THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BRINGING EDUCATION DISPARITIES TO THE FOREFRONT OF THE POLITICAL DEBATE

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. HANSEN: Good morning and welcome to the Brookings Institution. I'm Mike Hansen, senior fellow and deputy director in the Brown Center on Education and Policy.

And we are pleased to have you join us today, for this event on bringing education disparities to the forefront of the political debate. This event is being recorded and live-streamed over the Brookings.edu website, and I welcome those joining us remotely for this discussion.

Our objective in convening today's event is to stimulate a conversation on a very critical topic, both for today and for the economics -- for the economic prosperity of our country. I think we'd all agree that a quality education and a person's level of education attainment are important determinants of an array of outcomes for individuals, and also for our country's competitiveness overall.

Yet, we are all familiar with the many inequalities present in our public education system, and coincidentally for this event we just had a release yesterday from the Office of Civil Rights, they released data on a new round of data collection, though I imagine this will be part of our conversation later today.

Among other things, let me just highlight a couple things that this data shows. Black children, particularly black males are suspended or expelled from school at disproportionately high rates. Number two, black and Latino students have lower levels of access to AP or advanced math and science courses, and third, black, Latino and Native American students have disproportionately higher rates of math -- of chronic student absenteeism and attends schools with high concentrations of inexperience and/or unlicensed teachers.

Though there is general agreement among researchers, policymakers and the public both about the importance of education, and these persistent gaps in public education by race, this is a topic that often takes a low priority in prominent public debates and has also taken a pretty low -- a particularly low prominence in this current election cycle.

On the right most of the discussion has been about abandoning the Common Core, on the left most of the discussion has focused on the cost of lowering the cost of college. And while these are two hot topics and flash point topics, the depth and range of issues in education is much more vast than those two topics, and particularly against the backdrop of persistent inequality in the economy, which

is a very hot-button issue this election cycle, it's curious that that the topic of education's contributions to those inequalities continues to elude those debates.

And so I trust that this will be an engaging conversation this afternoon, and I invite those who are here in the audience and those who are joining us online, to join in the live Twitter conversation using hash tag, EducationDisparities, all one word. And I will be participating here on this panel with four other esteemed individuals from various backgrounds, and let me introduce them to you.

On my farthest left, your far right, we have DeRay Mckesson. DeRay is a protestor and a community organizer, and co-founder of Campaign Zero, and has taken a leading role in the Black Lives Matter Movement. DeRay's background comes from public schools. He was a teacher for America Corps Member in New York, and then worked in the offices of the Harlem Children Zone, as well as in the district offices as a senior human resources director in Minneapolis Public Schools before becoming a fulltime activist.

Next, we have Gerard Robinson. Gerard Robinson is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Among his many notable positions Mr. Robinson previously served as the state secretary of education in both Florida and Virginia.

Next to my immediate left here, is Peggy McLeod who is the deputy vice president of workforce development at the National Council of La Raza. Dr. McLeod has spent her career in public education, working as a teacher in Puerto Rico as well as working in administrative capacities in federal and district education agencies. Much of her work has focused on programs with English Language Learners.

And then finally to my right, Alia Wong will moderate today's conversation. Alia is an award-winning journalist, and the editor of The Atlantic’s Education Section. She was previously a reporter on the Education Beat in Honolulu, and holds degrees in journalism and Latin America studies from Boston University. Welcome to everyone for today's event. And with that, I'll turn the time over to you, Alia.

MS. WONG: Okay. Well, thank you everyone, for being here today. When I was first invited to moderate this panel I said, how the heck am I going to focus a conversation on educational disparities in an hour? I mean, we could be here for weeks. Education disparities are pretty much 90

percent, even 100 percent of what I cover, as an educational journalist. But I think that's the beauty of this conversation today is that it can really take its own shape, and we can really touch on a lot of the maybe more overlooked issues.

You spoke about the DOE data that was released yesterday, the Civil Rights data, and it really kind of reiterates just the myriad factors that contribute to these disparities in education; from chronic absenteeism, to discipline rates, to access to advanced courses. In your opinion what are some of the more ignored factors, or the overlooked factors that are contributing to this achievement gap that we should be paying more attention to? And I think each of you have your perspective on this issue. So, we'll start with you.

MR. HANSEN: You'll start with me. Okay. I am a teacher/researcher guy, that's where I focus a lot of my research on, and we are all familiar with the achievement gaps between white and non-white students in the United States, and one of the factors that I would argue contributes to those gaps is the diversity or lack thereof in the teacher -- the public teacher workforce. Educators and researchers have long pointed to the importance of students having similar role models to them, as teachers or other invested adults in their lives. And what this research shows and some of which has been highlighted on the Brown Center chalkboard, is that same-race teachers tend to promote greater student achievement.

They tend to have more positive expectations of minority student performance. They are less likely to view students' misbehavior as problematic, and therefore less likely to end up in taking suspension or expulsion measures. They also have more positive -- And also, there are various factors that contribute to this. And also as a result of this research many agree, as I do myself, that a teacher workforce that really reflects the diversity of the student population, would be valuable for public students overall.

Yet, I'm working on a report here in the -- with some collaborators from the National Council on Teacher Quality. This report is not quite released yet, but it will be released here through the Brown Center in the coming weeks. And what we are interested in this report is examining what it will take to achieve a national teacher workforce that as diverse as the student body -- as the students that they are serving; and how long that diverse workforce will take to achieve.

And I'm just going to give you a quick sneak peek of what those findings say. First the

punch line is that not only my children but my children's children will already be through their public schooling before they can expect to see a fully-diverse teacher workforce. And the reason for this is sort of two-pronged; number one is that looking over the next 40-odd years, student demographic trends, trend toward increasing diversity in the United States.

Whites will become less prominent, and by the year 2060 we expect roughly equal shares of Whites and Hispanics, among the student population. The representation of blacks will be roughly the same as what they currently are: about 15 or so percent. So where we have a current diversity problem among teachers where more than 80 percent of teachers are white, we have a target that is going to be moving increasingly away from us.

So that's the first prong of the problem. The second prong of the problem is that we have a problem getting minority teachers into the classroom, and once they are there, keeping them there. To become a teacher you need to need to meet qualifications to go through this long process and with my co-authors we were looking -- we looked at data to look at the various points of the teacher pipeline and everywhere that we looked and where we could find data, we basically found a white/non-white gap between teacher candidates.

And so, of course we are all familiar with gaps and college enrolment and degree attainment between whites and non-whites, and that of course contributes to how qualified they are to become teachers, but then of course there are gaps in who decides to become an education major between whites and non-whites. There are gaps in licensure test scores; there are gaps in who actually gets a job in the classroom. There are gaps in who among education majors say they actually want to become a teacher as a profession.

Once they are in the classroom, we tend to lose minority teachers at higher rates than we lose white teachers. Of course this is partially due to the context in which minority teachers are teaching, which tends to be in predominantly disadvantaged settings. However, we can't have a revolving door of minority teachers, and if we want to develop a diverse workforce. Combined, all of these factors make it extremely difficult for the workforce to diversify quickly enough to match the speed of the quickly-diversifying student body over time.

So we need to not only patch up all the holes in the teacher pipeline, but we would

actually have to do some type of affirmative action, type of selection and retention policies, to make workforce diversity a possibility within a generation. Otherwise, based on the numbers that we are looking at, it's just not happening.

And so what we do need -- while we wait for a diverse -- a more diverse workforce to develop, I argue that we need to be thinking about policies that we could put in place, that gives students a more divers public education experience now, even without the workforce diversity being there quite yet.

And so we need to get creative with solutions, and here are a couple of potential solutions, number one, we could make sure that other adults in the school buildings are diverse, which may be easier to achieve in the near future. So we could think of administrators teaching peer professionals, librarians, gym coaches, education leaders, basically any other adults in the building that develop and maintain relationships with students to help them promote and learn more in the classroom.

Another idea would be to better train and provide professional development to -- about subtle biases among teachers and looking at the dynamics between students and teachers. Of course, many of the biases that teachers hold, these are going to be unintentional biases. I'm not implicating anybody of being intentionally biased about the way they are interacting with their kids, but by talking about and becoming aware of these implicit biases that may arise, educators might be able to put solutions into place that help to mitigate those biases, and look for creative solutions to stop those biases from arising or to counter situations where they could unintentionally arise.

MS. WONG: Great. And Peggy, what about you?

MS. McLEOD: Well, why don't I take that and talk about Latinos, and Latino education, and more precisely the demographic imperative that Latino education and Latino children pose for this country. And maybe to set the context we can talk a little bit about what are some of the numbers of Latinos. Right now, about a quarter of all students in United States, a quarter of all students in the United States, a quarter of kids in early childhood programs are Latinos. 32 percent of kids from the ages of zero to two are dual language learners, which means that they are hearing another, or speaking another language in their home.

However, there continue to be serious gaps in Latino access to early childhood program.

Not only is access a problem, but access to high quality program is a serious problem for our community. The gaps, even though the enrollment of Latino kids in early childhood programs grew from one-third participation to 52 percent between 2007 and 2012, it still lags considerably behind, behind other groups.

A good thing is that last week the White House issued, for the first time, a policy statement on Dual Language Learners, which suggested or talked about the research that shows the appropriate programming for these kids in two languages, is the better way to go in terms of pedagogy.

It's also the better way to go in terms of family ties, when you stop speaking your native language. You are not able to communicate with your grandparents anymore, and you probably a lot of you have experienced it yourselves. And so maintaining that first language is really important, and then there's an economic opportunity there that we just have not tapped into. All these immigrants that come in with another language, and we think that our job is to take that language away and replace it with English. And it's increasingly dumb idea to do this considering the global economy in which we operate. So that was a really good thing to happen.

In K-12 again, a quarter of all students are Latinos, as you know in several states it's over half of the students are Latinos. And good news is that recently the latest graduation rates came out 76.3 percent, the highest it's ever been for Latinos. Dropout rates have gone down considerably. In fact that graduation rate actually exceeds the national rate of improvement. So, we are improving, the Latino kids are improving the graduation rates at a higher pace than any other group.

The bad news, 11 percent of states graduate less than 7 percent of Latinos. And there continues to be on NAPE both in the reading and math scores, there continues to be significant gaps of over 20 points in fourth grade and eighth grade between Latinos -- between Hispanic kids and white kids. And so, there is still significant gaps in terms of other kids.

In higher ed, Latinos now represent the largest minority on campuses, of course as the high school graduation rates have increased, the college enrollment rates have also increased, so right now there is a lot of Latinos in colleges in the United States. The bad news, they are not graduating in four years. First of all they are enrolling predominantly in two-year institutions, and then the retention rates are very low. So, you know, there's still significant lag there in achieving college graduation.

MS. WONG: How about you, Gerard?

MR. ROBINSON: Disparities in education are real. The Civil Rights data that was produced yesterday shocked some people, for others it was a yawn. This is 2016. If we take that data and link it to what the Government Accountability Office released May 17th, 62 years after the Supreme Court ruled in Bravo v. Board, they found something very similar. Some were shocked, some yawned.

If we want to have an honest conversation about racial disparities, we often have the conversation of white/black score difference; Hispanic/white difference. We rarely have conversations about a gap that exists: Asian/white. I hear a few "amens" out there. But even when you look at Asian-white, within the Asian population there are disparities, and yet we refer to the Asian students as "the model minority."

You obviously have not spoken to a lot of H'mong families, who have a lot of challenges. I'm not saying that members of the H'mong community are not excelling, because many are. Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Eurasians, others, there is a difference within groups. We rarely talk about the White differences in achievement. I live in Virginia, I'm proud to say that we have one of the best public school systems in the United States.

I'm happy to say that we have a number of our graduates who go to great institutions, state and private. If you look at Virginia and you look at the number of people age 25 and older, who at least have a bachelor's degree, arguably we find ourselves number 7 in the nation, being the 7th smartest in the country, and we cheer. And yet if you take a physical horseshoe, and you put it on the map of Virginia, where we physically have a horseshoe, where there's a great deal of poverty, a great deal of socioeconomic challenges, and a great deal of economic and educational challenges.

If you take the horseshoe, and you made its own state, it would rank 50th in terms of achievement, and in the bottom tier for socioeconomic parity in the same state. And this impacts a lot of low-income and working-class white families. It's tough to have the conversations without also talking about white families, so for me, we would have an intra race conversation, that's part one.

Part of the challenge with dealing with discrepancies, depends on how you define it. Here is a perfect example. Our American population would make up 5 percent of the world, and we make up 35 percent of the Nobel Laureates. When we say how did that happen? We call it American Exceptionalism, and I think there are many exceptional things about America.

When African-American students make up 16 percent of the public school population, and make nearly 40 percent of the suspensions, what do we call that? A statistical anomaly. Interesting, I bet you wouldn't say that about the 35 percent for Nobel Laureates. We have to be honest and get serious about defining that the problem is and what it is not. And so for me, I'm still optimistic that 62 years removed from Bravo v. Board, we are stronger; we've got some better results than we would have had without that decision. Are there challenges still? Absolutely! But public policy alone won't change it and we cannot expect our public schools to do it alone.

I apply support, what I call the civil society approach, where you bring in faith-based communities, nonprofits, for profits, and others, who can say, what can we do to wrap our arms around schools, teachers educators and families to help the process? So, for me, it's a definition challenge.

MS. WONG: And just to piggy-back off of what you are saying about Asian-Americans, the DOE only recently decided to disaggregate data on Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders, so until now, a native Hawaiian student would be bracketed in the same groups as Indians do then, and that data really glossed over a lot of the nuances. So I think that's, you know, a really important point. And DeRay, what's your answer to that?

MR. MCKESSON: Yes, I fundamentally think of this work as justice work, that that is absolutely so much of the work of the movement, but we know of the disparities that black kids in America have always faced have been so different, and have been so deeply rooted in the racist history of the country. When I think about this, it is tinged by my own experience as a teacher, you know, I taught sixth grade math, and as a senior leader in two public school districts.

I was a chapter leader for the EFT in New York City, and worked in children's home, worked in afterschool, like I believed in all those things. But I'll say that that I worry about a lot of things, when we think about this, I think there has to be a real commitment to public education. I think that we've seen -- I think charter schools are an important, an important part of the puzzle, if we think what a charter means is this idea that if we lower constraints that should increase innovation, and if we increase innovation it actually leads to increased results. I think that's at the root of what the charter school idea is, whether you like that in practice or not.

Again, when that's not happening, like I think we struggle. When we see entire school

districts sort of move to, in effort to privatize, or whatever, and like the results are not actually there for our kids, I think that's like a real challenge, and I think that we've seen that across the country. And I do think that, you know, sort of pushing on this idea, that the achievement gap, the language of it, I think it focuses on black people partly because this country's relationship to black people has been so -- has been so different, and I think that in that there's an understanding that if we address that head-on, that other groups will also benefit too, right.

And I think that's like a real thing. When I think about sort of how we -- I that we spend a lot of work in -- you know, I spend most of my time talking about the police, and Lord knows we talk about the problems there. So what does it look like to talk about solutions, and do those buckets look like? I think it's divided in three buckets, one is around classrooms. I think if the question becomes, how do you make sure that every kid has a great teacher every day, and how do we do it at scale? I think that's at the heart of what this work is.

The first bucket is deeply rooted in classrooms, and that's about how do we find the best teachers, how do we train the best teachers and how do we retain the best teachers, like I think that that is -- that is at work. What we know to be true; is not only there are teacher shortages, but very few districts across the country actually have a mechanism to hire teachers well. Like it is, you know, it's like a black hole in terms of hiring teachers.

I think in Baltimore we hired about 800 teachers a year, in Minneapolis we hired about 400 teachers a year, very few districts make it easy, like if you apply as a candidate, and go through the system, I mean it's not easy, it's much harder than it has to be. And then when you think about Teacher Prep Programs, you know, I was a Teach For America Corps Member, I've never been an employee to Teach for America, that's not -- you know, like I get all these articles about my affiliation with Teach For America. But I will say for all the critics of Teacher For America—which they should be criticized for things, it's an imperfect organization—is that it is an indictment of Teach Prep Programs that somebody who's trained at six weeks does as well as somebody who is trained in four years.

That's not an indictment to Teach For America, when what we think about the results. And how do we have more programs that are actually, like, recruit people and prepare people to do well. I think a lot of somebody who is hired and has managed staffing in two public school districts, it's really

hard when we look at our university partners, where every single person gets a 4.0, everybody got an A, I'm calling around trying to figure out who is the better teacher. Everybody is great. And you are like, okay. Well, that is interesting, when I'm getting like 80 résumés from one program, 100 résumés, and literally every single person on the program had a 4.0.

Like what that means for the way that we prepare, and the way that we would match candidates with schools, is like actually really difficult at the district level. And again, like, we experience, someone talked about teacher turnover, we have about 10 percent teacher turnover a year, a lot of teachers, I needed to hire in a way at scale, that is actually really hard for most districts, definitely big districts.

The second is about schools, and how do you make sure are fit environments for kids. I think so much about it is like the culture work, and I've seen districts -- I think about in Minneapolis, you know, if you remember years ago, a couple years ago, two or three years ago, we had that consent decree where we couldn't suspend kindergarteners anymore, it was like one of the biggest pieces of news. And one of the hard things about that, while I agree with that, that makes sense to me, is that what we found in our schools, is that some people, all of a sudden, everybody was like, restorative justice, right? Like every school is restorative justice.

And I'm sitting here, like I was the teacher, restorative justice actually requires a strong community at the beginning. Right? Like you don't walk into a school like, "restorative justice!" And that's what people started to do, they are like "restorative justice," like, what, this is a nightmare, that's not it. And how do we actually like support schools to think about culture in a way that's true to that school, that is culturally relevant, that makes sense, that has the right incentives, and I would sit in meetings and, you know, the polar bucks or whatever, like the dollars, and teachers would be like, that enforces capitalism.

You are like, yo, this is -- I don't know what behavior is going look like in your classroom, like we have to actually have real conversations about this, and I do worry about some of the things that really popular like restorative justice. Not because I worry about it as a tool, I think it's really powerful, I also know that it requires really strong community to be built upon. Like you don't get kids in a circle to talk about penalties if you, like, can't get them to sit down; like that doesn't work. And I think that people have become really theoretical about some of the work in education and that worries me.

But there about systems, I will say that my bias is about system work. I believe programs as somebody who worked in one of the largest after school programs in the country. Went back to Baltimore, opened one, I believe in that stuff, and what I've seen happening in too many cities, especially places like Baltimore, is that programs come in, and they do all this, this mildly-okay work, outcomes don't really change, but the focus on programs actually shifts the focus away from systems, like people sort of stop fighting for system change.

Because they are like, we've got that great after-school program on reading, and you are like, well, the school system is actually really, really poor at teaching kids how to read, and like you need to keep pressing them, and that great little, like, you know, 25-person reading program is amazing, but it's not a solution to scale. And like we have to figure out how to do both and in the work that I think that sometimes the language for programming sort of veers too far, and people lose focus on the systems.

The last things I say is, you know, I think that we -- some of the things that worry, I think that like the Opt-Out Movement worries me, with the impact that it will have on Black kids and kids of color, in general. I get that this push -- I get that some people are like testing is “answer here”, right. I think that when you ask parents though, it's like, you know, my kids should go to a good school, is what parent would say, and that I should be able to understand what good means. Like I think that is real.

And the question become like how do we operationalize that in a way that doesn’t sort of unduly burden teachers, and that really gives people information that they can act on, and I think that that’s where the work is, but I think that what is real about No Child Left Behind, and all the data that came out about subsets, is that we just wouldn’t know about so subsets if we didn’t have that data and we need that.

And I've seen too many people in community sort of say, well, we knew it was bad, and da-da-da, and they have these stories, which are really powerful, and I’m a believer in stories. The Movement is based on stories, I get it, but sometimes we need to be able to, like, drill down to the kid levels, so that we can actually support people in ways, and we'll really close gaps. And we think about the gaps and the reality is that we've left these gaps fester for so long.

So I don't know what it looks like if we actually don't get everybody at a grade level, as like a concrete strategy. Then there are things like Baltimore, where 40 percent of the adults cannot

functionally read. They are like, the K-12 issue is only a part of the puzzle in a place like Baltimore, and they are like, that many adults who can't read, is wild. You know, like we could bring every industry we want to the city, and like, that many adults not being able to read, is like a really wild thing.

So I think that most of the solutions that I think will have impact are probably like not the most sexy things. Things like home-visiting programs, where we give kids libraries, I think those sort of things will be the right things, and we think about reparations, which I know is like a hot topic word for people, but sort of reframing, is this idea of “acknowledge and repair.”

And what it means to focus on the deep racial history in the country is like an acknowledgement that I think changes the way we think about repair. So as a black person, as a black man, you know, I'm a third-generation reader. My great-grandmother could sign her name, and she was incredibly proud of that. And what does it mean to be from family where I’m the third generation of people who can read, that like means something in the way that we think about how to prepare people, and that requires us to understand our racial history in a deeper way.

MS. WONG: Okay. While it's clear from what a lot of -- what was said is that a big piece of the puzzle in solving this issue involves teachers. And you know folks highlighted a number of problems - diversity, retention, turnover. Another really big challenge when trying to close these achievement gaps, is figuring out how to get the highest quality teachers into the highest poverty and most struggling schools. Some districts have tried bonuses or other types of incentives, but I think, you know, from what I've read, those have had pretty limited success. In your opinion how do we get those teachers into the struggling schools?

MR. HANSEN: I think you are looking at me, and I will --

MS. WONG: Everyone, I want everyone to answer, we'll start with you.

MR. HANSEN: Okay. First off my assertion is that by paying teachers more for teaching in high-needs schools, that’s commonly referred to as combat pay, and in general those kinds of incentives, they can work if they are large enough, and if they are -- if they are consistent enough over time. By and large what we've generally seen is that there is a lot of resistance to paying teachers differential amounts because of the schools in which they are teaching. And so there is generally union resistance to that premise.

But I personally see no reason that we shouldn't and I feel like that that would be a step in the right direction. Of course, other things that we could that are not necessarily directly related to paying teachers based on where they are teaching, we could also just think of, perhaps, giving different teachers different roles in those schools.

And so, for example, if we wanted to hire more master teachers, like we have an innovative school staffing system in these particular schools, where there, we only allow master teachers to come to fill 25 percent of positions, for example, and master teachers come with, you know, a certain set of certain set of criteria, in order to be there, it becomes a selective thing. Anybody can do it, but only specific schools are eligible for those kinds of positions.

And so we could try to be a little bit creative, but I think we could perhaps even try to get -- we could get around some of the collective bargaining resistance to this differential pay, and I think that would do a great deal to attract and keep good teachers there.

MS. WONG: Peggy, what do you think? Particularly, and I there is a shortage of ELL teachers and teachers who speak a foreign language; so particularly with those types of teachers, which as you've illustrated are pretty critical to supporting English Language Learners. What are your thoughts on that?

MS. McLEOD: Well, I think the sad kind of a paradox for the Latino community is the fact that we, number one, in every poll Latinos identify as number one or number two, education is a big issue. And so teachers typically in the countries where we come from are held in very high regard, you know, whatever the teacher says is what goes at home. I mean, certainly that way with me. I mean, if the teacher said anything to me, it didn't matter what my opinion was, that's what happened.

And so it's interesting that more Latinos don't go into education. I think it's because education is so devalued here, so when you get to college, when you list -- the last 10 years have been a total assault on teachers. You know, we've managed to devalue the profession to such a point where, if I was a teacher, I would not want to become a teacher. It's gone -- it's an increasingly difficult job, it's even more difficult if you are teaching certain groups of kids who might have additional needs if you are working in a high-poverty school.

And so I think we are facing a real crisis, because we don't really know it right now, but

there's increasing numbers of teachers retiring, there are a lot of states that have slashed their budgets, and so are paying their teachers poorly, and can't get enough teachers. If you go to Kansas, all their teachers have left and gone to Missouri because they get paid better there. So I think we have this huge problem. I think that the teacher pay issue, is enormous and I think that the solution is to start teachers --

When I start teaching, you know, you started making $30,000, and maybe at the end of your career, you'd retire, and you were making $90,000, which is a pretty good deal, right. But meanwhile you had to go through this long ladder. What happens with physicians, for example, they graduate and they don't start at $30,000 and then work their way up to $200,000. They start at a much higher level, and then the curve to go up to the highest earnings, isn't that long as it is for teachers.

So, in traditional public schools, and even in charter schools, we radically have to reform the way teachers are paid. Teachers don't work until 3:00 o'clock, like people think, and then go home. That just doesn't happen, and any of you who have ever taught know that that's the case. And so I don't think that we can make teaching attractive to anyone in this country, unless we have some basic changes in the way look at teachers, the way we value the work that they do, because it's the most important work, and in this country we just don't value that.

You know, we want to look at people who are singers or, you know, sports people, and whatever. I think we have to have a radical departure about the way we talk about teachers, the way we do teacher preparation programs, and everything else related to bring people into the profession.

MS. WONG: Gerard, do you have any thoughts on getting good teachers into the struggling schools?

MR. ROBINSON: So, there was an evaluation of a program in the State of North Carolina that provided additional money to teachers who would go into the hard-to-serve areas, and results show that for the teachers who were able to participate there was actually an uptick in student results, and so that was a good sign. But more importantly those students were -- those teachers were more likely to stay. So, there are examples out there that pointing in the right direction, that's number one.

Number two, we know that students who are in classes with National Board Certified teachers actually do pretty well. And there was a debate over whether all teachers should have it or not.

We know that it's a club that you have to earn your way into. And so I would like to see ways for state law makers, not only to provide the financial support to Nationally Board Certified teachers, but also incentives for them to either transfer to hard-to-serve schools, or if they are in a school already, to stay.

But those answers really are about quality, the reality is, the fertility rate, and the fecundity rate in the United States is not strong enough to keep with the student rate and the number of teachers we'll need. So rather than us trying to birth teachers, we need to invent teachers.

Here is an example. There are universities in the country that have innovation labs, and through those innovation labs, they create many things. I know of a university currently who is relationship, I'll just talking to the military, where they can actually scan someone, and create a hologram or 3D vision of to the person, and that person, for all intents and purposes, are in the same room.

So let's take DeRay who teaches who teaches math, we know we need more math teachers, I'm going to scan DeRay, I'm going to put him in the computer, and through the technology we have today, not tomorrow, we can have him appear in 600 classrooms simultaneously, teaching math. We can do it for science; they still lack components so we need aspects there. But for the social sciences and others we can do it, when you look at television and what we can do, to take people across space and time, we are going to have to do that to take our best and brightest teachers, reinvent them and spread across the country.

MS. WONG: DeRay, especially as a recent teacher, what are your thoughts?

MR. MCKESSON: I think that one of the interesting challenges of the discussion we see -- think of is about like the small school movement, which I agree with, I think it's important that we open up more schools, in general, but it begs the questions of like who are going to be those leaders. Kind of like it presupposes that there's like this great bench of principals out there, and that is not true. And that makes you think of, like, you couldn't pay me like $20,000 more to work for a bad principal.

It was like; teaching is already hard enough, right? Like working with the kid was a challenge, and like it was joyful and amazing and that was a challenge I chose. Like crazy adults, it like you, you know, like a couple more dollars, like, wasn't it. So like it may seem to me both in my own experience and as a District administrator, that like, incentivizing with money like you can -- you know, people want to work -- teachers want to work with good teachers and good principals, that's like it.

And like how do we scale that and sell that story to them better? Like I think about Minneapolis, we could get some teachers to move to really tough schools, because they were like; I'm gonna follow that leader, and I'm like, cool. One of the hard things, is there's not a strong bench of school leaders that people want to follow in those schools, and I think that's like a real challenge, and if we don't figure that out, and like it is, you know, people often talk about like our most inexperienced teachers go into the hardest schools, and which is, I mean the data reflects that and that is real.

I think that is a consequence though of like, you can't convince other people to go there, not because the kids are tough, necessarily, but because the work environment is a place that people are like, nah, I'm not going to do that. And people are willing I mean, to take some risks when they are strong leaders, and there's like a really good crop of teachers already. But in the absence of that, I think are like, we are not going to do this.

Also, like I will not downplay. Like it is incredible, the systems that most districts have to bring people on, or like to look at applications, is actually, it's not very helpful, like it's really hard, and that has to be easier. Like I think about some incredible teachers who we had to work really hard to match them with schools, and we did it, because there was a priority, but we missed a lot of people, too.

So, you think about what happens when there are some black men who are teaching and there are not a lot of black men teaching. Like how do we flag and put them in places, like make sure they interview with teachers, schools that might be better fits. Like that whole matching process at the district level, especially for big districts, is not very well done, and mostly, you think of a place like D.C., and D.C., Chancellor Henderson manages schools, right, she's not managing buses, IT, like she's managing schools. And in some of the districts, you think about Baltimore, you know, I was managing, I'm trying to recruit a lot of great teachers, but I'm recruiting welders, I'm recruiting electricians, we are doing like a whole other thing too.

Which means that our focus on those schools is like a part of it, and that was a really important to us. We had to make sure that somebody would, like fix the stairs when they are broke, and there a lot of big districts that really struggle with how to do that work well, and I think that's real. And then, again, I don't think districts recruit nationally well at all. Most districts recruit hyper locally. Places like Baltimore, places like D.C., places like New York, sort of benefit from people making career changes.

So, you know, people in human capital will always tell you that if you hire somebody during the summer, it's like scary, right. Like the summer teachers are the teachers who couldn't get hired otherwise. That's like -- whether it's true or not, that is what people will say in the work. And these regions sort of benefit because there's normally an influx of talent because people make career changes, so we can sort of hire differently, but the hiring process is normally, really early, right.

It's like April, May. April-May is when a lot of the sort of best teachers make choices about where they are going to be next, but very few districts are actually revved up and ready to make hiring decisions in April or May, and I think that that is also like part of our challenge. I think it's like actually pretty logistical.

MS. WONG: And quickly before we wrap up, I wanted to ask each of you about one of the latest buzz-words that's really popular, is grit, and kind of similar to restorative justice, you know, it seems like a nice idea, but whether or not, it's really the panacea that it's often described as, is far from clear. So, in a minute or less can each of you give your opinion on grit and whether it's really the life hack we all need.

MR. HANSEN: Do you want to start off?

MS. McLEOD: Oh, sure. I don't -- I mean, yes, I've heard the word grit and I think– in theory it sounds great. I think there is some things you will want to inculcate in our children that would allow them to demonstrate qualities of grit, but I'm not sure that that's like an answer to everything. I think as many things and to -- you know, I bring up this for many, many years, and it's just, you know, it's just like another buzz word.

MS. WONG: I wonder what it's going to be next year.

MS. McLEOD: Right, it will be something else in a couple of years.

MS. WONG: Yeah.

MR. ROBINSON: One good thing about grit is it has a lot of middle-class people, particular philanthropists, coming up with one word to explain what they are trying to do, instead of trying to say it with two or three sentences, so that's a good thing. The other challenge is, you only talk about grit if you don't have it. You know, a lot of times conversations about school reform and the words we use, are really cocktail conversations for the materially-comfortable, because the people who actually

have to do this don't call it grit, they call it life, but I'm glad it's around.

MS. WONG: So your take, or --

MR. MCKESSON: Yeah. I'll personally say -- you know, I think about -- I taught in East New York, Brooklyn, Star City, one of the largest housing projects in the country, it was so big that we had our own zip code, and it was really important that we were really doubtful about teaching our kids like how to persevere through some of the academic challenges, and I taught math. So I would think these kids were super math-phobic, they fail one test, and it was the world ending, and I'm like, it will be okay really.

How do I actually like, give you the skills so you can, like, get to the next thing too, right? And you are eleven. So I'm really trying to teach you like these concrete strategies that will allow you to come back tomorrow and experience success. Because so much of why our kids struggle it's not because they don't care or aren't smart, but like school isn't always a place where people feel successful, and like its teachers, like how do we actually make it a place, like in math, it was like how do I make sure that you feel successful every single day, even when you screw up, and you get everything wrong, and da-da, and like, how did I get that success.

And I think that the grit conversation like gets us closer to being intentional about pushing kids in a world where they can, like, come back tomorrow. And the classroom is a place where failure like has to be a part of how people learn. You know, I've never failed as much as I ever have a teacher, and kids definitely do as a part of their growth process, and I think that grit is like an important entrance into that.

MS. WONG: Mike?

MR. HANSEN: Sure. I do echo many of the comments that were already said, and one thing I will add though, is that -- it's also I feel like it's, it is helpful in that focusing on grit, or focusing on something that's not test score related, I think it has helped to shape this conversation to other important values of education that are part of public schools, that we do value other -- these social emotional kinds of outcomes in students.

Now, I will also add a caveat to that, that it's not entirely clear the role of schools or teachers in how those are developed and I think that's a really interesting research problem to look at,

and so in that sense I'm a little skeptical of current policy focuses in trying to sort of rush into put those into our accountability systems right away. Just because I think there's a lot of caution warranted, but I think it's an exciting new development and worth paying attention to.

MS. WONG: And it's interesting now that with ESSA a lot of districts will be measuring social and emotional learning, and how that's going to play out will be fun to watch. And that, unfortunately, wraps up the Q&A portion, so now I'm going to bring it out to the audience. And if you could just say your name and what organization you represent, and keep your questions brief, and please make them questions, not statements. So, we are going to have people walking around with mics. Let's start with man in the pink shirt.

SPEAKER: Raspberry --

MS. WONG: Oh, raspberry, sorry.

MR. COLLINS: Donald Collins, University of Maryland, University College. My question to the whole panel really is about moving beyond sort of this taking the micro and making the macro around teacher quality and teacher effectiveness, let's all have hero teachers in the field, to really think about more broadly and sort of the history of the achievement gap, and when it's actually close. Marian Wright Edelman wrote an article about 44 years ago, looking at how the achievement gap closed during the tail-end of the civil rights period, as a result, of all things, school desegregation.

And during the years of '70s and '80s, to actually kind of closed a bit, quite a bit as a matter of fact between whites and blacks, whites and Latinos, et cetera, et cetera. I'm asking in so many words to talk about school desegregation and how that can play a role in taking a lot of the things that we are talking about, experimenting in this here, bringing this to scale there, and talking about structural issues like segregation and schools, residential and otherwise, and how that deal with a lot of the achievement gap issues. Thank you.

MR. HANSEN: Let me address that one first. I've done some thinking on this, and some writing on this. As you state -- And what was your name, again?

MR. COLLINS: Donald.

MR. HANSEN: Donald. And as Donald stated, desegregation of course, there were orders for desegregation following Brown v. Board of Education, desegregation peaked in the late '80s,

and since then there has -- it's been documented that schools have been slowly resegregating over time. We are not quite to the level of segregation that was present at the time of Brown v. Board of Education, but we are actually closer to that, than what we were at the peak. And part of it, so the question is, is if we were in -- are in more integrated schools, are our students going to be better off?

And the short answer to that question is yes, and the slightly longer answer to that question is, if we are looking at it through the lens of teacher quality, we are better off by being in this integrated school environment, but we are actually not going to be hugely better off. And the reason is because while we do have documented evidence of gaps in licensed professionals, or experienced professionals across different school settings. Those are gaps in characteristics and qualifications, and not quality, and quality and characteristics, they actually don't line up very well, and if you are looking at quality the gaps are significantly smaller than what we expected.

And so while going into an integrated school environment, does make a difference, it was a difference -- it was on the order of closing the achievement gap by about 3 percentage points, based on the study that I was involved with, this teacher quality distribution study, and it was funded by IES.

And so, does it make a difference? The answer is yes, it doesn't make nearly as big of a difference. Now that's of course just the teacher quality dimension, and so there are of course school funding dimensions, peer characteristics that also go into this, that could also be part of gains that could be made, but desegregation alone, I feel like -- at least through teachers is going to be a relatively minor piece of the puzzle. And a good start, but a minor piece.

MS. McLEOD: My plan for closing the achievement gap, has always been to make everyone middle-class at least, because then you really eliminate the achievement gap. And I'm not being flip about this. I really believe that that is a solution to it. And, you know, the economist in me – that's what I studied in undergraduate, says that if you change fiscal policy, if you change economic policy, if you change tax policies, you really can make a big difference in making sure that everybody has a decent living wage and a decent place to live.

Because, you know, as Donald alluded to, a lot of this is residential segregation, and the desegregation of schools has been fleeting if you look at it over decades. And so the impact of that desegregation is only going to last, is going to be very limited, so we really have to have an economic --

eliminate the economic segregation in which many of our communities live in.

MS. WONG: The woman right here?

SPEAKER: Once you get out of the large cities, particular in the suburbs, school boundaries are set by geography, and geography is set by income inequality, and so since part of this discussion was to be at the national level, what do any of you think, either the Department of Education, Housing, Transportation, should do to press local jurisdictions where you have some schools with 80 percent of the kids in school in reduced lunch programs, and other schools in the same district with none.

So, my question to you all is at the federal level, do you see that as a problem, and do you see anything that the next administration, whatever that is, could do to press for more open school systems?

MR. ROBINSON: So, you have approximately 22 states that have open enrolment laws, which allow you to go beyond one school zone area to attend another school that's better-performing. I wouldn't recommend that the Department of Education, Transportation or Housing dictate that, if there is to be a federal role, it should be, maybe to give an incentive grant to states to say, you know what, I would like to expand the program. Other than financial incentives, or a grant piece, I wouldn't recommend the federal government get involved.

MS. WONG: The gentleman back here in the blue sweatshirt, the right corner?

MR. WILSON: Hi. I'm Charlie Wilson from Ohio State University College of Law where I teach education -- on educational policy. I have two very quick questions, first of all we have enormous gap between what wealthy parents spend on enrichment for their children and what people in the bottom quintile can spend on enrichment. Is that one of the causes of the achievement gap?

And my second question is, would it attract teachers, high quality teachers in the high-need schools, to offer, instead of more pay, a sabbatical? Professors like me every six years it's such hard work teaching these 160 kids who want to be there out of 5,000 applicants that I need a rest every five years, it seems to me K-through 12 teachers, teaching at a high-need school, it would have an enormous ability to attract students -- that teachers would really love to do that.

They would come back so energized after their sabbatical, and it wouldn't be cheap, but that I think would attract a different kind -- I guess I'd want a response to whether it will attract high-quality

teachers into high-needs K through 12 schools.

MR. MCKESSON: So, starting with the second question I think that -- I'm not -- So I think sabbatical -- and there are some charter schools that do that and I think that's really interesting. I think, again, I think that's also like a different, I think that that might solve the burnout question, I don't think it solves how to get our highest performing teachers in struggling schools. I firmly believe that people go for good colleagues and the principles and it's like, you can't -- the school environment is so tough in some of our toughest schools, it's like none of that is going to have me sit through.

I think there are some schools, there's a school here with a principal walking in while you were teaching and post your notes, and give you feedback during your lesson, like, I don't want to work there. Do you know what I mean? And there's no amount of -- there's no amount of, like give me four years I'm going to get out. Like this is like wild place to be. So that's I think the -- About the racial, wealth gap, yes, and it's an acknowledgement that like black people are -- like the racial -- black people aren't poor because it just like we are lazy to -- like that's not real.

So it's like, how do we acknowledge that and then do it, it will appear, that honors the injustice that was done. So what will it mean to give every single kid in that birth cohort of like 7,000, their first set of library -- their first books when they are -- Like that would actually be like a corrective, sort of at the scale level, for what it means that there are all these people, like, who can't afford books, right; or that like --

And I think that that has to be -- reparations is like -- you know, I don't talk about often, because people just lose it about it, but it's like how do we, like, acknowledge the injustice, and then do some, like systemic things that actually repair. I think about, you know, when I was a teacher, where this parent come in and her kid read on a second-grade reading level as a seventh grader.

She was like, I read -- he reads every night, and da-da-da, and we are sitting here like, he is definitely at a second-grade reading level, and he is actually really fluent, right? He totally can look at words and repeat them, can't comprehend a lot, like he has no clue what the words mean, but he can, like, repeat them. And some of our work tend to be building her capacity, to do things at home, and like it was easier to teach her, like a couple of questions she could ask him every night, that are like comprehension questions, and like we got him up to grade level in a year, but it took like real work

between us.

And like, how do we actually do that work with parents in like in a really, really coordinated way? Not in some sort of random program, and none of that -- Like as the actual work of district, I think is like real work, and for all of Minneapolis public schools' faults, and Lord knows it's a struggling district, with a huge achievement gap, is the commitment to educating adults is actually real. We have 100 different languages spoken in our schools, and we did a lot of work with their parents to like equip them. Again, the achievement gap is still big. Like what does it look like to make those commitments?

MR. ROBINSON: To the first part of your question I would say, yes. We know there's research about a 30,000-word gap between families who fall into your first category, and challenging families, and so if I'm to take this example, one thing that we can do, is that a lot of poor people actually own a phone, or some type of hand-held device.

Instead of physically shipping books, which cost and all the things that come with it, actually have an app where you can send the book to a home, the parent could either read to the child or if the parents are having challenges with the reading as well, guess what, your phone could read to the child, and you could even find language and diction to either fit your ethnicity, your interest or your lifestyle and move forward. So there are ways of dealing with that.

MS. WONG: And if I could chime in on the extra-curricular piece. I'd like to call it the activity gap, and one other promise that wealthy parents they are spending more on their kids than ever before. You know, parents are -- the parents who have the money are paying for all kinds of enriching activities for kids, and so that's also contributing to the gap, because they are pulling further and further away from the poorer kids.

MR. HANSEN: A good point. And just a final note on that piece, is what many may not realize is that the achievement gap between races has actually diminished pretty progressively over the last several decades, but the achievement, or the achievement gap between poverty, or between income levels has actually expanded over time, and it's now greater than the racial gaps.

MS. WONG: This woman in the black blazer, yeah?

MS CLARK: I'm Julia Clark, from the National Science Foundation, and I can't believe

that after over 60 years with the Brown v. Board, we are still talking about the achievement gap. I did write a book two years ago on closing the achievement from the international perspective, where we looked at different countries who had gaps and what big countries were doing to close the gap, and when I look at the achievement gap, and when I look at education in the schools, there are two major things I think contributed to the gaps, and that's equity and assets.

And I know you focus more today on teachers and quality teachers, they are important, that's key, but there are a lot of other factors. There's a lack of rigorous curriculum for African-American and Latinos and American-Indians, all students. There's a lack of funding in those schools as well, equipment, they don't have equipment like other schools do, and you did mention about the lack of training of teachers. We do also have digit to divide. So we have less access to a lot of things that are in the school that contribute to that achievement gap, and we do fund projects at the National Science Foundation, the after-school programs and teacher preparation and in service.

And it's not that these students are, and students a low socioeconomic also have problems, and it's not that these students can't do, when we provide enriching, innovative type of activities for these students. They can do just as well or better than many other schools, and we have one example of that. It's that in Bronx School of Science in New York and one of the projects I've funded. Took students from the inner city school, and placed them in the Bronx School of Science, and they did just as well or better than some of the other schools. So I think it's a lack of opportunity for many of our minority students.

SPEAKER: Hi, I'm Algerie and I used to be on the School Board in Howard County and I currently work in tech in San Francisco. I'm really curious about the whole idea of access, specifically looking at gifted education and the role that that plays in heavily segregating schools. But you didn't really get to talk about that today, but I'm curious about the different road blocks that are given to a lot of students, for example, in Howard County, the school that I attended, it was a fairly diverse school, and I was one of two black students in AP classes.

And I didn't do well in the Gifted and Talented -- The Gifted and Talented test, and I pretty much failed it, and I ended up becoming an AP Scholar. So, what other methods are available, do you think, to identify particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and when you think about

access, my school had over 30 AP classes, so they are there, but I wouldn't be allowed to actually partake in them.

So imagine for some students, I don't think I'm an anomaly, I mean, there are so many students that have these situations, what else could we do to reduce those barriers. One of the things that I worked on was to remove waivers that were placed for students because that's what happened to me, but I don't think that that's the only problem there. So I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

MS. McLEOD: I think that for us, and in my organization, one of the things that we focused on consistently on over the years has been ensuring that all children have -- have access to high standards, because we feel that if you increase the level of standards and, you know, we support, for example, the Common Core state standards. Not as a political issue, but because these standards are benchmarked international standards.

And the structure of the standards themselves ensure that if they are carried out appropriately, kids will learn a much at a much higher level, so you really have to start almost from the beginning. I think the issue with gifted and talented programs, is that we've never ever be able to figure out how we get kids who are Latinos or African-Americans, and identify them for those programs.

And so we know that, you know, you look at a kid in third grade and you have lots of White kids being pushed into these programs, where their parents are actually taking them to classes, and preparing them, test Latino -- I mean, or black kids and they don't do as well. And yet at the end they are just as prepared, so we feel that having high standards, having really excellent curricula, and outstanding teachers, prepares everyone to be able to go on and participate in advanced courses when they are in high school, like you did.

MR. MCKESSON: On two things, one is, you know, the public conversation around differentiation is often about -- it's about like our middle performers. It's like how do we get the kids who are really struggling, to like meet some of these standards. We often don't talk about our kids who are doing really well in those classrooms, and like how do we make sure they continue to do really well, which is in and of itself like differentiation work, that's not easy especially in big classes. So I think that you are right, and we need to have more public conversation about that.

The second is that people often don't talk about the social cap, and I know when I was in

high school, like White parents will be walking in and be like, my kids gonna be in Algebra 2. My father would never walk into anybody's school. He would be like, whatever the teacher said, it was -- he was like, if the teacher calls, the teacher is always right. I'm like, Daddy that is nuts. But that how -- that was real for him, and I think that there had to be some structural fixes that we can do to that that might be burdensome, like what does it mean to flag every single kid and put them against this bar and see if they could --

Like I think I think that it might be sort of out of the ordinary, but I think that that might be the right thing. I think in Minneapolis, you know, we are not hiring teachers of color, it was really bad. And we made the commitment, we were like, we are going to interview every single teacher that applies, which was like a wild commitment, and it took us a -- it was not easy to do but we did it, and it changed the face of teaching in Minneapolis because we were just -- we were missing people.

Because their résumés, there were typos, there was all this stuff. And we are like, you can't even send it in right, like this rough, but we made this commitment, we were like, we were going to interview every single person who applies, and that was a burden for us, and we thought it was the right thing for kids, and like how do we make more of those bets when we think about like doing the right things for kids.

MR. ROBINSON: So, a few things. Number one, your story, you are not an anomaly, it's a story that people know. There's two scholars, one at Vanderbilt, one in Indiana, published a report I believe in the last two weeks to show that one of the strongest correlation between how many kids will get placed into gifted, it's having a black teacher.

That’s interesting because you are not going to radically make all the teachers Black in the United States and therefore get more kids in. But it's an interesting story to read because it raises the narrative that we should often think about where there's stereo-type bias or other factors, that’s number one.

Moving on to your point about students who graduate; a lot of the students who finish summa cum laude, magna cum laude, where kids who were gifted, but you also have students who graduated from college, thank the Lord, you know, these were the ones who -- these were the ones you overlook because they did not test well, but they were gifted. They had the grit or whatever anyone wants

to call it. There are some nuances that we could look at and change in policy, but that study is worth looking at.

MS. WONG: Unfortunately, we are out of time. Sorry folks, but look forward to engaging on Twitter, and I'm sure these folks would like to engage with you too. And thank you all for coming, it was a great discussion. Thanks for your questions. (Applause)

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