

Dear ISD Student Equity Council members,

Thank you for expressing your concerns about the National PTA 2020-2021 Reflections theme. I want you to know how much we appreciate students voices, and that we take yours very seriously. As the mother of a young African American man, I absolutely agree that there are systems of oppression in place that harm students. I've fought that fight over many years, and there is a lot more work to be done by all of us.

One of the suggestions you had was to elevate your concerns to the National PTA Office. I did that yesterday, and would like to share both Anna King's response as well as our National PTA President, Leslie Boggs' comments.

From National PTA President Leslie Boggs:

"PTA's Reflections program provides opportunities for recognition and access to the arts for all students. Each year, over 300,000 students in pre-K through grade 12 create original works of art in response to a student-selected theme. This 50+ year-old program helps them explore their own thoughts, feelings and ideas; develop artistic literacy; increase confidence and find a love for learning that will help them become more successful in school and in life.

The Reflections theme is selected two years in advance through a nationwide theme search contest. Each theme is written by a student, collected by a local PTA and submitted to National PTA by their state PTA. The theme then goes through a careful selection process at the national level by a team of National PTA officers. The I Matter Because... theme was selected in 2018 by an elementary school student, Rylee Stier, from Burney, California. Rylee, a then 1st grader, drew inspiration from her town and the towns around her being completely wiped out by the California wildfires of 2018. The selection of her theme brought hope and pride back to her community.

Regarding this year's Reflections theme and concerns that have been expressed, National PTA carefully considered the feedback, conducted extensive research and collaborated with volunteer leadership. Through these discussions and findings, National PTA has been encouraged to move forward with the theme full steam ahead. The Arts and Culture Director of the Los Angeles Black Lives Matter chapter shared support of the new Reflections theme stating, "The National PTA arts program looks beautiful and powerful. You have the green light from BLMLA to proceed with your theme for this year. No reservations here." Through the I Matter Because... theme, National PTA will continue targeted outreach efforts, lifting voices of leadership and young artists of color, opening dialog and creating new content.

*National PTA does not condone the All Lives Matter movement. We stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. We believe the 2020-2021 Reflections theme, I Matter Because..., is an opportunity to engage and elevate the voices of students of color. This is a priority, now more than ever, and National PTA is committed to standing behind our beliefs and mission to make **every** child's potential a reality."*

Anna King, National PTA President-Elect and former Oklahoma PTA State President, wanted to add that "we (National PTA) spoke to Oklahoma City chapter of BLM, and they agreed it was an encouraging theme.". She also wanted you to be aware of the National PTA's position statement on institutional or systemic racism (attached). Also attached is our WSPTA statement addressing inequities and my President blog post from June 2020.

Because the 2020-2021 Reflections theme has been publicized and in use by PTAs and students for several months, it is extremely unlikely that the theme will be changed. We do offer contests in Game Development and Essay Writing in our state as well as potential alternatives. While we do not have the volunteer bandwidth to also create and administer a new arts program at the state level, a local PTA could provide that if they chose to.

What I hope to convey in this email is that while we may not be able to do anything about the Reflections theme this year, this one program is only a small part of what we provide. The statements attached combined with the legislative issues and resolutions we'll be voting on next month show our dedication to advocating for children, and our desire to end racism.

I hope this message alleviates your concerns, but if not, I am willing to discuss further with you or put you in direct contact with Leslie Boggs.

Please keep advocating. Your voices as students are important.

Best regards,

Janice



Janice Kutzera
President

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