

October 26, 2017



P.O. Box 55864
Little Rock, AR 72215
www.bbamath.org

President

Brea Ratliff
Hearland, TX

Past President

Margaret Walker
Orlando, FL

Secretary

Claude Stuart
Dix Hills, NY

Treasurer

Marcelline Carr
Little Rock, AR

Regional Directors

Southeast

Nikita Patterson
Stone Mountain, GA

South Central

Latrenda Knighten
Baton Rouge, LA

West

Christina Lincoln-Moore
Los Angeles, CA

Northeast

Shelly Jones
New Haven, CT

North Central

Kwame Anthony Scott
Chicago, IL

Southwest

Javelo Jones
Cedar Hill, TX

I received an email this afternoon with a subject line which read, “Unleashing Problem Solvers”. Intrigued by this title, I quickly scanned the first paragraph, then stopped as my thoughts turned to the true complexity of the problems educators and students face. We recognize problems exist in our country's educational system, and most will admit injustice - particularly as it relates to race and culture - is still very prevalent in our institutions and society. Ironically, when individuals attempt to “unleash” their problem-solving abilities in this area, their efforts are often rejected as if there are quantitative and qualitative limitations for questioning systematic injustice.

Mathematics teachers and teacher educators have spent many years encouraging students to believe that there are many ways to approach/solve problems. As I think about problem-solving, I reflect upon the teaching of my mentor, Beatrice Moore-Luchin, who always articulates that the first step of solving any problem is to simply understand and re-state the facts. I have heard many educators wonder aloud about the necessity of discussing problems related to race and culture within the context of school, but if we are inviting people to become problem solvers, the name alone validates the fact that these problems do exist.

I understand Dr. Rochelle Gutierrez has been wrongfully vilified this week, and her credibility unjustly called into question based on purposely misconstrued conversations about white privilege and its authenticated impact on the teaching and learning of mathematics. I understand that at the very core of this tough, yet delicate discussion lies facts; the facts are that mathematics has largely been perceived as a predominately white, and predominately male field in the United States of America. Not unlike other careers and fields of study, mathematics and the learning of mathematics is often devoid of the contributions and appreciation for the multicultural participants.

As an example, recognizing Kathryn Johnson and even identifying brilliant women of color as “Hidden Figures” 50 years after they made amazing contributions to mathematics and science is very telling of where we are in our poorly-described “honest dialogue” about these issues. I would be ignorant to believe that because I and others have been successful in academia, particularly mathematics, that there lies no fault in or with the system.

We have often celebrated having a seat at the table, but it seems we should revisit the rules of etiquette involved for two parties agreeably entering a discussion in such settings. Inviting someone to your table only to force feed them your ideologies is no better than not allowing them to have a seat at all. The facts tell us that when certain “problems” exceed a sense of familiarity or resonance with some people, their tolerance for finding solutions to the problems sharply declines. Moreover, we are told the problem simply does not exist. In that case, a dissonance occurs between an individual's truth and the facts. If we have any hope of bridging this chasm, it will not be found by muzzling the voices of the true problem solvers.

It is to this end that the Benjamin Banneker Association, Inc. stands with Dr. Rochelle Gutierrez, as well as every individual and organization choosing to support factual and actionable solutions to very real problems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brea C Ratliff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brea C. Ratliff
President, Benjamin Banneker Association, Inc.