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SRCD Launches National Discussion on Child Development in a Diverse Majority Society

Inaugural Lecture at UVA Illustrates Benefits of Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Schools

It is expected that by 2044, the United States will become a majority-minority society, with Non-Hispanic Whites comprising less than half of the U.S. population. As the nation prepares for this transition, the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) has launched an annual Lecture Series entitled *Child Development in a Diverse Majority Society* with the inaugural lecture at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia (UVA) in July 2018.

“This series exemplifies our commitment to child development and sends a powerful message of constructive engagement towards an inclusive future,” said Laura L. Namy, Executive Director of SRCD. “Our goal is to share research evidence to guide children, families and educational institutions to move forward in an increasingly diverse society.”

In anticipation of the one-year anniversary of the tragic events associated with the white-nationalist march in Charlottesville in August 2017, SRCD partnered with UVA in launching the lecture series to address the need to build towards a positive future with children learning self-respect and respect for one another. SRCD and UVA sought opportunities to utilize research on child development to engage in a constructive dialogue that will help the nation grow into a more inclusive society.

Robert Pianta, Dean of the Curry School of Education at UVA, underscored the impact of having the first lecture in this series at the university, drawing on the importance of research to build towards such a future.

“Knowledge must ground our efforts to improve outcomes for all children,” said Pianta. “It is only fitting to partner with SRCD, the preeminent scientific organization focusing on child and human development to reflect on the implications and opportunities present as the United States transforms to a diverse-majority society.”

The inaugural lecture was given by Joanna Lee Williams, Associate Professor at UVA, who outlined the transformative power of diversity in education with a specific focus on racial and ethnic diversity in schools. Williams used research findings to illustrate how and why bringing students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds together is beneficial and addressed the obstacles that inhibit the realization of such benefits.

“One of the biggest impediments to realizing the benefits of diversity is fear,” said Williams. “But what the research actually shows us, is in the context of diversity, the negative impacts only result when there is no intergroup contact.”

Williams concluded by summarizing the steps society should consider to fully embrace the transformative power of diversity in education. After her presentation, she moderated a panel discussion with experts Natalia Palacios, Associate Professor at UVA, and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, Associate Professor at the Virginia Commonwealth University, to discuss additional research that informs issues of school diversity.

The idea for the SRCD Lecture Series grew out of discussions of the SRCD Ethnic and Racial Issues Committee led by Dawn Witherspoon, current chair of the committee and McCourtney Family Early Career Professor in Psychology, Associate Professor at Pennsylvania State University, and Eleanor Seaton, former chair of the committee and Associate Professor at Arizona State University, and joined by Martha Zaslow, Director for Policy at SRCD, on ways that SRCD could use research to help to anticipate and inform the transition to a majority diverse society. Each year, SRCD will partner with a different university to co-sponsor a lecture by a distinguished scholar at the hosting institution who is researching this critical topic.

“This series should help us determine how to best meet the needs of the diverse population,” said Witherspoon. “It’s an opportunity for us to think about diversity, inclusion, and equity following the events that happened right here on this campus.”

With more than 5,000 members worldwide, SRCD has started the national dialogue through the dissemination of research that will help parents, educators and caregivers of children prepare for this shift to

a majority diverse society. As an interdisciplinary, international, and diverse organization with members from more than 60 countries, SRCD is fulfilling its mission to advance development science and promote its use to improve human lives.

Available resources:

- **Watch a video of the lecture, *"The Transformative Power of Diversity in Education is Enormous": Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century***
- **Download slides**
- **Read prepared remarks**