

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Jennifer Norrell Cole Ed. D

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Tumultuous 2020 Oral History project

Interview # T20-A-L-2021-026

Dr. Jennifer Norrell Cole, Superintendent for East Aurora School District #131, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Tumultuous 2020* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Jul 20, 2021

Location: Aurora, Illinois

Interviewer: Philip Pogue

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript being
processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:32 / 1.53 hrs.

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on August 31, 2021.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Dr. Jennifer Norrell Cole, *Tumultuous 2020*, T20-A-L-2021-026

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Jennifer Norrell Cole was born in Harvey, Illinois in February 1974. She graduated from Hillcrest High School in Country Club Hills, Illinois. Jennifer earned a BA degree in 1996 from Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia, majoring in biology. In 2000, she earned a MA degree in education from St. Xavier University, Chicago. Jennifer received a Doctorate in curriculum instruction and educational psychology from Loyola University, Chicago. Dr. Norrell Cole's work experiences include her time at Crete-Monee Unit District, Bloom Township High School District, and Rich Township High School District, teaching science and serving as an assistant principal, Director of Middle and Secondary Curriculum, and Assistant Superintendent. She also worked for the Illinois Center for School Improvement, which strove to improve academic performance in schools. In 2018, she became the Superintendent for East Aurora School District #131. Dr. Norrell Cole was the first female in the school district's 170-year history to serve in that capacity, as well as the first African American Superintendent in Kane County. She has also worked on the university faculty at St. Xavier and Governor's State.

Dr. Norrell Cole explored how a large western suburban school district met the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to July 2021. Beginning in March 2020 the district's schools were closed to in person learning for three months. East Aurora SD #131 formed eight subcommittees to deal with specific topics and handed out iPads or laptops to its students. She also discussed summer professional staff training conducted in the district to prepare for the 2020-21 school year, and the many changes made by the school district due to the rise of COVID-19 cases and state restrictions. She reviewed student participation rates for remote learning, and the technological, transportation, food service, and personnel challenges faced due to the pandemic. Other topics covered included the return to some in-person learning in March 2021, the needs of special education students and 2nd language learners, and the social and emotional impact on students. Finally, Jennifer discussed her concerns for learning loss and the preparation for in-person learning for the 2021-22 school year.

Subject Headings/Key Words: East Aurora School District #131; school operations during COVID-19 pandemic; Kane County Health Department; teacher unions during COVID-19 pandemic; social and emotional impact of COIV-19 on students; budget impact of the pandemic; federal funding for summer school; IL State Board of Education during pandemic; relations with teacher's union during pandemic;

Notes to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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