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Moises Echeverria: Yes, a spirit of inclusiveness is good for business

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Students Taliyah Hansard, 10 (left), Allisson Villarreal, 8, Dylan Ledesma-Antel, 8, Ry'Morgan Buyckes, 9, and Nathan Strickland, 8, sit on a Buddy Bench at Jackson Elementary School in Tulsa in October. A Buddy Bench is a place where school children can go if they need a friend. The Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice sponsors the program, which is designed to help kids feel included, and reduce bullying. Tulsa World file



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By Moises Echeverria President & CEO, Oklahoma Center for Community & Justice | 0 comments

The energy and momentum Tulsa has created are evident as you walk around downtown, visit one of our vibrant commercial districts or see improvements and investments our city is making. It is a good time to be a Tulsan.

It is especially encouraging to know our city elected to invest in itself. This allows greater access to healthcare, transportation, increase in law enforcement and community policing, infrastructure improvements among many other exciting projects which will help Tulsa attract and retain creative talent. I am excited about the lasting impact the voices of young professionals has on revitalizing our city. Tulsa continues to rank as one of the top cities for young entrepreneurs, affordability, short commutes, vibrant live music scene and more.

One of my favorite aspects of Tulsa is its welcoming spirit. Through arduous work, civic and community leaders and institutions have led the charge to continue to make our city more inclusive. There is still much work to do and I am hopeful for the future. There truly is something for everyone to be engaged in, regardless of their passion.

As I continue to become engaged in community service I realize that our city is becoming an example of what inclusive leadership means. Corporations, agencies and organizations

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are discovering the business case for inclusion. Not only is fostering an atmosphere of respect and understanding the right thing to do, but it affects the bottom line. We can capitalize on our diversity, making it our competitive advantage. Inclusive leadership requires skills and knowledge to have courageous conversations needed to move the needle forward. There are many organizations that are leading the charge in providing these tools to help our community in this regard.

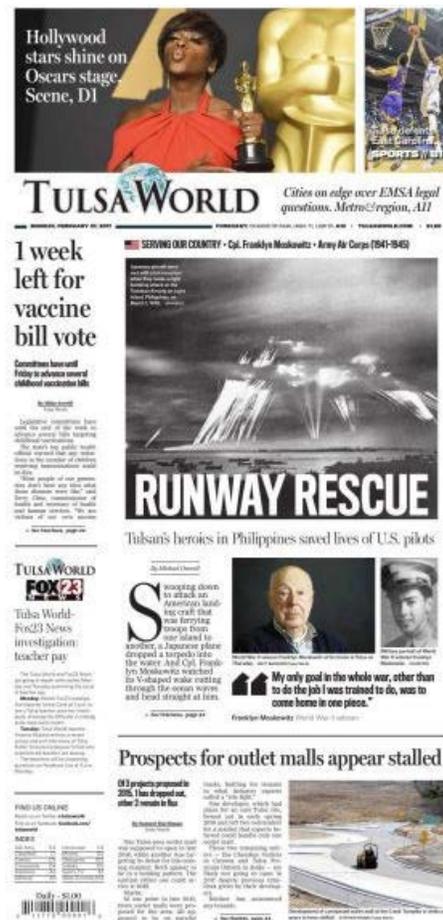
The demographics of our city are rapidly changing. Our elementary school classrooms are a perfect picture of what future leadership will look like. It is a diverse group who are growing to love their city, state and nation.

I still vividly remember the teachers, school counselors and mentors who helped inspire me and challenge me to do my best as I adjusted to a new culture and language as a young teen. I had the privilege to attend Camp Anytown Leadership Institute, sponsored by the Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice (OCCJ). This leadership training for high school students throughout the state focuses on our role to make a positive change in our communities as we learn to navigate through our deepest differences. At Anytown I realized that the idea of "building bridges" is obsolete when we realize we stand on common ground.

For the last 15 years I have continue to learn and volunteer to help others realize that regardless of our differences, we share much more in common. My deepest and most meaningful friendships are with individuals who live and believe differently than I do. We enjoy exploring our similarities while celebrating and learning from our differences.

As I run through one of our beautiful parks, visit one of our museums, or attend a concert or show, I am reminded that it is a good time to be a Tulsan.

Moises Echeverria serves as president and CEO of the Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice, an organization dedicated to achieve respect and understanding among all people. He has been involved with OCCJ for 15 years, first as a program participant, then as volunteer and subsequently as staff. He is passionate about education and giving back to the community. He serves on the Tulsa City-County Library Commission, Tulsa Public School Superintendent Community Advisory Committee, Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration Society and is chair-elect for TYPros, the largest young professional



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organization in the nation. Echeverria graduated from East Central High School in Tulsa and Oklahoma State University.

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