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Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Focusing the Lens on the School Library Profession

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With overt racism and violence against Black and brown people in our communities and newsfeeds and predominantly white institutions and organizations, the world can no longer avoid the work of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This is especially true for K–12 schools, from hiring practices and curricular choices to the more-subtle ways that our schools and systems are designed to reinforce the values of white supremacy culture. According to Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, these values include perfectionism, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, defensiveness, power hoarding, paternalism, individualism, and either/or thinking (2001).

The contributors to this issue identify as Black women. In the pages ahead, you'll read about many instances when they have experienced racism in their schools. It is taxing—emotionally, physically, and psychologically—to come to school to learn or work in systems and structures designed for white people to thrive. These Black school librarians show up as their whole, authentic selves at

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school, which takes purposeful effort. How often have these brilliant school library professionals been in a minoritized position in their predominantly white schools? Or at national or regional conferences for school librarians? It is often uncomfortable, exhausting, and anxiety inducing, so what makes it worth it? What makes *everything* worth it in our schools and libraries? Our students, of course.

Content expert Maegen Rose writes a call to action in her article “Black School Librarianship: Navigating Race and Creating Change.” School librarians are influential in our schools: as leaders, advisors, coaches, and advocates for our students. We are uniquely positioned to lead EDI initiatives in our schools, and we white folx cannot expect the burden to be shouldered by our colleagues of color. As school librarians, we love turning to books, but to paraphrase Tre Johnson, a commitment to antiracism means going beyond our books and reading, our affinity book groups, the listening sessions, and having that be the extent of our “work” to dismantle racism. The work begins with exploring our own identities but must also extend to taking meaningful action and making change in our spheres of influence. As Rose states, “We owe it to our students to do more than just read and talk about it.”

Veteran educator but new to a school librarian role Adrienne Almeida shares how her authentic approach to her school library yielded a complete shift in culture in “Leading a School Library as My Authentic Self.” Almeida’s approach to building culture with her students

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has created a welcoming and affirming space, from her approach to behavior management to developing a collection that reflects her students' identities and interests. Her work is guided by the question: "How can I be the adult I wish I had myself as a Black child in white majority schools?" That she accomplished the cultural transformation in just half a year, prior to COVID, makes this even more impressive.

Jean Darnell shares some of the hurtful experiences she has had as a Black school librarian in her article "Unpacking Black School Librarianship." Darnell acknowledges the professional risk she is taking even by writing for this issue. The exhaustion of constant self-questioning ("What will they fire me for today?" "How will my accomplishments be ignored and/or usurped?") means that the moments of triumph matter so much more. For Darnell, empowering her students with opportunities to engage with their community decision-makers is the bright spot and motivation to persist in service of her students.

In "Advocacy: 2021 Style and Beyond," K.C. Boyd brings a fresh look to the school librarian's role as change agent in our schools and communities. As advocates for strong school libraries, we need to be ready to inform the uninformed about the school librarian's critical role. Boyd encourages school librarians to stand up and speak out, and she shares one of her own professional goals for the year: "to share the beauty and importance of school libraries in places where I would not normally venture."

In "Making a Mark on White Space: My Experience as a Black Librarian," Erika Long addresses how she has worked to advance representation of Black, indigenous, and people of color in the school library community. This needs to be a priority for our state and national professional organizations, to better reflect and represent the demographics of school-aged children in the United States. Long paraphrases Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop when she asserts that "learners should encounter school librarians who offer views into worlds unfamiliar to theirs—librarians as windows."

In our school libraries, in our collections and services, and always in service of our students and learning communities, school librarians value EDI and access. This may be the first time you've considered that our schools and professional communities are not aligned with these values when it comes to support for and inclusion of BIPOC school librarians, and the articles in this issue may push your thinking and may even make you uncomfortable, especially if you are white. I invite our white readers to take note of your responses to the articles you're about to read. What can we do in our professional practices and in our state and national organizations to uplift and center the voices and expertise of BIPOC school librarians? And for our BIPOC readers, on behalf of the *Knowledge Quest* Editorial Board, I hope this issue is the invitation you need to submit your manuscripts. We need your voices in the pages of *Knowledge Quest*.

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