



## **Lessons from COVID Inspire the Aspen Institute and Teachers College, Columbia University to Team Up for Two Town Hall Events to Improve Outcomes for Students of Color**

**New York, NY, Jan. 19, 2023** -- As schools struggle with post-COVID declining enrollment and unprecedented learning loss particularly for Black and Brown children, The Aspen Institute, Project on Belonging and Teachers College, Columbia University are partnering to create a new dialogue and define new solutions to improve outcomes for students of color.

In collaboration with CWK Network, the world-class institutions are hosting back-to-back town hall meetings in Washington, D.C. and New York City. Leading voices in education and government along with administrators, principals, parents and students from DC Public Schools, New York City Public Schools, and surrounding school districts and universities are expected to attend.

The events include special screenings of the film [\*Defining US, Children at the Crossroads of Change\*](#), a pivotal documentary that takes audiences inside the nation's largest school systems to see the potential and power of America's students of color who are now a majority of our nation's youth.

Cordell Carter, Executive Director of Project on Belonging at the Aspen Institute will make opening remarks at the Washington D.C. Event. "If COVID taught us anything, it is that our diverse, vibrant democratic society doesn't handle rapid change very well. We must figure out how to come to solutions faster and that requires engagement with our most underserved populations," said Carter. "If there was ever a reason for expanding opportunities for all, COVID and its impact on young people in schools should be the impetus for us to do something different. That starts with getting a better understanding of the context in which young people exist. This film provides a bird's eye view that most of us hardly ever see," said Carter.

Thomas Bailey, Ph.D., President of Teachers College, Columbia University and Celia Oyler, Ph.D., Vice Dean for Teacher Education at the College, will make opening remarks at the New York City event.

"I see the demographic shifts that show more and more of our children being diverse whether it be children of color, BIPOC, black indigenous people of color, multiracial, biracial children, I see it as an opportunity for schools to have an opportunity to get things right," said Dr. Yolanda Sealey Ruiz, Associate Professor of English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, who is featured in the film. "And I just hope that teachers and superintendents and those in charge of school systems, have the courage and the stamina to move forward."

### **Dates, time, and locations follow:**

#### **The Aspen Institute, Socrates Program, Project on Belonging**

- January 19 | Doors open at 3:00 p.m.
- 2300 N Street NW Ste. 700, Washington, DC 20037

#### **Teachers College, Columbia University**

- January 26 | Doors open at 4:00 p.m.
- 525 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10027

Following the film, audiences will participate in a town hall meeting facilitated by community leaders to create action plans and next steps to promote belonging and improve outcomes for students of color.

Regarded as an important catalyst for recent growth of the movement to improve the narrative about students of color, *Defining US, Children at the Crossroads of Change* is an independent film, produced by CWK Network, Inc., over six years on a lean budget with little fanfare. Since its release worldwide last August by [Gravitas Ventures](#), thousands of educators and families have attended local town hall events nationwide, prompting constructive conversations about innovative programs that address race and other social issues crucial to youth of color.

David Banks, Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, recently introduced the film at a screening event for local educators. “You are going to be blown away by what you see,” said Banks. “This film not only celebrates and uplifts our young people, educators, and influencers across the country, but will serve as an inspiration for those who are in the work. How we move after being inspired by this film, is critically important,” said Banks.

**Media Note:**

Media interested in attending one of the two special screenings should contact Angela Watts at 10 Squared Agency via email or phone: [angela@10squaredagency.com](mailto:angela@10squaredagency.com) or 678-637-0982.

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**About Defining US:**

*Defining US, Children at the Crossroads of Change* is [available for streaming](#) across all major VOD platforms, including Apple TV, Prime Video, and iTunes. The film is distributed by [Gravitas Ventures](#). For more information about *Defining US, Children at the Crossroads of Change*, please visit [definingus.org](http://definingus.org) or view the trailer [here](#). The film was produced by [CWK Network, Inc.](#), and directed by [Stacey DeWitt](#).

**About CWK Network:**

CWK Network, Inc. uses the power of media and the promise of education to produce and distribute non-fiction films and corresponding evidence-based, educational resources that improve the lives of children and families. In 2022, CWK released its flagship feature documentary *Defining US, Children at the Crossroads of Change*, the first in a series of films that tell the inspiring stories of students and educators who are leading a movement to improve social justice issues. The company produced the Emmy-Award winning *Connect with Kids* documentary television series for over a decade and distributed that series to over 55 million homes through CBS, ABC, NBC, and Fox television affiliates.

CWK owns the nation's largest, proprietary, non-fiction video library on social and emotional health, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The company creates non-fiction films and corresponding, evidence-based, educational resources on these issues and distributes that content through private label streaming platforms to schools, universities, and community partners. CWK is listed as an "Effective Producer of Programs" on the U.S. Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse; Substance

Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP); and the New York Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS).

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