

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



**communities
for just
schools fund**



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LETTER FROM OUR CO-DIRECTOR

I am so profoundly grateful to all of the Communities for Just Schools Fund's members, partners, and collaborators for the trust, support, and collaboration you extended to our small but mighty squad in 2021. You allowed us to look inward to the work of building a healthy, vibrant organizational infrastructure to support the movement for racial justice in education while doing our "always work." In 2021, that included meeting the needs of our existing partners and growing our network to include 64 partners across 21 states; Washington, DC; Puerto Rico; and Ontario, Canada. It looked like publicly releasing our radical report (radport) "Reclaim Social-Emotional Learning: Centering Organizing Praxis for Holistically Safe Schools" – a labor of love dreamed into existence with our partners. Our striving also included moving \$5.1 million in general operating support grants and contributions to grassroots organizers – a new record for us.

2021's grantmaking milestone is the new floor from which CJSF will seek to build increased and sustained support for education justice organizers. They deserve no less and this moment calls for so much more. In 2022 and beyond, we will deepen our grantmaking commitments and will support others in philanthropy to do the same. We will expand our investments in technical assistance and organizational capacity-building for education justice organizers, support connections across local and federal education strategies, and invest in healing and wellness supports for our partners who have been on the frontlines before and through this pandemic. We will also launch our next community of practice to engage with our partners in defining and uplifting culturally-sustaining pedagogy and the importance of fostering educational environments that are holistically safe.

LETTER FROM OUR CO-DIRECTOR

This is not easy work and it requires choosing our battles. This means not engaging in some of the defensive work that attacks on teaching truth invites. Instead, we plan for the work to define what schools that embrace and uplift intellectual safety look and feel like.

With all of that in the air, I hope that the waning days of 2021 and these early days of 2022 have offered each of you space for rest, joy, and reflection even as we waded through the lingering uncertainty and strife that have accompanied us into 2022. Challenges persist. There are efforts to dismantle progress towards police-free schools, omicron, school staffing shortages and related (overdue) conversations around the long-standing inequities they illuminate. There are sophisticated attacks on racial justice in the form of social studies standards legislation... all of this and so much more are challenges layered on top of our collective “always work” to eliminate anti-Blackness that is deeply rooted in education systems. Our “always work” is to see and support our partners’ work and wellness, to reclaim SEL, and to uplift holistic safety in and around schools.

The new challenges of this moment are very much evidence of the importance of the work and demands we’re advancing together to ensure intersectional racial justice is woven into our education systems’ ethos. On behalf of the CJSF squad, thank you for moving with us as we strive together to build education systems that embrace all students and nurture their full humanity.

Jaime T. Koppel

CO-DIRECTOR,
COMMUNITIES FOR JUST SCHOOLS FUND



ABOUT CJSF

Lifting up, centering, and resourcing the intentions of communities is what makes CJSF really unique.

CJSF MEMBER

WHO WE ARE

Communities for Just Schools Fund is a national collaborative that links philanthropy with the power of grassroots organizing to transform schools. CJSF was started in 2010 by individuals in philanthropy who understood that, in the ecosystem of education justice, grassroots organizers are the least resourced and the most impactful. We are part of an arc that began with Black parents in Mississippi demanding change in their schools. Their children were being pushed out of school, disproportionately disciplined, and arrested for reasons that defied explanation except as symptoms of a pervasive system of racial hierarchy.

A movement was born to end the school-to-prison pipeline.

Thanks to that movement, public will began to shift. We started to see decreases in suspensions and expulsions and school-based arrests because of organizers' work and demands. CJSF is determined to make sure that public education takes the road that has been dreamt and engineered by communities, led by organizers. We are committed to doing our part to ensure that conversations about school safety center holistic safety and are grounded in organizer demands and expertise.

By community organizing, we mean the process in which communities come together to learn and to address specific challenges and build momentum for social transformation. Our partners organize around dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, demanding police-free schools, culturally affirming social-emotional learning and mental health supports, culturally responsive/sustaining curricula and pedagogy, ethnic studies, restorative and transformative justice, reproductive justice, gender justice, parent partnerships, meaningful youth engagement, participatory budgeting, and more.

Purpose

To connect the power of communities with necessary resources for the health and longevity of the nation's schools, the nation itself, and the world.

Mission

We bring together the resources of philanthropy with the power of grassroots organizing to ensure that schools welcome all students and nurture their full potential.

Goal

Proliferation of the mindset and values that fuel the creation of education models in school districts and statewide that acknowledge and grapple with historical trauma and oppression, as well as affirm and nurture the genius, gifts, and expertise of young people and their communities.

Vision

A high-quality, comprehensive system of education in which young people are centered in the education process, treasured for their humanity and the power they carry, and their learning is valued and fostered. Schools are places where all young people are affirmed in a space that centers joy, love, and creativity. School is a welcoming, nurturing, and safe place for students where they have a deep sense of belonging and where they are challenged to grow. As such, our communities are stronger and our future is limitless.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Fund

We fund organizations that change schools and the system of education through community organizing. We fund first. We provide multi-year general operating support grants to 64 grassroots organizing groups in 21 states, Puerto Rico, Ontario, Canada, and Washington, D.C. The majority of grants range in size from \$100,000-\$400,000. We also mobilize rapid response support.

Build

We build the capacity of our partners by supporting their strategic know-how on everything from communications to data analysis.

Connect

We are dot-connectors. We foster relationships between our partners and philanthropy, policy, research, advocacy, national movement leaders, and others.

Lead

We lead efforts, together with our partners, to make community-rooted holistic school safety and positive school climate a priority for philanthropic organizations, policymakers, and national allies. For an example of the ways we lead, see our Do the Harder Work report and Reclaim Social-Emotional Learning radical report ("radport").

OUR TEAM



In loving memory of our fearless
leader and North Star,
Allison R. Brown



Jaime T. Koppel
Co-Director



Alexis J. Smith
Operations Manager



Cierra Kaler-Jones
Director of Storytelling



Kate Price
Georgetown Policy Resident



Kimberly Ellis
Education Anew Fellow



Allie McCullen
Programs Associate*



Thena Robinson Mock
Program Officer*

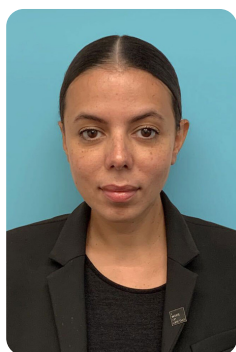
*departed CJSF in 2021 for other exciting opportunities

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Communities for Just Schools Fund is grateful to have the support and partnership of an esteemed, highly engaged network of funders who join CJSF as members in order to:

- resource community organizers who are working to ensure that schools are holistically — physically, emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually — safe, particularly for Black, Brown, Indigenous, LGBTQ+ young people, and young people with disabilities;
- learn with and from one another about organizing work and the work of other stakeholders in the field to disrupt structures and systems of oppression and how they manifest in schools;
- understand the role and potential impact of philanthropy in supporting systemic change in education in the best interests of young people, communities, families, and, thus, the nation.

In 2021, our Executive Committee members were:



Nyoka Acevedo
Andrus Family Fund



Gisele Shorter
Raikes Foundation



Toya Randall
Casey Family
Programs



Kathryn Bradley
Hewlett Foundation



Nahir Torres
Hyams Foundation

MEMBERS

CJSF welcomed new members and supporters in 2021, including The California Endowment, Advancing Girls Fund, a fund of Tides Foundation, and Hill-Snowdon Foundation. This brought our member table to 23 members. We also received generous donations from many individuals and several other groups.

Andrus Family Fund
Annie E. Casey Foundation
Casey Family Programs
The California Endowment
Charles & Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation
Grantmakers for Thriving Youth Policy Working Group (Seattle Foundation)
Ford Foundation
Hyams Foundation
Nathan Cummings Foundation
NEA Foundation
NoVo Foundation
Oak Foundation
Public Welfare Foundation
Raikes Foundation
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Skillman Foundation
Tides Foundation | Advancing Girls
Stuart Foundation
Voqal
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund
William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
W.K. Kellogg Foundation
Hill-Snowdon Foundation

PARTNERS

CJSF's partner network continues to offer us all a bold and liberatory vision for education that transcends our current understanding of what is possible. It is because of organizers that we know what can exist when love is at the center and when we move beyond policing that confines and constricts the beauty and genius of Black and Brown people's humanity, culture, and existence.

In 2021, CJSF welcomed new partners, including:

Florida Student Power Network

Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS)

Maria Fund

The Lighthouse: Black Girl Projects

Black Swan Academy

New York City Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ)

NYU Metro Center, EJ-RoC (connectivity/corollary research)

We've grown our connectivity grants from one-year commitments to two-year commitments. The idea of connectivity grantmaking to coalition partners is coming into its own as a critical component of truly moving as a cohesive movement. Our connectivity partners include:

Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS)

Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ)

Center for Popular Democracy (CPD)

Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC)

Journey 4 Justice (J4J)

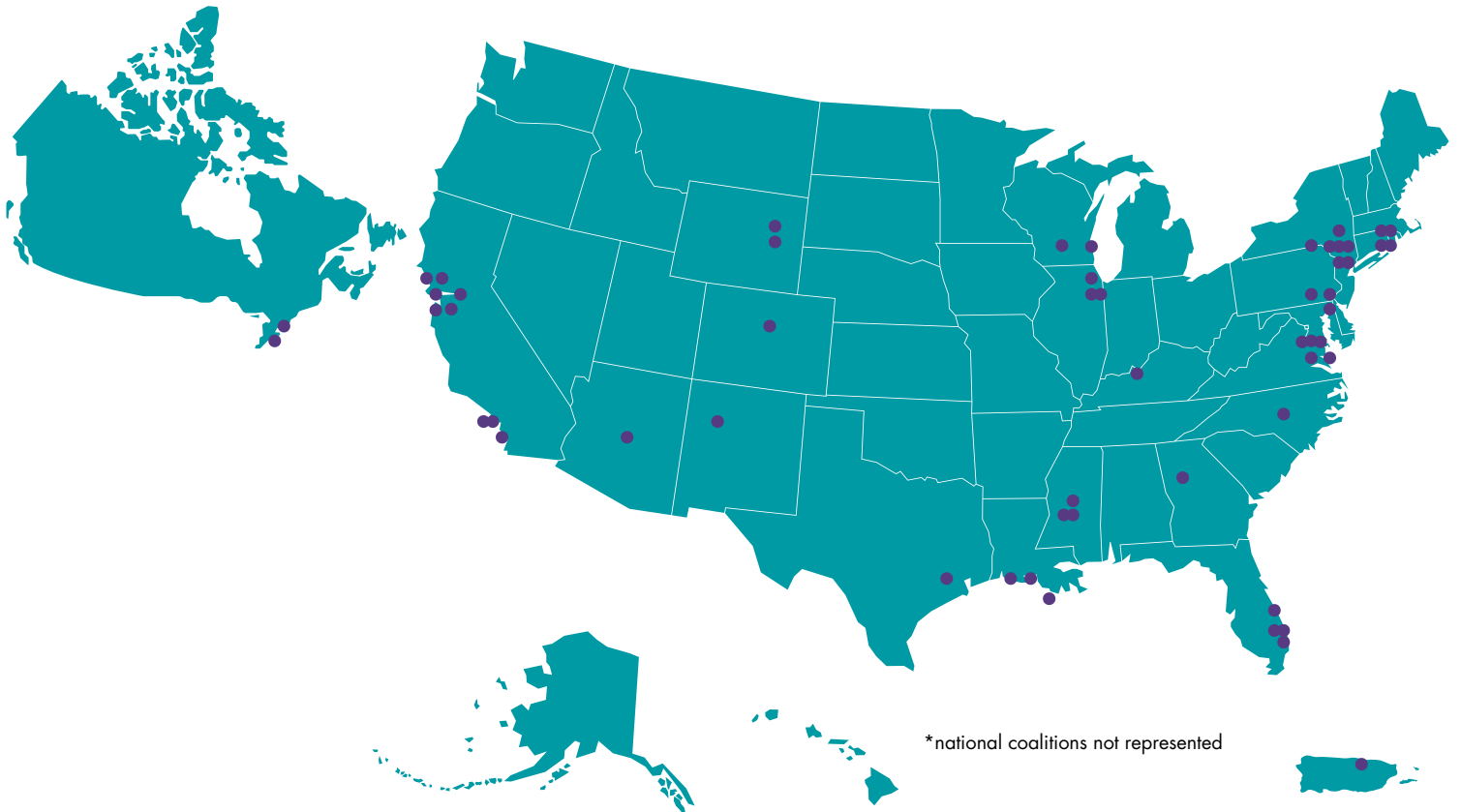
PARTNERS

Alliance for Educational Justice (AEJ)
Alliance for Quality Education (AQE)
Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS)
Baltimore Algebra Project (BAP)
Black Organizing Project (BOP)
Black Swan Academy
BLM Freedom School
Boston-Area Youth Organizing Project (BYOP)
BreakOUT!
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (BPNC)
Californians for Justice
Center for Popular Democracy (CPD)
Citizens of Louisville Organized and United Together (CLOUT)
Coleman Advocates
Communities United
Community Asset Development Re-Defining Education (CADRE)
Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)
Critical Exposure
Data for Black Lives
Desis Rising Up & Moving (DRUM)
Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC)
Dream Defenders
Education Justice Alliance (EJA)
Education for Liberation Network (Free Minds Free People)
Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)
Federación de Maestro de Puerto Rico (FMPR)
FIERCE NYC
Florida Student Power Network
Freedom, Inc.
Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network)
Girls for Gender Equity (GGE)
Gwinnett Parent Coalition to Dismantle the School to Prison Pipeline (Gwinnett SToPP)
Journey for Justice (J4J)
Juntos

PARTNERS

Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools (Rethink)
Labor Community Strategy Center (The Strategy Center)
Latinx, Afro-Latin America, Abya Yala Education Network
(LAEN)
Leaders Igniting Transformation (LIT)
National Black Women's Justice Institute (NBWJI)
New Settlement Parent Action Committee (PAC)
Nollie Jenkins Family Center
NYC Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ)
NYU Metro Center - The Education Justice Research and
Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC)
Padres y Jóvenes Unidos (PJU)
Philadelphia Student Union (PSU)
Power U Center for Social Change (Power U)
Providence Student Union (PSU)
Providence Youth Student Movement (PrYSM)
Puente Human Rights Movement (Puente)
Racial Justice NOW!
RYSE Center
S.O.U.L. Sisters Leadership Collective
Southern Echo
SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP)
Teachers Unite
Teaching for Change
Texas Organizing Project Education Fund (TOP)
The Lighthouse | Black Grl Projects
Twin Cities Innovation Alliance (TCIA)
Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC)
Youth Justice Coalition (YJC)
Youth on Board
Youth Together
Youth United for Change (YUC)

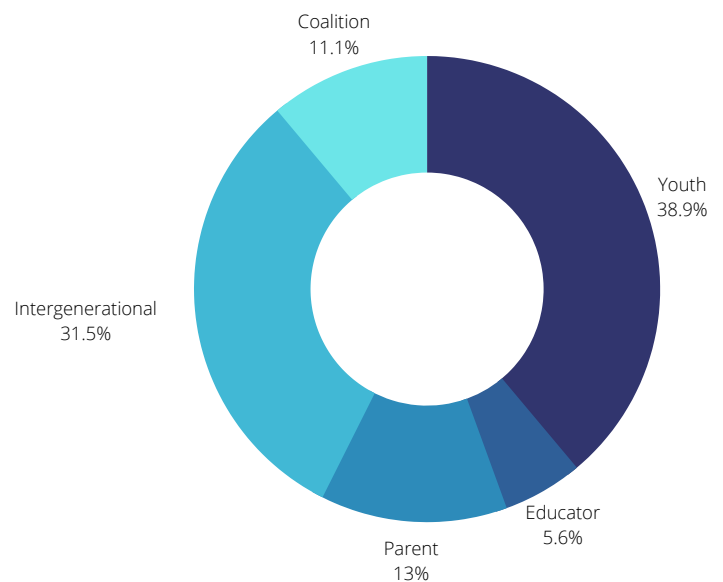
PARTNERS



64
partners

21
states + Puerto Rico, D.C., and Canada

Partner Organizing Base





IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

2021 was a historic grantmaking year for CJSF. Our first priority is to fund and resource education justice organizing in a way that places relationships at the center. We match our belief in the power of education justice organizing with trust-based investments and we encourage and mobilize our philanthropic partners to do the same.

\$5.1 million

in grants and
capacity-building supports.

**30 general
support**

**11 rapid
response**

**6 connectivity
grants**



Rapid Response

CJSF's rapid response fund supported grassroots groups in the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida, as well as organizations that requested resources to deepen their investment in mental health supports for staff. It also included support for long-time movement leaders as they transitioned out of leadership roles in order to create space for new movement leaders.

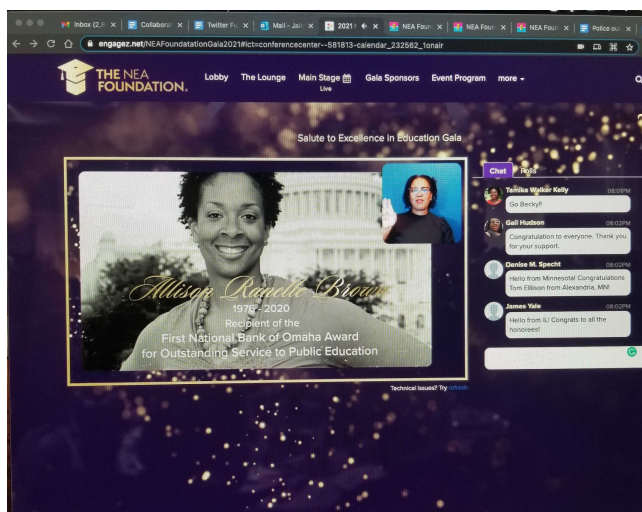


KEY MOMENTS & RESOURCE GUIDE

2021 was a year of both triumph and continued struggle. We built new relationships and sustained sacred ones, while our partners kept the unflickering torch lit on the path to futures where police-free schools, abolition, and liberatory education are realities. We saw organizers win victories that were the result of decades of strategic organizing, community struggle, and tireless commitments to a vision of freedom. We also bear witness to the continued effects of a global pandemic, in which individual and collective grief weigh heavy. We feel the impacts of educators and organizers experiencing fatigue and burnout as they navigate ever-changing realities. We seek to remain steadfast amid attacks to teaching the truth and the pushback against police-free schools.

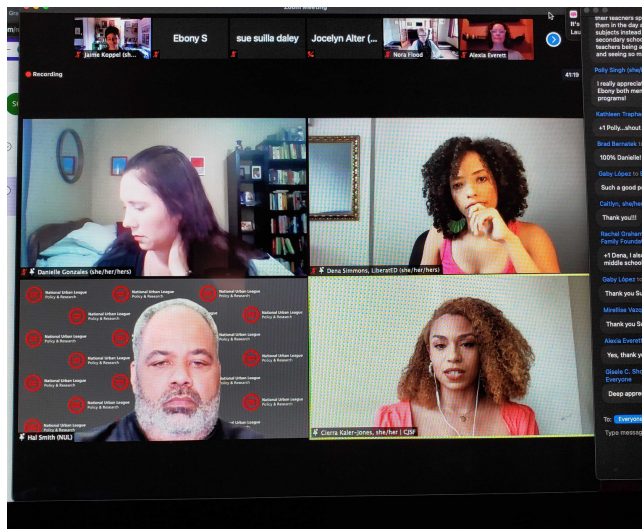
January

- CJSF Partner Call | [Recommendations on School Climate, Discipline, and Safety](#) to the Biden Administration
- Rapid response and communications strategy in response to [#AssaultAtLiberty](#)



March

- Member Meeting | Reclaim SEL and Organizing 101
- The California Endowment joins as newest member



February

- Black Lives Matter at School [Week of Action](#)
- Public Launch of [#ReclaimSEL](#) Radport & Webinar Series
- [NEA Foundation Gala](#) Honors the Life & Legacy of Allison Ranelle Brown
- Federal Teach-in: Civil Rights Act, Title VI, & Title IX
- Gisele Shorter (Raikes Foundation) & Nyoka Acevedo (Andrus Family Fund) join CJSF Executive Committee

April

- Cierra Kaler-Jones becomes our first [Director of Storytelling](#)
- Grantmakers for Thriving Youth Spring Convening
- ABFE Annual Conference - includes a tribute to Allison R. Brown
- NY State made a historic commitment to fully fund [Foundation Aid for NY public schools](#) as a result of CJSF partner Alliance for Quality Education's and coalition partners' organizing

May

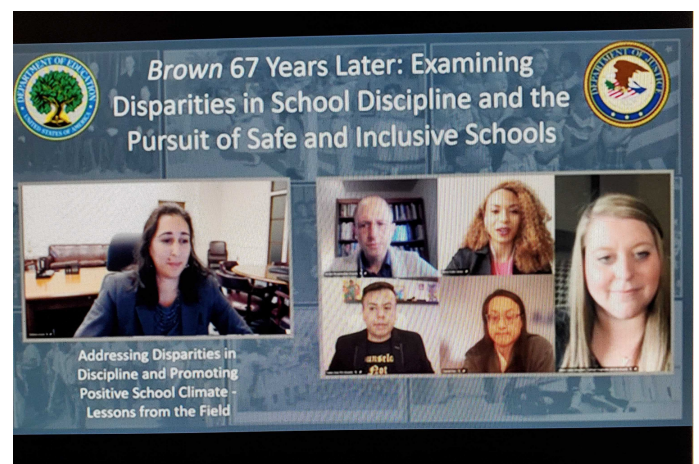
- Grantmakers for Southern Progress | Mississippi Funders' Strategy Session
- [#ReclaimSEL](#) Webinar | Transforming Social-emotional Learning through Healing Justice
- CJSF Partner Call | Summer Strategies
- [Brown 67 Years Later](#): Examining Disparities in School Discipline and the Pursuit of Safe & Inclusive Schools
- EASJ Learning Session | Take Back the Budget hosted by Andrus Family Fund
- CJSF submits a [comment letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Education in support of ED's proposed American History & Civics Ed Grant Priorities

July

- [Kimberly Ellis](#) joins the team as our Education Anew Fellow
- CJSF Partner Call | Mapping the Ed Justice Ecosystem Workshop facilitated by Deepa Iyer & the [Building Movement Project](#)
- Advancement Project Action Camp | CJSF leads Building Narrative Power workshop
- EASJ Virtual Plenary | [Winning & Sustaining Police-Free Schools](#): Lessons from the Freedom Side
- CJSF Partner Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ) wins enormous victory: NYC Department of Education will create new Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curriculum for K-12 ELA and Math

June

- Member Meeting | Culturally-sustaining pedagogy
- CJSF featured in [School Library Journal](#) on the push for police-free schools
- [Thena Robinson Mock](#) departs to an exciting new role at Public Welfare Foundation



August

- [#ReclaimSEL Webinar](#) | Ending Intellectual and Social-Emotional Policing
- CJSF + partners host a [federal listening session](#) for U.S. Departments of Justice & Education
- [Allie McCullen](#) (CJSF Program Associate) starts student teaching in Gwinnett County Public Schools

September

- **Kate Price** joins CJSF as Georgetown Policy Resident
- CJSF has a conversation on Reclaim SEL with the California Department of Education
- CJSF presents Reclaim SEL work to the Oak Foundation board
- **#RaceAnd Our Present, Our Future** | A Race Forward Virtual Convening
- CJSF Partner Communities United named a finalist in **Racial Equity 2030**
- CJSF mobilizes rapid response to support partners in the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida

November

- CJSF sponsors partners' participation in **Foundations of CRSE** training
- 25 Years Later Starts Now! The Debt Repayment Plan's Impact on the State of Education & Health in Puerto Rico, a funder briefing co-hosted with Andrus Family Fund, Ford Foundation, and The Maria Fund
- Advancing Girls Fund, a fund of Tides Foundation joins CJSF member table
- Kathryn Bradley (Hewlett Foundation) joins CJSF Executive Committee

October

- Member Meeting | Leadership Transitions
- **CHANGE** Philanthropy **UNITY Summit**
- **Speaking Truth to Power:** Narrative Change for Youth Power-Building | Hosted by Andrus Family Fund
- **Counseling Not Criminalization** congressional briefing | Hosted by Center for Popular Democracy Youth Mandate Team



December

- **#ReclaimSEL Webinar** | SEL in the Policy Landscape
- CJSF partner (formerly) Padres y Jóvenes Unidos celebrates their new chapter as Movimiento Poder
- Member Meeting | 2021 Reflections & Learning and 2022 Building Forward
- Hill-Snowdon Foundation joins as newest member

CJSF kicks off a hiring season by promoting the Director of Movement Partnerships position



PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTS

You all are EXPERT facilitators and I really appreciate the way you utilize tools for the online space and also the spaciousness of the discussion. EVERYTHING was covered and NOTHING was rushed. It was perfect and inspiring.

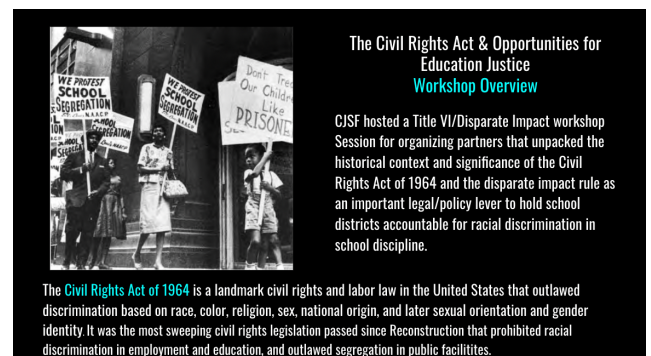
RECLAIM SEL WEBINAR ATTENDEE

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & CAPACITY-BUILDING

Our Build efforts are grounded in ensuring support for building connections among CJSF partners and other power-building organizations. It also includes sustaining/increasing investments in partners' organizational strengthening needs and convening partners for strategy and tactics-building conversations.

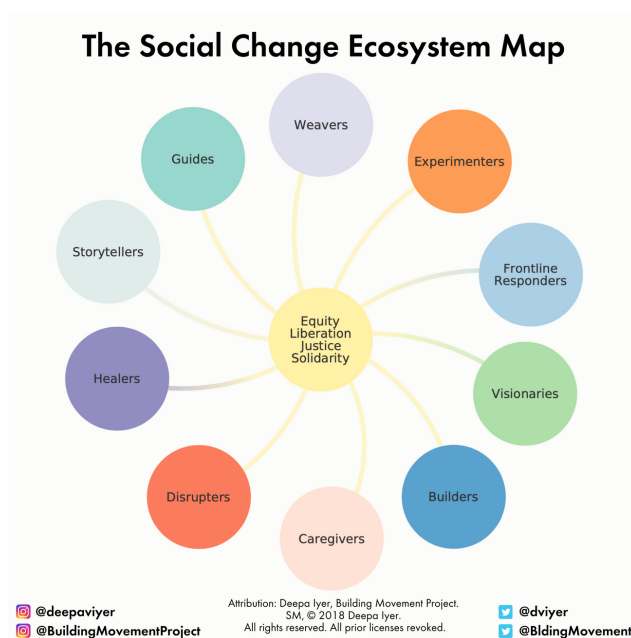
Federal Power Mapping & SWOT Activity

CJSF hosted a power mapping/SWOT activity workshop for organizing partners and network allies to establish a common understanding of the current federal landscape (Biden-Harris Administration & 117th Congress) and an assessment of the relationships, systems of power, influence, opportunities, and threats to help inform federal advocacy strategies and tactics to advance a bold, racial justice agenda for education.



Social Movement Ecosystem Training

CJSF and our partners participated in a workshop on "Social Change Roles and Ecosystems," led by Deepa Iyer from the Building Movement Project. During the workshop, we explored the roles that our organizations tend to play in advancing education justice. We also discussed how to do so in ways that foster solidarity and sustainability. Many of us play different, yet essential, roles in moving the world towards liberation. The Social Change Ecosystem Map provides a framework to help individuals, networks, and organizations explore and understand social change values in light of their individual roles and strengths amidst a larger ecosystem.



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & CAPACITY-BUILDING

Advancement Project and Alliance for Educational Justice's ActionCamp

"Our Abolitionist Futures – Winning #PoliceFreeSchools" ActionCamp brought together over 150 young people and organizers together to: advance a radical abolitionist politic, move organizers through political education, skills sharing and development, and facilitate relationship building across movement sectors, cities, and political ideologies. CJSF provided financial support to allow for increased participation of youth organizers. CJSF also led a narrative power-building session for attendees to discuss what it looks like to build narrative power in the police-free schools movement and provide practical strategies and tools to continue to leverage storytelling practices in their organizing.



Credit: Advancement Project & Alliance for Educational Justice



"Black girls & non-binary youth continue to be under attack in places meant to be sacred - their homes, communities and, yes, even their schools. Our girls are in fact children; a fact we have to reaffirm again and again because they are constantly seen and treated as adults - perceived as threats and not protected. Girls & non-binary youth have the right to be met with loving kindness and compassion by adults meant to care for them. We will continue to build power in South Florida and across the state to ensure the safety, well-being and thriving of Black and indigneous girls and non-binary youth and those of color."

Tanisha "Wakumi" Douglas,
Co-Founder and Executive Director of S.O.U.L.
Sisters Leadership Collective

#AssaultatLiberty

Healing, Wellness, & Grief Support

CJSF resourced healing efforts and offered wellness support for those who were grieving.



COMMUNICATIONS

#ReclaimSEL Webinar Series

There have been many conversations across sectors to reimagine education amid a global pandemic, continued racial injustice, and a climate crisis — many of these conversations center SEL as a tool for healing. However, we've seen how well-meaning SEL initiatives, policies, and practices have been weaponized against young people, specifically Black and Brown, LGBTQ+ youth of color, and young people with disabilities, as mechanisms of control and policing. The narrative has been that to exhibit or practice SEL, young people must control and manage their emotions, and in turn, stifle their most authentic selves. This harmful framing is further exacerbated by the physical policing of students through harsh disciplinary practices and policies. Together, SEL, school climate, and school safety are used as means to criminalize and punish Black and Brown and LGBTQ+ youth of color, rather than create and sustain schools as spaces that are emotionally, psychologically, intellectually, and physically safe. For SEL to live up to its true promise, there must be a container for SEL, meaning that school climate, safety, and SEL must be connected in intentional and holistic ways.

Through the #ReclaimSEL series, we brought together multiple education stakeholders to explore how to reclaim SEL from its use as a metric of compliance. Instead, the conversations connected SEL to positive school climate and school safety policies and practices that use relationship-building as their foundation. The series uplifted and amplified the power of strategic organizing praxis as a model for radical SEL.

This work comes out of the Community of Practice, which brought our partners together for a series of learning exchanges, site visits, webinars, and strategy sessions to engage with current definitions of social-emotional learning. That process led to the design of a new SEL definition that centers community demands and expertise.



Radport Downloads: 900+ in 31 states



The Intersections of Culturally-Affirming SEL & Education Justice: Movement Towards Holistically Safe Schools

This webinar kicked off the [#ReclaimSEL](#) webinar series. While curriculum and pedagogy, school climate and safety, and social-emotional learning are often regarded as separate initiatives and areas of focus, this webinar highlighted the need to connect these areas to truly transform schools to be spaces rooted in justice, joy, and liberation.

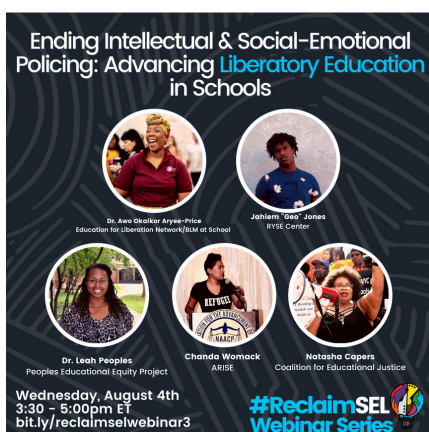
[Watch the Video](#) | [View the Resource Guide](#)



Transforming Social-emotional Learning through Healing and Restorative Justice

This webinar conversation explored: 1) the intersections between physical, emotional, and intellectual safety to ensure holistically safe schools; 2) how organizers and educators across the country are building and sustaining educational spaces rooted in love and liberation; and 3) pose visions forward for how to end all forms of policing in schools.

[Watch the Video](#) | [View the Resource Guide](#)



Ending Intellectual & Social-emotional Policing: Advancing Liberatory Education in Schools

In this webinar, we unpacked the section of the radport that highlights how culturally-affirming SEL is centered in healing justice and emotional justice to transform schools to truly be holistically safe spaces.

[Watch the Video](#) | [View the Resource Guide](#)



Social-emotional Learning in the Policy Landscape: Federal Strategies to Ensure Holistically Safe Schools

This webinar brought organizers, policy advocates, school district officials, educators, and other education stakeholders together to discuss the importance of federal engagement in ensuring education justice. The webinar also highlighted the powerful, withstanding grassroots efforts that continue to influence and shape policy and consider what implementation must look like if these bills are passed.

[Watch the Video](#) | [View the Resource Guide](#)

CJSF IN THE MEDIA & RESEARCH



CQ RESEARCHER

**Teaching about Racism:
Should concepts of critical race theory
be part of classroom instruction?**



**The Push for Police-Free
Schools Continues Amid
Debate**

neaToday

**We Need to Teach the Truth
About Systemic Racism, Say
Educators**



EdSurge

**For Social-Emotional
Learning to Move Beyond
Buzzwords, It Must Start
with Educators**



educationfirst

experience | quality | results

**Heeding the Call for Change:
Centering Equity in Social &
Emotional Learning**



Solution Tree

**Social-Emotional Learning
That Empowers Students**

EDUCATION ANEW: SHIFTING JUSTICE

Education Anew: Shifting Justice (EASJ) is a unique conference co-hosted by Communities for Just Schools Fund (CJSF) and Andrus Family Fund (AFF) for education and youth justice movement-leaders to come together to strategize, build, and learn. EASJ is a place of storytelling and wellness, and a space in which movement genius is elevated and celebrated; a convening where arts and culture are the glue that binds learning to wellness and strategy.

EASJ2020 would have brought us to Jackson, MS, a place with a rich and wondrous history. That history is fraught with oppression and combat, and it is forever branded with the blood, tears, laughter, and joy of a mighty people. Because we were unable to be together in place, CJSF and AFF committed to virtual learning that grounds participants in the intersections of place and history that have led to the current moment, while creating space for deep strategy and movement-building – crucial to the demands organizers are elevating now.

WINNING & SUSTAINING POLICE-FREE SCHOOLS: LESSONS FROM THE FREEDOM SIDE

An Education Anew: Shifting Justice Virtual Plenary



Letha Muhammad
Education Justice Alliance



Tyler Whittenberg
Advancement Project



Jasmine Williams
Black Organizing Project



Dr. Savannah Shange
Black Organizing Project



Andrea Vásquez Jiménez
LAEN



SilviaArgentina Arauz Cisneros
LAEN



Raul Botello
Communities United

July 27 | 2:00pm EST | RSVP bit.ly/pfseasj

The Mississippi Roots of Education Justice: An Education Anew: Shifting Justice Virtual Plenary

The rich history of struggle, resistance, and organizing in Mississippi has shaped - and continues to influence - national and international movements for justice. This Education Anew: Shifting Justice (EASJ2020) virtual plenary session will spotlight Mississippi-based organizing at the intersection of education and youth justice with a focus on police-free schools, organizing for abolition, and the historical context of efforts to end Mississippi's school-to-prison pipeline.

[Watch the Video](#)

THE MISSISSIPPI ROOTS OF EDUCATION JUSTICE An Education Anew: Shifting Justice Virtual Plenary



Ellen Reddy
Nollie Jenkins Family Center



Rukia Lumumba
People's Advocacy Inst.



Natalie Collier
The LightHouse



Jonathan Stith
Alliance for Educational Justice



Albert Sykes
IDEA



Rachel Mayes
Southern Echo



Tamieka Mosley
Grantmakers for Southern Progress



July 22, 2020 3:00pm EST | RSVP bit.ly/ms-plenary

Winning and Sustaining Police-free Schools: Lessons from the Freedom Side - An Education Anew: Shifting Justice Plenary

During this virtual panel, we heard from movement organizers who are leading the way toward holistically safe schools who described the themes emerging across North America when it comes to implementing policies and practices that are truly about police-free schools and the call for abolition. We identified and discussed how to eliminate new threats and challenges that are emerging at the local, state, and federal levels. Lastly, we dreamt forward to the other side of a carceral state and posed visions and strategies for community-rooted safety.

[Watch the Video](#)

FEDERAL STRATEGIES

In our role as a dot connector, CJSF seeks to bring the work of organizers into the federal space. This year, we have worked with our partners to write a transition memo to the Biden-Harris Administration on school climate based on our shared vision of holistically safe schools. We also collaborated with partners to submit a comment letter in support of the U.S. Department of Education's proposed American History & Civics Ed Grant Priorities. To share our intersectional and liberatory approaches to holistic safety, we convened partners to host a listening session for the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education.

In partnership with the Federal School Discipline and Climate Coalition (FedSDC), a network partner, CJSF has engaged in deep learning and strategy around a suite of bills developed to address systemic racism, discriminatory discipline policies, school hardening practices, and resource inequities. Part of our engagement in this work has been through working groups focused on research and the abolition of corporal punishment. We remain committed to building FedSDC's infrastructure and highlighting our partners' work as much as possible to ensure FedSDC is accountable to and driven by local demands.

Although some of our partners engage directly in this space, and all are welcomed to, we recognize limitations on bandwidth and capacity. We support partners' engagement through a curated resource guide. In 2021, we launched a resource guide for partners and members to stay informed about policies directly aligned with their work or interests. Through our access to the Politico Pro platform as a resource, we have been able to transfer important information moving through the federal space at a rapid rate into this guide in a digestible way. While our first installment of the guide highlighted federal legislation, sign-on letters, and additional call-to-action materials, each iteration will strive to be responsive to partners' needs and interests as they evolve.

In the coming year, CJSF will re-launch federal brownbag sessions to engage with congressional and agency staff to learn about our partner's work. It is a chance to bring our partners' work to the forefront and continue to push for education policies and practices and federal investments grounded in organizers' demands.

TO: President-Elect Joseph Biden, Jr. and Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris
via Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond and the Education Transition Team
FROM: The Communities for Just Schools Fund
DATE: December 18, 2020
RE: Recommendations on School Climate, Discipline, and Safety

These recommendations are sent on behalf of the Communities for Just Schools Fund (CJSF). Our 60 partner organizations' efforts to improve school discipline and climate and ensure holistic safety span more than 31 states and have positively impacted millions of students, parents and educators. They organize young people, parents and caregivers, educators, and others to advocate on behalf of students who are disproportionately impacted by the overuse of exclusionary school discipline and law enforcement interventions in and around schools. Their advocacy sheds light upon the fact that, in many places, there are far too many students who find themselves being policed and targeted for exclusion from their schools because of flawed policies and practices and biased perceptions of them and their communities. Their organizing has been crucial in illuminating the need for and value of meaningful engagement with young people and their families, the lack of which exacerbates negative perceptions.



**CJSF Comments on ED
Proposed Rule, Proposed
Priorities on American
History and Civics Education**

**There are blatant attacks
to liberatory education
across the country.**

**Join us in supporting
culturally-affirming
and sustaining education.**

Visit bit.ly/CJSFCommentHistory
to read the full letter

MEMBER PROGRAMMING

CJSF brings our members together for updates, strategy, and to learn directly from partners. We convened our members virtually in March, June, October, and December.

Here are some highlights:

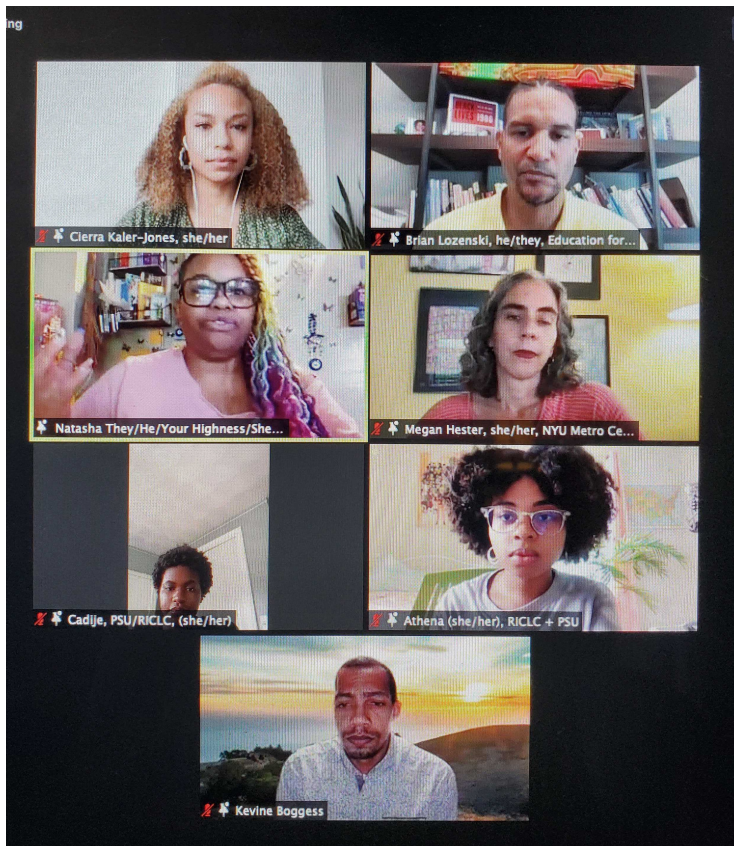
March

In March, we brought members and partners together to think about the next iteration of our Reclaim SEL work. Juntos (Philadelphia), Nollie Jenkins Family Center (Durant, MS), Gwinnett SToPP (Gwinnett County, GA), The Lighthouse | Black Girl Projects (Jackson, MS), and Make the Road New York (New York City) joined members.



June

In June, amid a surge of anti-truth education laws and policies, members discussed culturally-sustaining curricula and pedagogy with partners. We examined how CJSF can help breathe life into the possibilities — identifying and addressing research gaps while building forward from our work to connect holistic safety and school climate/SEL with the types of curricular approaches and pedagogy that ensure schools are welcoming and nurturing all students. Partners including Coleman Advocates (Kevine Boggess), CEJ (Natasha Capers), NYU Metro Center (Megan Hester), Education Liberation Network (Dr. Brian Lozenski), Providence Student Union/Rhode Island Civic Learning Coalition (Athena Holloway & Cadije Louis), joined to share their expertise.



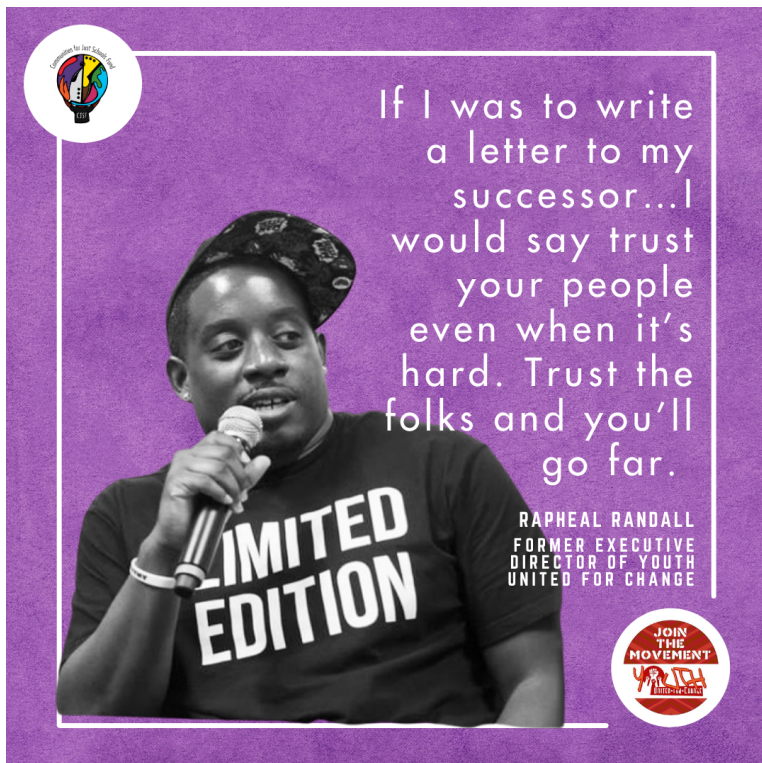
MEMBER PROGRAMMING

October

In October, CJSF hosted a panel with partners on leadership transitions. We heard from leaders in the education justice movement about what they are thinking, planning, and needing as they work to ensure – as they always have – the long-term health not only of their organizations, but also of the education justice movement. Transition is not a bad thing but it requires work, planning, and resources. In a season in which we will see much transition across the education justice movement, we wanted to unpack this together by engaging in a discussion about how our partners are approaching this work. We were joined by Maisie Chin (CADRE), Sally Lee (Teachers Unite), Rapheal Randall (YUC), Neva Walker (Coleman Advocates), Jackie Byers (Black Organizing Project), and Elsa Bañuelos (Movimiento Poder).

"One of my favorite memories was listening to an amazing panel of education justice leaders in the midst of leadership transition. The level of deep candor, trust, and wisdom shared by movement veterans was deeply moving, eye opening, and a conversation funders really could benefit from."

- Nahir Torres,
Hyams Foundation



December

In December, CJSF brought members together to celebrate a historic grantmaking year and also forecast for 2022 and beyond.

2021 in Review



EDUCATION A NEW FELLOWSHIP

The Communities for Just Schools Fund's Education Anew Fellow (EAF) is currently housed with our partner, Teaching for Change (TFC), in Washington, D.C. The Fellow works closely with CJSF staff and community partners, and with TFC'S staff and teacher network to support conversations and collaborations between the community organizers CJSF supports and the educators with whom TFC works, all for the greater benefit of education justice efforts nationwide.

The Education Anew Fellowship is a rich opportunity for engagement between educators and organizers. The EAF works with educators to build strategy, develop concrete solutions to issues of racial injustice in schools, and support lasting and constructive relationships between the CJSF organizer network and social justice educators. Such interactions are instrumental for educators, young people, parents, families, and community members to support one another and join forces to push back against inequitable systems and instead create healthy, welcoming learning environments and holistic, nurturing, culturally-affirming classroom practices.

Since starting the fellowship in July 2021, Kimberly Ellis has published several [teacher stories](#) on the D.C. Area Educators for Social Justice (DCAESJ) site, coordinated endorsers, communications content, and curriculum workshops for two of TFC's largest campaigns: Teach Central America Week and Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action. She co-coordinates the DCAESJ Elementary Working Group and teaches a bi-weekly 8th grade history class at Ida B. Wells Middle School. She is also guiding an intern with Prologue DC to create a high school curriculum aligned with Mapping Segregation DC content.

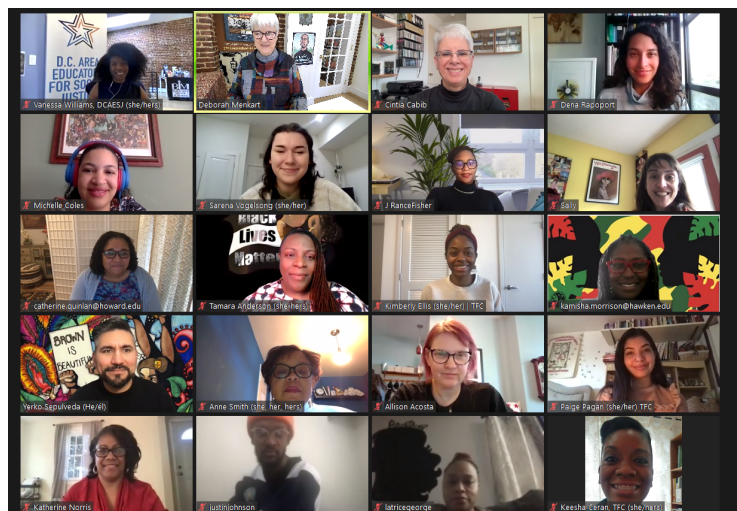
On the CJSF side, Kimberly has been working to build out our federal strategies work. She has led conversations with statewide agencies, such as the California Department of Education, and facilitated a training for the Mississippi Coalition to End Corporal Punishment on our [Reclaim Social-Emotional Learning work](#). In the coming year, Kimberly will lead our Community of Practice work focused on exploring intellectual safety through culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Everyday People: 7th Graders Step into Selma

November 22, 2021

By Kimberly Ellis

"The Civil Rights Movement was made up of everyday people choosing to do difficult things." Lesley Young, an English teacher at Maret School, opened her 7th grade English class with this statement. Now that students had almost finished reading *Brown Girl Dreaming* — a powerful memoir written in verse by Jacqueline Woodson detailing her childhood — they used evidence from the novel to substantiate this claim. Students documented their evidence on Post-It notes, stuck onto posters on the classroom's board.



ORGANIZATIONAL WELLNESS & CULTURE



In 2021, we continued to lift the legacy of our beloved ancestor and fearless leader, Allison Ranelle Brown, who transitioned to the ancestors in 2020. With a collective and brave deep breath, the CJSF squad (family and team) committed to not only carry on, but to further invest and grapple with wellness and our organizational culture. Ever inspired by Allison's example and her words in her gift of a draft "culture document" for the Communities for Just Schools Fund, we share:

"CJSF's culture, its aura, can be summed up in a few words: Trust. Love. Belief. We hire highly talented people who have experience and demonstrated capacity such that we trust them to perform as professionals. We identify community groups that are working toward equity in education and society at large. We love the communities we serve, and we believe in Freedom, that it is possible...in our lifetimes. We have the opportunity, as an organization, to model what school culture and climate can be and what philanthropic support of grassroots organizing must be. "

In 2021, we were more intentional with holding time and creating sacred space for ourselves, in our daily efforts and in three staff retreat convenings. In July, we hosted a 3-day retreat. Coming together for the first time in many months – we used crayons and art technology to explore our vision of our new website. We celebrated two squad birthdays with CJSF special fruit salad. We welcomed a new team member and closed the session with an outdoor adventure where we carefully navigated a ropes course and learned even more about the strengths we each bring to this team.

"We hire highly qualified people who are capable, creative, thoughtful, responsible, passionate, intelligent, motivated, good, and fully committed to the issues CJSF supports. We trust them and assume positive intent. We will make room for the talents of our staff to flourish. We also will make room for mistakes, questions, and uniqueness. We recognize that we are working boldly and purposefully in ways that are new to the fields in which we operate. As such, we anticipate that we will make mistakes and we commit to discuss those mistakes and missteps, learn from them, and grow forward."

ORGANIZATIONAL WELLNESS & CULTURE

In September, we welcomed one more to the team with a celebration of blueberry tea and banned books at Busboys and Poets. As the team grew, so did our focus on culture and wellness. Together we took a lovingly critical look at our organizational infrastructure.

"CJSF is and will be in a state of transformation, growth, and evolution to our highest organizational purpose. We embrace all of it, including the struggle and the process, which will include high

aims, 'failures' with accompanying lessons learned, new attempts, and celebration of successes. We embrace fluidity and adaptability as constant states of being for the staff in relation to the developing organization. Evolution will continue to happen, for the life of the organization and beyond."

In December, CJSF convened for our warmly anticipated annual "Reflection and Celebration Season" retreat. We wore ugly holiday sweaters, made decadent hot cocoa, walked to the corner stores for painters' tape and hummus, and took a more intentional moment to "be" as we continue to "do" in this work.

"We recognize that freedom and accountability are flip sides of the same coin. As such, transparency is crucial. We will operate from a place of love and compassion in holding one another and ourselves accountable to the organization's purpose. We will care for ourselves and for one another. We will bring our full selves to our work. We will work intentionally to ensure that CJSF as an entity is a safe space of safety for authenticity. At CJSF, we work for the higher purpose and possibility of the organization."

This is our organizational culture and our wellness work.

"We must be aware of human connectedness: We choose compassion and appreciation over judgment and ridicule. We choose partnership and cooperation over competition and conformity. We choose strength over deficit. We choose trust and responsibility over fear and power in a few or one. We choose Love."





STAGE-SETTING FOR 2022 AND BEYOND

CJSF's continued work comes at a tumultuous time in history. As a response to the racial justice uprisings of summer 2020 and significant police-free schools wins across the country, we are navigating a period of white supremacist backlash. Incited by the 45th presidential administration's Executive Order establishing a "1776 Commission" promoting patriotic education, governors and school districts across the country are enacting laws to ban teaching about structural and systemic racism. We know that because educators and organizers across the country continue to remain steadfast in their commitment to truth-telling, the blatant attacks are a direct response to the power of collective resistance to a whitewashed curriculum and to policing in all its forms.

In states like Iowa, these bills not only ban the teaching of racism and oppression, but also ban discussing legislation that has further perpetuated discrimination and segregation. In light of voting suppression laws and at a time where redlining and gentrification is occurring at high rates, students would not even be able to discuss the historical context of the current moment. In states like Texas, patriotic education bills are also banning incorporating lessons on or giving students credit for advocacy, political activism, and lobbying. After the Daily Wire posted the names of every educator who signed the Zinn Education Project's Pledge to Teach the Truth, organized by state and city, educators were being sent letters from their school districts threatening termination. The bills create a chilling effect for educators everywhere. This is intellectual policing.

Coupled with patriotic education efforts, we also see how legislators are introducing bills directly aimed at curbing organizing — a strategic praxis that has always propelled this nation forward towards justice — through the criminalization of protest. "In Florida, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed sweeping legislation...that toughened existing laws governing public disorder and created a harsh new level of infractions — a bill he's called "the strongest anti-looting, anti-rioting, pro-law-enforcement piece of legislation in the country." "G.O.P. lawmakers in 34 states have introduced 81 anti-protest bills during the 2021 legislative session — more than twice as many proposals as in any other year." "A Minnesota bill would prohibit those convicted of unlawful protesting from receiving student loans, unemployment benefits or housing assistance."

We are also seeing districts suspend social-emotional learning curricula. The Canyons School District in Utah permanently suspended the Second Step SEL curriculum because it grapples with "power and privilege" and "teaches children to be social justice activists." Further, schools continue to remove books that discuss race and racism, gender, sexuality, and truthful accounts of history. The opposition has orchestrated a highly vocal, well-funded campaign to strip schools of the necessary conversations and tools to understand, grapple with, and fight against injustice. When we learn about injustice, we can mobilize and organize against it. All of this backlash is aimed at stifling the disruption of the status quo. This is all on top of navigating individual and collective grief and a global pandemic.

White supremacy is deeply entrenched in every aspect of how this society operates, including laws and policies, public discourse, curricula and pedagogy, philanthropy, and more. Our efforts to dismantle and disrupt oppressive structures and systems have to be multi-layered. To move towards true transformation, our partners not only work to tear down unjust systems but dream forth a world anew. This is why in 2022 and beyond, we will continue to invest time, energy, and resources into narrative power-building, federal strategies, technical assistance and capacity-building, deep learning about culturally sustaining pedagogy, and wellness.

We maintain a posture of radical hope. The kind of hope that Mariame Kaba talks about when they say, "Hope is a discipline." Organizers continue to point us to the North Star. Together, we know we can do so much to build the world, and the schools, we all deserve.



**Linking the resources of philanthropy
with the power of grassroots organizing.**

**Dreaming, strategizing, and acting
towards more just futures.**

**Building and sustaining the
schools – and the world – we all deserve.**

Join us.



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