities of color who we serve, we recognize that we have an incredible responsibility to not only serve those students but recognize that the political landscape is changing, and the boundaries are becoming more blurred between our academic mission and legislative and political communities. And so we have to understand that we no longer operate in what I call mutually exclusive circles. Therefore, we have to be mindful of being able to navigate those spaces that, quite frankly, have been viewed as sacred, hallowed grounds. We can't forget that community colleges have a very unique space in higher education. We can't forget that the REACH Collaborative at one point was viewed as a very, what I consider, innovative or organizational unit. But now we're clearly in spaces that are questioning our very value and are very worth.

So I want to remind ourselves as the people who are listening to this podcast that we have to recognize that we're no longer operating in a vacuum, that we have to be mindful of the fact that the political landscape continues to question, I would even argue, demand the ROI of what we're doing. And we're going to talk about this later on in the podcast because Pam is already giving us kind of like a little bit of a head start to talking about how we use empirical evidence to support this. But I just want to be absolutely clear that we can't ignore the fact that we are in very interesting times in the value of what we do, and we have to become more politically savvy in how we communicate our message.

As Dr. Baston mentioned, and as Reyna also highlights, there are a lot of communities that are looking towards us to be the torchbearers of what we believe are essential elements of what we argue community colleges strive to achieve. So I appreciate everyone's commentary, but I also want to remind ourselves that we are no longer doing this work in the background. We're literally being forced onto the stage, and we have to be mindful of that.

Dr. Michael Baston: I love what Luis said because we are not playing checkers; we're playing chess, and, you know, I had a conversation this morning, as an example, with one of our regional talent development arms that deals with business and industry, and one of the things that I was talking about to the organization is that, you know, we've got to engage business and industry in the conversation, not simply because we want them to be altruistic, but there's an economic benefit to reaching out to those communities that have been historically locked out of

opportunity, because the talent shortage in the country requires a level of engagement that you can actually put financial statistics behind. We can show what it costs not to be able to retain talent in your community. We can show the stranded assets, the great people who actually are available and able to work, but because of systems and because of perceptions and because narratives have not been challenged that the opportunities have evaded them, and then you don't have trust and credibility with those communities that you've always locked out historically. So this is a matter of actually providing opportunities for our business and industry to thrive, but now they've got to sort of deal with all of maybe the unintended consequences of previous bad behavior, so that they now can benefit as we move forward.

Dr. Gianina Baker: You all are absolutely pointing out some huge, just places where we need to have further conversation. One of the other podcasts in this season is around what is the cost of doing nothing? And you all are just amplifying many of the points that were brought up in that one, and adding in some additional pieces, right, as we think about new leaders coming into this space. And so the next question that I'll pose to you is, what resources would you suggest to new leaders wanting to ramp up their knowledge on racial equity work happening around either your respective states or the states that you're working within the REACH Collaborative itself?

Dr. Michael Baston: Well, I can just jump in. From my perspective, I think there has to be a greater nexus between the community college strategy of economic development and community-development cooperations within your region, within your community. How do you build a bridge between the concepts of community development and the community college? How do you have access to those who have boots on the ground, who are daily struggling and making the case for economic opportunity, economic mobility, social mobility within a community. And two often we have operated in the silo of higher education. Too often we have been thinking that the conversation should just happen with our four-year partners as we try to get more students into the four-year space. There is a place for that working with our workforce so that our students can graduate and go into good jobs. That's an important part of the conversation. But community colleges have to better engage community-development infrastructures within the local community, so that there is greater alignment and greater understanding of the community college. How we can tangibly get access to the people who don't feel like they have access to the opportunity ecosystem, and this is a space that would be new for

community colleges because we've kind of frittered along the margins in this space because of our heavy emphasis on our K to 12 work, our heavy emphasis on our employer-engagement work, the heavy emphasis on the work that we're doing with four-year institutions. There is a space if we are really going to drive an agenda that promotes economic development and social mobility and economic mobility to better align ourselves with the efforts in our community in those community development organizations and that infrastructure.

Dr. Pamela Eddy: All right, I'm going to hop onto that. I think one of the things to think of with resources, as well, is based on rural locale and urban locale, because you're going to see differences based on the context there. And when we're looking at some of the urban locations with really generational poverty, being able to frame and put into language that motivates individuals to think that college is even an option for them or that it's worth it becomes increasingly critical. And so the resources end up being in partnership with others, especially in rural communities where there is not a lot of resources going around to anyone. But if we can't talk about our value proposition for why someone should come to our community colleges, we're going to miss the aspect of engaging with the public and our community and really lose a lot of opportunities to bring people along. So we have the open access, and we've had that for over a 100 years now. How do we keep them in school? How do we get them to graduation? And trying to understand where that is making those connections in the community is going to be really pivotal.

Dr. Reyna Anaya: I'll tax onto that as well. You know, I think there is an increasing importance in having the both/and of your external and your internal kind of guidance, right? And connection and partnership. And one of the pieces I want to talk specifically about is that internal knowing and connection to your community. And we talked a little bit about this at the very top, but I really want to drive it home and making sure you know your data, making sure you're checking your early momentum metrics because that alone tells you a story of how are we starting this journey with these students that are choosing us? And how are we, you know, what are some of the things that we need to do to make sure that they are able to continue that journey?

So some of those early momentum metrics may be, you know, how many students are earning zero college credit in that first semester? What does your English and math courses look like? What does your overall fall to spring and fall to fall

retention metrics look like? And really being able to dive deep and be able to understand the experience through the numbers, and then being able to take that to the next level and making sure there are multiple people in your organization from, you know, the president of your organization all the way down to the folks that care for your grounds. How do they understand this story when they're out in the community?

As we go back to that piece of the external in telling our story about the importance and the value that we can bring to really uplift and engage that concept of social and economic mobility. And I think, you know, to kind of tangential to that, I think there's also an important component as we think about racial equity work. To really understand the idea of its intersectionality into multiple facets of identity and lived experiences. You know, so I think about one of the new kind of like, not new necessarily, but the topics that are continuing to reengage in legislature around free community college, right? You know, what are some of the things that we need to consider within that as we're thinking about racial equity as being an intersectional concept, right? What are the impacts of the first dollar, last dollar kind of decisions? What are the impacts if there's a requirement to FASFA or for us, in our state, we have an in-state aid application that students are required to, or can, complete to get the same sort of number. And so, you know, thinking about those concepts of, you know, there's so much value when having a scope that is external and internal, and at the same time also recognizing the intersectional workings that happen not only as we think about identity of our students and who we're serving in our communities, but also as we think about how all those things come into play together.

Dr. Luis Ponjuan: I want to thank everyone. I sometimes feel like I am the oddball in this conversation because I read the question completely different, and I'll share this with you because I think it's important because of my work with a Texas Success Center in the Texas Association of Community Colleges. I've been the equity coach for that community. They have over 10 years of work engaged in this discussion around the issues of racial equity, and Dr. Cynthia Farrell has been very instrumental as the leader of that organization. But what I gathered from this question was really the two most important ones in my view of this question was “new leaders.” And what I mean by that is being engaged in working with the board of trustees of these different community colleges, which represents over 50 community college systems in the state of Texas is that we have a lot of new leaders that are coming into the spaces that are in charge of creating policy, in

charge of creating institutional commitment to these issues that all of my colleagues have mentioned.

And so when I have been in these spaces, I had to engage with folks who don't understand the lingo that we use, don't understand the vernacular that we talk about. And so what I had to do was really change my perspective when we talk about the two words that I thought were most important is "new leader." These new leaders are board of trustees. These new leaders are community members who are coming into community college leadership positions that are warming their opinions about community colleges. With that in mind, I want to answer the question a slightly different way because I became abundantly clear that my knowledge or my understanding of community colleges as my colleagues have mentioned thus far is quite elaborate. But they're coming into those spaces with a very unawareness of this issue. So I wanted to embrace this concept. We need to help them embrace the realities. They have known and unknown communities that they are part of. They're very familiar of their position of being a community leader, a business leader, or a medical doctor, but they're coming into spaces of known and unknown communities. And these new leaders need to recognize that they need to become more aware that these communities, known and unknown, are becoming more complex and interconnected, and it behooves us to educate these new leaders with them, alongside them, to develop a greater sense of curiosity, humility, respect, and awareness of the many unique perspectives and identities that they're going to represent as new leaders.

And I think it begins with this conversation that, as folks who are engaged in this work, people who are listening to this podcast, don't assume that these new leaders understand issues that we believe are essential to being a leader. Don't assume that these leaders recognize the perspectives that you bring are really important to leading the conversation.

So what resources would you suggest to these new leaders? I believe that it is our responsibility to understand that they need to realize the interconnectedness of this issue, the complexities of these issues, and everything else that my colleagues have mentioned: that this is important work that has to happen. But a lot of these new leaders really simply have a good heart and have a good commitment to this work because either have been appointed by some political leader, or they've been elected by some constituency; but nonetheless, it becomes our responsibility, our commitment to educating these new leaders about the resources that we bring to

the table and the recognition that these community colleges have a longstanding relationship with the community. But they may have a very myopic understanding of that. So I don't blame them for going into this space not knowing. I've considered that a responsibility to provide the expertise of, and we're going to talk about it later on, the data and everything that we're going to be addressing. Just be mindful that these folks have blind spots just like we did. Just be mindful that we have to be reminding ourselves that people don't speak the same language, don't have the same perspective that we do as scholars, as practitioners, and as community leaders. So please remember that we have to have humility, curiosity, and respect of those different perspectives.

Dr. Gianina Baker: You are no oddball. You were intentionally placed here, and had you not come from that perspective, I would have been, like, what happened? So you absolutely are supposed to be in this conversation, and I loved your reminder of what we like to think around systems thinking, right? Instead of placing blame, right? We accept responsibility. And you're saying, here's what we can do as leaders in these systems, right, to assist others in helping them think through what is next.

You all are absolutely at the forefront of many of these conversations and very much involved in them and absolutely can assist in helping people understand the resources that are out there, the organizations that are out there. So this is an incredibly important topic, and I think that you all are bringing just additional places to start points of discussion to start, right, with some of our listeners, hopefully.

Another question that I had that I hope that you can help us think through, right, there's a lot of these conversations have stemmed, right, from our work with the REACH Collaborative about culturally sustaining practices and pathways. And so not just jumping into the conversation and introducing it, right, in terms of awareness, but helping us think through how we might sustain some of this racial equity work, and so I ask, how can we sustain, or at the very least continue, some of this knowledge management around racial equity, in the midst of new leadership at our colleges? Or, you know, if you prefer to answer, you know, what are some questions you would ask of new leaders to better understand their knowledge of racial equity. Who'd like to start us up.

Dr. Pamela Eddy: I would jump on this because it really aligns with Luis's prior comments. So when I was thinking of this, is the importance of the idea of a

culture of inquiry, and it really comes into this idea of curiosity. So coming in to understand, you know, what is going on and how do we continue to ask that question of why? And I think that is really important.

And when I kept trying to think of what to ask the new leaders, I think we need to also think of picking up on Luis's point, as well, who are the new leaders? If we only focus on leaders at the top, we're missing an opportunity for the talent development of all the leaders within the college. And so I like to have us think about looking at mid-level leaders, and what are the kinds of supports they need? So as a new top-level leader on campus, trying to understand those needs of mid-level leaders. And we often see less turnover at that mid-level rank, and the mid-level leaders are often the ones that need to be implementing strategic plans, new policies. And so paying attention to that mid-level rank will be important and then doing that in this context of always asking why and trying to have that inquiry mindset, I think, can be really helpful.

Dr. Luis Ponjuan: All right. I want to chime in because I think it's so important what Pam says. And again, I think it's so essential to remind us about the context. And here's again, I read these questions, and some words pop out to me, and the words that popped out to me are "continue knowledge, management." Those are the three words that really resonated with me when I was making my talking points to this.

And I'm going to say something that I think is so important because I think we're in the midst of creating, not creating, but engaging in really challenging conversations. As leaders, we need to continue to lower the temperature and commit to civil communications, to embrace how our institutions need to evolve and adapt to our complex landscape. Based on what I said earlier about the realities that the lines are becoming blurred between politics and higher education, it's more important than ever that this should not be viewed as a zero-sum negotiation, that our commitment to this work is at the expense of someone else or some other group. Because that just creates or supports adversarial conversations that have become the norm. And so we have to remind ourselves that when we're talking about continuing knowledge management in the midst of new leadership of our colleges, we need to recognize that race continues to be a social-political construct. We must recognize that leaders must develop a deeper understanding of how they can change the narrative with a simple notion that we must lead with a commitment to tap the immense potential of marginalized communities. We need

to recognize that leaders need to advance this discussion with a commitment to understanding that we're not trying to create more adversaries and more contentious conversations, but to think about the hope and the promise, which we're going to be talking about in a few moments, about why we do what we do. It's so important to understand that when we get into spaces that people will have preconceived notions. We need to lower their temperature and understand that this is something that benefits everyone.

Dr. Baker, you mentioned earlier, you were talking about what's at stake if we don't do anything. We need to continue having the conversations about this is not a zero-sum negotiation. This is not creating us versus them. This is having conversations that allow us to understand the potential of "we." And that's the part that I really want to continue to identify. How do we lower the temperature by addressing the focus of the potential of a diverse "we"?

Dr. Reyna Anaya: I want to piggyback on the concept here of lowering the temperature and maybe even equate it to reminding ourselves of the value of human connection and being able to share our own stories and ask others about their own. And I think that's where, you know, where we think about kind of this contentiousness around, particularly DEI and it's interruption with, you know, kind of the academy and all these sorts of concepts. How do we come back down to that foundation of sharing our story and building human connection? And I think that is for me, when we think about maintenance, and we think about the continuation of knowledge, it is important that we also recognize that there is so much value in being able to come down to that place of commonality where we are able to connect as humans and able to be vulnerable and share community and this concept of humanity that we all share commonly.

And you know, I think that's one of the biggest tips that, you know, coming out of, you know, quarantine in the pandemic that folks just really needed that connection and, you know, I don't think that we have to stray too far away from kind of some of the core pieces of our being. So I just share that and, you know, I had that already written down before you said anything, Luis, about like, you know, we've got to ask people their stories, right? And we've got to be willing to share our own. And, you know, that's where those moments of joy and understanding come from, and we've got to do better at that.

Dr. Michael Baston: I think we also have to address that, for many, trust has been broken because of the multiple versions of the facts. The multiple versions of the

truth. When I hear from folks in certain industries, the trades as an example. If I get a question, 'Why can't we get more people of color in the trades?' I remind the folks in the trades that for generations, when people of color tried to get in the trades and they were not given those cards, they were not given the opportunities, they were not given - that is truth. That's not some sort of, you know, because we sort of at times have conversations as if, you know, we are in this utopia. There are hard truths that we have to deal with.

When you break trust, you have to build it. And so the idea that all of a sudden, because now we need hands to do this hard work that others don't want to do, and let's go to the population that we have always said, well, you are not able to do this because you're not doing it for free anymore, quite frankly because of the history of our country. People don't like that language, they don't like that conversation, they don't like that, but if we don't deal with, you know, the facts and the truth, you can't build trust. And so that is a reality.

And when we talk about the power of story, you know, if we don't include sort of the unchallenged narratives that have ultimately created the kind of structure that we have to navigate through, it's very easy to say, 'Well, that's a long time ago. It had nothing to do with me. Let's just move on.' Well, but is that position working as we look at the talent shortages in our country? Is that position working as we look at now not having people to meet the critical needs that we have? Is that working? You know, it's just sort of putting your covers over your head. Does that make, you know, this not a new day?

So I think that it's important for us in all these conversations to remember that while it's certainly politicized and, you know, demonized and all this kind of stuff, at the end of the day, we need people to get things done. We've got to build trust where trust has been broken, and we've got to be intentional using data as my colleague mentioned earlier. You know, the data is what it is. The facts are the facts, and we can't just simply, you know, think that the multiple versions of the truth are going to get us where we need the level of engagement to move our country forward.

Dr. Gianina Baker: I'm so glad I muted myself throughout all of this because I'm over here just a green and shaking and saying all kinds of things that would have interrupted what you were trying to say. But, I mean, people are our greatest resource. I'm reminded from some of your comments, Dr. George, who led some of our work in another institute talks about, you know, change moves at the speed

of trust. And so it all just keeps coming down to that, right? Pam, I'm so glad that you talked about, you know, who is a leader? It helped us think about that definition of. I think that's incredibly important, and I think that you all are pointing to this notion right, that those who are leaders, right, have some responsibility in helping find connections between people. But there is telling stories, of having other people share theirs or being vulnerable and telling your own. And so I appreciate each of you bringing it back to a space of things that we can do, right? These are not things that are not in our realm. These are absolutely things that people can start if they're not doing it now.

I want to end with the question about hope, as Luis referred to a little bit earlier. This work is tough, and if you've been in a space of HR, right, with all the turnover and then having to retrain and train new leaders coming into these spaces, right, and helping them understand the institutional context, and it can get overwhelming, it can be exhausting. And so, as we think about, you know, not just that work, right, but also in maintaining ourselves in this racial equity work itself, personally, professionally, I ask, you know, what do you see as the hope? And what we've been kind of terming throughout this series and asking this question to each of our podcasters, right, is this could even be a radical hope. What do you see as the hope, right, in doing racial equity work? It's tough. It's a tough space to be in. Who might start us off?

Dr. Pamela Eddy: All right, I'll jump in. I'd like to be hopeful and in terms of thinking of the way to think of it radically is that so much is at stake in terms of our communities and changing lives that when I find myself being overwhelmed or tired, I see the faces. I see the faces of the students. I see the community members and the pride that they have when their students or themselves are successful, and the hope is we extend that kind of feeling throughout our communities so that people see that the ways in which equity is being supported, not only on the campus, but it permeates into the community and changes lives in that way. That's what drives me with the hope here.

Dr. Reyna Anaya: I think for me, hope is my why. You know, and I have to be hopeful because it's connected to my very livelihood as a human and that of the students and their families that I serve. And, you know, early on in my career have committed, have put down roots into the work. And, you know, there are often moments where I do have to have those reminders because the work is hard. It's draining. It's, you know, sometimes one moment away from saying "no more."

And it's important for me to remember those small moments of change, of success as we're entering, you know, in our institution graduation season, and we're celebrating students and their accomplishments. And we're supporting them as they're going through those processes of thinking about what is their next step or sharing about a new employment opportunity that they have, you know, being there in that moment with them when they are able to share. And you see that smile on their face, like, that is my hope in why we continue to refine our systems and our processes. Why we work these, you know, long hours or have these hard conversations where we have to continuously potentially expose ourselves and our vulnerability and share our story - that is the why. And, you know, that will continue to be my driver. And, you know, I just am so thankful that I get to do this every day and being able to fulfill my why over and over and over again. So that's my hope.

Dr. Luis Ponjuan: Michael, do you want to go? Or I can go?

Yeah, I, again, I sometimes have to remind myself that this work that we do is not about me. It's about the legacy that I want to leave behind. It's the commitment that this is greater than me, and I'm just carrying the baton for a few years to pass on to the next generation. So radical hope really is the belief that we have an unwavering commitment to address these complex and challenging educational issues.

And I want to give you some perspective in terms of how I think about this because a lot of times I work with easy concepts. Like, hope for me is having humility and honor to do this work. Hope to me is continue to create opportunities for marginalized communities. Hope to me is recognizing the potential of the communities that we see as funds of knowledge. Hope to me is having a commitment to empowerment, that we are not trying to be saviors to a community; we're empowering a community to have their own agency. So when I think about hope, I think about humility, opportunity, potential and empowerment, because we have to continue to serve our students, our families, and our communities to maximize their full potential. This is what radical hope and radical love means. Is this idea that we remember that this isn't about us, and that we have privilege in who we are, and we have to continue to advance this work because of the communities that have turned to us to carry this baton and this torch, to carry the message that this is important. Radical hope is that belief, that unwavering commitment.

Dr. Michael Baston: And I can say that all of the comments from my colleagues are extraordinary, and I believe that we must encourage ourselves. Because there are times when we will not be encouraged by anyone else. The times when you're not going to get a thank you. There are times when you're not going to get acknowledgment of an idea or even how you raise the banner high and try to take the scale off the eyes of those who simply choose not to see the truth. For me, hope is not just an emotional response, but it is a very specific set of expectations, of actions. Hope is this idea that we are going to set real goals, and that those goals are going to be measurable goals because we don't just want to feel like things are happening when things aren't happening. Hope is about developing real plans, those plans that are actionable and that are connected to somebody who's going to be accountable to helping us move forward. Hope is about making sure that we take the action steps that we need to take so that we ultimately can see what it is we're talking about come to pass. And last, hope is about the success that we collectively share, because when we, together, define success, when we, together, drive to success, when we, together, move forward, not only does it benefit the students we serve, not only does it benefit the families connected to those students, not only does it celebrate the support that we can provide to business and industry and our partners in government and our community-based organizations.

Our destiny as a nation is connected to our ability to stand up, show up, and show out that we can make things better for everyone, and that we must continue to challenge the narratives that suggests that we shouldn't have full equality. We must continue to challenge the narratives that say, 'Everything is all right, and the past is the past.' We must challenge the narratives that say that we can be good enough, and that's enough. Until everyone is eating, until everyone is participating, until everyone is engaged, we are at risk of being a nation of sort of depressed potential. And I want us to use hope as a vehicle to untap the potential of our country and to make us stronger for every single person.

Dr. Gianina Baker: I am so glad, not only that we ended on that, but that we've asked that of each of you. You all provide such different lenses yet such encouragement to continue doing this work, even on those days where you're like, I don't want to do another thing.

I definitely hope that we leave listeners with what you said. Dr. Anaya, 'Hope is my why.' Many of us continue doing this because of hope, and so I hope you've learned a little bit about each of the people that have joined me today. And a little

bit about, you know, not just how we work with new leaders thinking about racial equity, right, but also what are some resources that might even be helpful to you in your own journey?

And so, as we end, I want to thank you all for listening to this episode. If you'd like to read more about our four podcasters today, please go to occr1.illinois.edu to read their full bios. And should you want to find out more about the REACH Collaborative and the work we are doing to increase credential attainment of racially minoritized adult learners in six different states, please go to reachcollab.org. Thank you.