

F.I.R.E. NEWSLETTER

Webster, NY

Welcome!

Who We Are:

- Families Igniting Racial Equity (F.I.R.E.) is a group of parents and allies working together to address issues of racial equality through an intersectional lens in our schools.

What We Do:

- Our focus is always on developing and implementing action-oriented steps that create a positive impact on the outcomes and experiences of students.
- F.I.R.E. has become an asset to the general community by providing advocacy, resources, and tools to promote understanding around diversity, equity, and inclusion among the community at large.

This issue:

Welcome!
PAGE 01

Upcoming BOE Election
PAGE 02-03

Introducing BOE
Candidate:
Maria Cortes
PAGE 04-07

May is AAPI Heritage &
Jewish Heritage Month
PAGE 08-09

Chats with
Dr. Chalwell
PAGE 10-12

News:
Community Events,
Jobs/ Trainee Support,
FIRE Updates
PAGE 13-15



Upcoming Board of Education (BOE) VOTE!!!

Thank you F.I.R.E.!

You recently helped us to exceed the number of signatures needed to get Maria Cortes (introduction on page 4) on the ballot for the upcoming Board of Education (BOE) election on May 16th!!

As the Webster Central School District (WCSD) BOE election approaches, it is important to elect BOE members who are supportive of the DEI work Dr. Chawell and the District are doing.

What does a BOE member do?

- Take an oath of office.
- Advocate for public education.
- Create and revise district policies.
- Study issues and regulations.
- Discuss issues at public board meetings.
- Vote on issues affecting their districts.
- Support the decisions of the board majority.
- Promote public education in their local communities and beyond.
- Perform their duties without compensation (except in the 5 largest cities).

Above from: <https://www.websterschools.org/board>



“You’ve got to vote, vote, vote. That’s it; that’s the way we move forward.”

- MICHELLE OBAMA

Absentee Ballot:

All absentee ballot applications must be RECEIVED by the district clerk at least seven business days prior to the vote (i.e., May 9th) if the ballot is to be mailed to the voter, or the day before the vote (May 15th) if the ballot is to be picked up personally by or for the voter. The FIRE Steering Committee is available to collect your application if you’re in need of this service. You can reach out to request this by emailing:
fireofwebster@gmail.com



Meet the BOE CANDIDATES!!

The FIRE Steering Committee is excited to announce that we'll be hosting a virtual Meet the BOE Candidates Night this Thursday, May 4th from 7 - 8:30 pm. All four candidates have accepted our invitation to attend this event. The format will be as follows:

- (1) Candidates will each have 5 minutes to do introductions,
- (2) 40 minutes will be devoted to them answering questions generated by the FIRE Steering Committee, and
- (3) the last 15 minutes will be allotted for them to take questions from the audience.

Please register for the event here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwpfu6gqzsjGdBvNKDUhBdWrAouB06Diq8V>



“Voting is the expression of our commitment to ourselves, one another, this country, and this world.”

- SHARON SALZBERG

**We hope
you all can
make it!**





Introducing Maria Cortes!!



“The vote is precious. It is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in a democratic society, and we must use it.”

- JOHN LEWIS



It was an absolute pleasure to sit down with Maria Cortes recently to learn more about her and her passion for the Webster Central School District (WCSD) and the Webster community.

Maria and her family moved to Webster over 15 years ago. Her own two children are proud graduates of WCSD, class of 2020 and 2021. Her son was accepted (as a freshman) into the Rochester Early Medical Scholars BS/MD program at the University of Rochester and her daughter is pursuing a degree in elementary education. Maria and Samir met in Rochester and have been married for over 23 years.

Having worked at RIT for the last 16 years as a Senior Research Administrator, and at Nazareth College two years before that, Maria brings over 18 years of experience in Higher Education; skills in grant writing, community partnership building; and a keen understanding of federal and state funding mechanisms.



Introducing Maria Cortes!!

When asked what is motivating her to run for the WCSD Board of Education (BOE) at this time, Maria explained how she and her family felt the impact of emboldened racism following the 2016 election. She recalled incidents of racial harm that happened to her family and the way that the political climate inflamed a sense of fear and skepticism about her and her family— and in a place they had loved and cared for.

When Maria heard that a group was forming to help support Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, she was very interested. Maria volunteered to be on the steering committee of Families Igniting Racial Equity (FIRE), and she chaired the Hispanic Heritage Committee.

Since that time, Maria has spoken about how her sense of hope has been growing. She noted witnessing the community’s burgeoning support of DEI efforts. She is also aware of how difficult change is and the fragile nature of new growth. It is this clear-eyed hope that motivates Maria to run for the Board of Education—knowing that a tender green shoot of change is growing, balanced with an awareness that we have a long way to go.

“I want to expand kids’ knowledge about the community that surrounds them.” Maria noted. She spoke about how important it is to change the prevailing narrative, in a way that the histories, contributions, and accomplishments of all groups are known and celebrated. “My commitment to DEI efforts isn’t just about meeting the needs of children of color, but about inspiring ALL children to broaden their understanding of the world many of them will venture to explore.”

She said, “My strong belief that the prosperity of a community is determined by the success of its children, fuels my desire to serve.”





Introducing Maria Cortes!!

With a background in business and creating sound budgeting, Maria spoke of her concern for the details of budgeting: “fiscal responsibility is a big deal to me.” She also noted, “I will be asking questions about where the money is going. I know that our school budget has many fixed expenses with little to no wiggle room, but there is no harm in raising questions on behalf of taxpayers.”

Maria spoke often during our conversation about her care and concern for parents and teachers. She wishes to empower parents to advocate for their children. She also noted that she understands that many teachers are tired after the past few years. Additionally, she added, “We’ve lost a lot of great teachers with great experience for many reasons.” Maria spoke about the importance of recruiting and maintaining excellent teachers, particularly Teachers of Color.

If elected to the BOE Maria is dedicated to working so that...

- ALL STUDENTS are provided the environment and resources they need to thrive and reach their full potential.
- ALL TEACHERS and STAFF have the training, tools, and resources they need to practice their craft with the passion and expertise our kids deserve.
- ALL FAMILIES are empowered with the information they need to advocate for their kids.
- ALL RESIDENTS are confident that their tax dollars are being spent wisely, and are producing results that are measurable, meaningful, and sustainable.

Maria is committed to, “being a voice on the Board of Education who can ask the tough questions but can come to the consensus that we need to do what is right for ALL our communities’ children. Our community needs leadership that can listen to all stakeholders --not just the loudest voices in the room. I believe I can do that.”





Introducing Maria Cortes!!

The FIRE team is thrilled to support Maria’s campaign as well as Janice Richardson, who’s running for re-election and whose values also align with the mission and goals of FIRE.

If you are interested in learning more about Maria and supporting the campaign effort, please use this link to access several important items:

[cortesforwebsterboe](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Linktree](#)

The above link will allow you to:

- (1) Learn more about Maria!
- (2) Request a lawn sign.
- (3) Get an absentee ballot application. All absentee ballot applications must be RECEIVED by the district clerk at least seven business days prior to the vote (i.e., May 9th) if the ballot is to be mailed to the voter, or the day before the vote (May 15th) if the ballot is to be picked up personally by or for the voter. The FIRE Steering Committee is available to collect your application if you’re in need of this service. You can reach out to request this by emailing: fireofwebster@gmail.com
- (4) Support Maria’s campaign monetarily. Monetary donations are being collected via Venmo. If you choose to make a donation this way, please make sure to include the following information when asked “What’s this for?” Indicate that it’s for a BOE campaign and include your full name and mailing address. This is for reporting purposes. If this information is not included, Maria will have to send back your donation, as she won’t be able to properly document the donation.



Tuesday, May 16, 6:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Webster Schroeder High School gymnasium
875 Ridge Rd, , Webster, NY 14580



May is Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month



“The American dream belongs to all of us.”

– KAMALA HARRIS

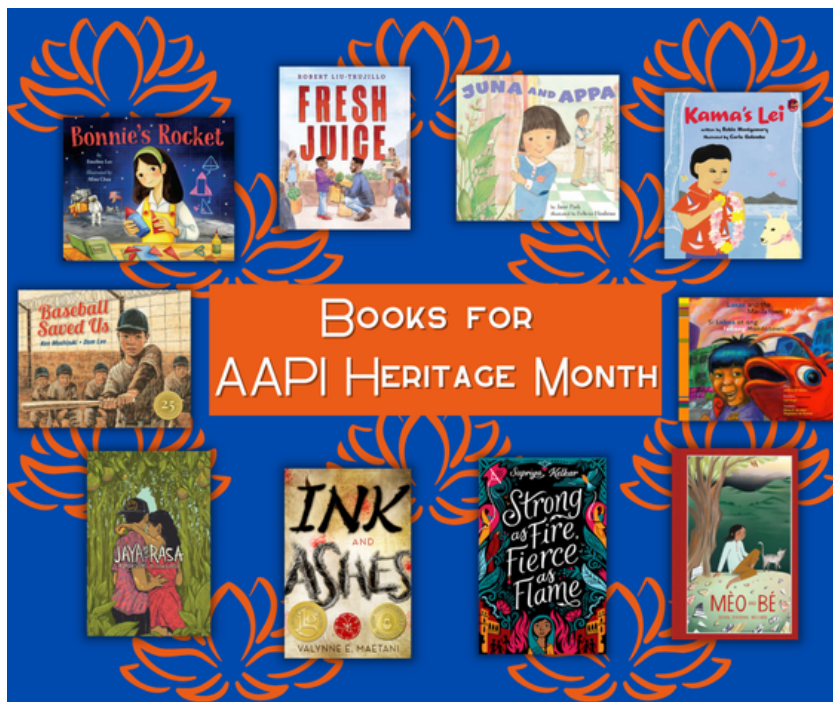
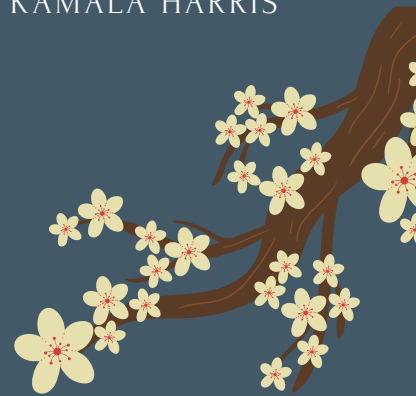


Image from: <https://blog.leeandlow.com/2023/04/27/books-and-resources-for-aapi-heritage-month/>

Links to check out:

[Resources for Teachers for AAPI Month](#)

[Asian Pacific American Association \(Greater Rochester, NY\)](#)

[List of 25 Must Read Books by Asian and Asian American Authors](#)

[Films and Documentaries for AAPI](#)



May is Jewish American Heritage Month



"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

– ALBERT EINSTEIN



Image from: <https://pjlibrary.org/beyond-books/pjblog/may-2016/pjlrecs-jewish-american-heritage-month>





Chats with Dr. Chalwell

We will be checking in with Dr. Chalwell quarterly and bringing you updates on his efforts. Please feel free to reach out with questions or topics you'd like him to respond to!

-Mary Beth Covert
marybcovert@gmail.com



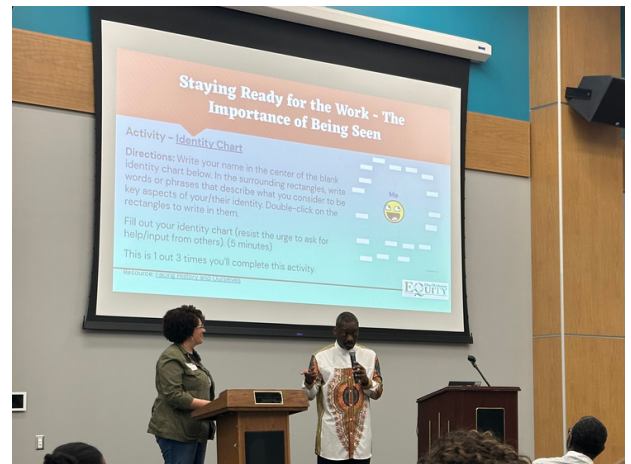
Mary Beth:
You, (Dr. Chalwell) spearheaded an important gathering recently!

The Webster Central School District (WCSD) in partnership with Webster Families Infighting Racial Equity (F.I.R.E.) hosted a Convening on Equity in Education on March 25th. The program featured guest speakers and WCSD student participants involved in diversity and equity efforts in the Webster community.

We'd love to hear your thoughts about how it went.

Dr. Chalwell:
While we share a persistent grievance with all forms of inequity and recognize that there is much more to be done, I hope that The Convening evidenced how important it is for us to gather:

1. as community members with concern for the numerous issues associated with inequity;
2. to hold space where we see and celebrate each other, and respectfully acknowledge that while we share concern, our primary interests may diverge;





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-Mary Beth Covert
marybcovert@gmail.com



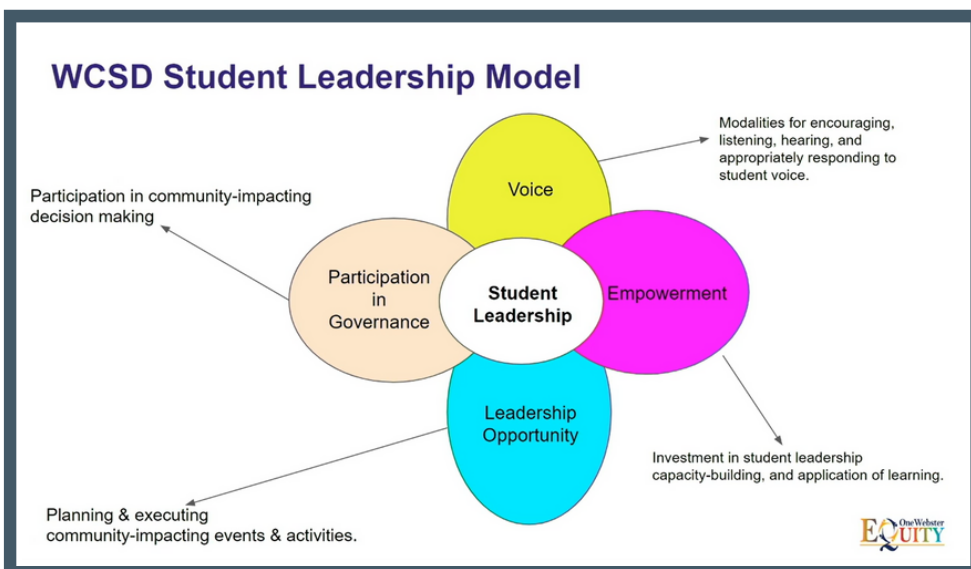
Dr. Chalwell (continued):

3. to clarify understandings of equity work in the specific context of K-12 education, and arrive at shared understanding that informs coherent, coordinated, strategic actions;

4. to understand and be reminded of the ways we must be of mutual aid to each other, as means of sustaining our efforts in pursuit of lasting change; and

5. to, at appropriate times, de-center our own frustrations, rage, and hurts. And in the space created, ensure that our young people are robustly seen, heard, engaged with, and empowered with the truth our ancestors modeled for us, that; even in adversity we must give thanks, we must celebrate, we must aspire, we must struggle on, we must build for a future we can't yet see, we must love, we must live life fully.

Recording of event: <https://www.websterschools.org/familyengagement>



A slide from the event highlighting the importance of student leadership. We had the opportunity to hear from many powerful young voices that morning!

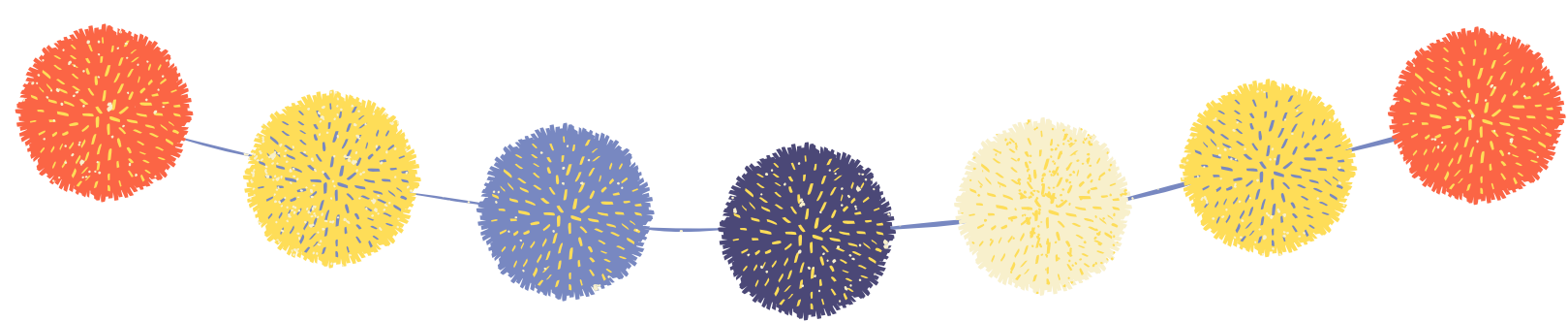




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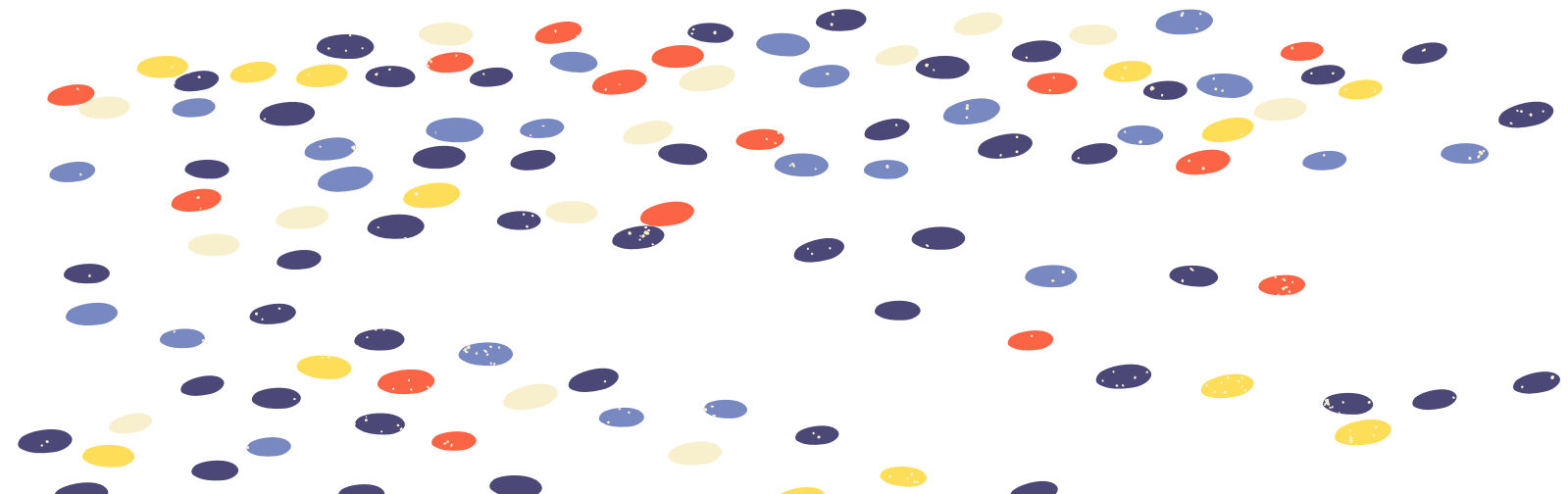


Mary Beth:

We'd like to hear more about the upcoming Family Fun Day on May 6th.

Dr. Chalwell:

On May 6th, 12:00-1:30 we'll be meeting in the Activity Center at Phillip's Village (100 Kreiger Rd, Webster, NY 14580). We're looking forward to connecting with all of the communities in Webster and are excited to do so with the Phillips Village Community on Saturday. This is a time of connecting and relationship building--strengthening community and sharing space. There will be games, pizza, cookies, and iced tea. We will also have a selection of free children's books to take and other giveaways.





Community Events

FIRE's Meet the BOE Candidates - 5/4/23@7-8:30

Please register for the event here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwpfu6gqzsjGdBvNKDUhBdWrAouB06Diq8V>

Phillips Village Family Fun Day - 5/6/23@12-1:30

BOE and Budget Vote - 5/16/23@6:00 am - 9:00 pm,
Webster Schroeder High School gymnasium, 875 Ridge Rd,
Webster

Black Kids Matter Celebration - 6/4/23@11-2:00, Harris
Whalen Park (2126 Penfield Road in Penfield, NY)

[*Check out other upcoming classes from 540WMain!](#)

Dates to Take Note of in May

- May is Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month
- May is Jewish American Heritage Month
- May is Older Americans Month
- May is Mental Health Awareness Month
- May 17th is International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia

Job Postings & Training Opportunities

[Webster Central School District Job Postings](#)

Local Food Pantries:

- St. Martin Lutheran Church at 813 Bay Road
- United Church of Christ at 570 Klem Rd
- Webster Baptist Church at 59 South Ave
- Phillips Village Apartments Stand at 100 Kreiger Rd

Bullying is NOT okay:

[Dignity for All Students Act \(DASA\):](#)

If your child experiences discrimination, harassment, or bullying, one avenue to address the issue is through filling out a DASA form. [Click here for the form.](#)

The F.I.R.E. Steering Committee also stands ready to consult about any of these issues.

Email us at:

fireofwebster@gmail.com



Book Drive for Family Fun Day!



Do you have gently used books that you're no longer using?

F.I.R.E. is collecting books for children and teens to give away at the Family Fun Day at Phillips Village this Saturday, May 6th, 12:00 - 1:30.

Bring books to the event, or a F.I.R.E. member would be glad to stop by and pick up your books.

Email us at:
fireofwebster@gmail.com





F.I.R.E Volunteer Opportunities

- Get involved in one of our Subcommittees: Recruitment & Hiring, African-American Heritage, Hispanic Heritage, Culturally Responsive Curriculum.
- Join our newsletter and social media teams. We need your creativity and excitement!
- Email fireofwebster@gmail.com with interest

Let's Keep in Touch

- If you haven't already, sign up to receive this monthly newsletter by emailing us at fireofwebster@gmail.com.

Drop Us A Line

- We'd love this newsletter to be a place where our community can share resources for good. Send your announcements, job opportunities, good book suggestions, etc. to marybcovert@gmail.com.

Gratefully,

The F.I.R.E. Steering Committee

Sonnette Bascoe, Laurie Soltman, Abby Terrana, Christy Roushey, Lauren West, Mary Beth Covert, Sarah Johnson



"Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time."

- Ruth Bader Ginsburg

