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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. HANSEN: Good morning. I'm Michael Hansen, senior fellow and director of the Brown Center on Education Policy here at the Brookings Institution. I welcome you today to join in our discussion on the future of school accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act. We'll be archiving the video of today's event, so anyone who wishes to view after today may do so through the Brookings.edu website.

The Every Student Succeeds Act was passed in December of last year with bipartisan support. This is the most current re-authorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act. No Child Left Behind's most distinctive feature of course was its mandate for states to administer standardized testing for all students in select grade and subjects and then holding schools accountable for annual yearly progress toward proficiency on these tests.

Due to the testing and accountability requirements under NCLB it was generally considered the peak of federal oversight in our public schools. The new law, referred to as E-S-S-A, or ESSA -- I'm not sure how the panelists will refer to it here, but it does not backtrack on the testing requirements of states, however it is a major sea change on the school accountability side. Important changes to the federal law for school accountability systems include the following: First, no more requirements for adequate yearly progress in schools. Second, no prescribed strategy specifying how or when states intervene in their lowest performing school. Third, a new requirement for states to include other measures of school performance and accountability systems that are not based on standardized tests. Of course these are not the only changes, but these are some of the most notable ones.

Combined all of these changes are significant because they represent the return of a significant amount of autonomy to states regarding the design and the consequences of their state's accountability system for their school. And so during today's panel we will hear from these three experts who have a wealth in experience in working either with or for state education agencies as they have

implemented school accountability under NCLB. And they will discuss how they expect this issue to play out in the coming years under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Our panelists -- and let me introduce them to you here -- first we have Arne Duncan on my far right, your far left. Arne Duncan, he is a nonresident senior fellow here in the Brown Center in Education Policy here at Brookings. Previously he served as U.S. secretary of education under President Obama for seven years, and prior to that he served as CEO in the Chicago Public Schools. Currently he is working in a new role as managing partner with the Emerson Collective. In the middle we have Hanseul Kang. Hanseul Kang is the District of Columbia state superintendent of education. She has served in this role for a year and a half and she came to D.C. from the state of Tennessee's department of education where she served most recently as chief of staff and part of the team that helped districts in Tennessee implement policies and supported them as they became one of the fastest improving states in the country. Ms. Kang is also a former high school teacher. And, finally, here closest to me is Chris Minnich. He is executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, CCSSO. Chris has worked in the executive director role since 2012 and as executive director Chris has ushered in a new strategic plan in which CCSSO is committed to making sure all students participating in our public education system, regardless of background, graduate prepared for college, careers, and life.

Arne Duncan will be moderating the conversation amongst the panel today, so I now turn the time over to you, Arne.

MR. DUNCAN: Thanks so much. I'm thrilled to be asking the questions rather than answering them. It's a much easier job. I like to play Oprah. And Chris has grilled me numerous times over the years, so I want to start with Chris and put him on the spot.

MR. MINNICH: Yeah, thanks. (Laughter)

MR. DUNCAN: And I look forward to having a conversation. We'll talk for a while

amongst ourselves and then open it up to the audience and take any questions you might have on anything.

So, Chris, maybe just, you know, sort of set the historical context a little bit, walk me back sort of pre-NCLB, what accountability was or wasn't for the nation, what worked, what didn't with NCLB, and a little bit about what you think may work or may not work with the new law.

MR. MINNICH: Thanks. And I just want to thank Brookings for pulling this together, and Arne and Hanseul for being part of this up here with me.

You know, the history is really interesting because I came into a state agency right at the beginning of No Child Left Behind. So that's when sort of I have cardinal knowledge. But I will tell you when I was in Oregon and I was in a state agency we had very little information on how our schools were doing prior to No Child Left Behind. We had tests at maybe like three -- I think it was grades three, five, and eight. We didn't even have a high school test at that point statewide. So we just didn't know how our schools were doing. We thought we were doing great, but we didn't have any information really. And so NCLB did a couple of important things. It gave us a whole lot of information on how schools were doing and it forced us to disaggregate the data and show us our gaps. And that's just huge for the country and it's something that we cannot overemphasize. It's in the current law, the new law, which is great. We cannot go back to a time where we don't have information on how schools are doing. And I don't think we're going to, but I think that's a risk and people are properly pushing us to think about how do we continue to provide good information back to teachers and students and parents.

I also think one of the challenges of No Child Left Behind is as state agencies we weren't great communicators of that information. So we had a lot of information but we didn't put that out in a way -- this is a generalization -- some states did better than others -- but we didn't put it out in a way that parents could engage with, that teachers could engage with. So, you know, three or four years into this and a school is not improving, a school would get a letter saying you need to come up with a plan, you

need to write a plan and send it in. And so the state would then approve that plan. But there was no real action on the other side of whether or not the plan was being implemented, whether there were resources to implement the plan. So it was largely an exercise in becoming transparent is how I would talk about No Child Left Behind.

I think the ESSA opportunity is to go beyond transparency, to go into the idea that it's not enough just to tell a school that they're not getting it done for kids, but we've got to do a better job of helping that school actually get better. If you look at the statistics the majority of schools that are in the low performing status in these states aren't improving fast enough. There are pockets of success and we need to learn from them. But I think the success of this law really relies on whether or not we can help schools that haven't been getting it done for kids.

I think we also have to understand there's a middle group of schools that may have big gaps. So they're getting it done for most of their kids, but there's a group of kids maybe that need some extra assistance. Those schools need to be focused on as well.

So I think you see that framework in the law, but this is really going to be on the states to step up and do this. And that's what our organization is working on. I'm really proud of what D.C. is doing and other states and I'll talk a little more later about which states I think are really doing a good job on this. But it's exciting to see the states have this opportunity, but I think people are right to question whether or not the states are going to step up because that's on the states to decide if we're going to be able to do this. And that's what we're working to try to do.

MR. DUNCAN: And, Hanseul, again before we sort of get into the nuts and bolts of the accountability stuff, do you see this amazing story of -- I think probably most folks live here -- but it went from very dysfunctional, very corrupt, interestingly not underfunded, significant resources, but just not getting it done for kids. And while D.C. by any measure has a long way to go I very proudly and loudly repeatedly talked about D.C. being the fastest improving district in the nation, which is no small feat,

because it was.

So give me a little bit of the 5 or 10 year sweep of where D.C. was, how you became the fastest improving district, and how do we keep that momentum going as we move forward?

MS. KANG: Absolutely. So as you said, I think there's so much to be proud of in D.C. in terms of the progress that has been made over time. I think what's really exciting about it is we've seen that progress in both DCPS, which is our traditional district that serves a little more than half of our students, and in our public charter schools which service just under half of our students. And to see that progress across sectors and driven by really different approaches and a range of approaches has been really exciting. We've seen sustained and significant progress on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the NAEP test, and we've seen that both on state level NAEP, that assesses all of our schools and all of our students, and also on the TUDA assessments, the Trial Urban District Assessment, which is specific to DCPS. And again, it's just a validation that that progress is really happening across the District of Columbia.

At the same time, as you said, we know we have a really long way to go. We see significant and persistent gaps that exist among different groups of our students and we also see that not enough of our students are on track for college and career readiness. On the first year of our PARCC assessment, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career, which we released last fall, we saw that about a quarter of our students were on track for college and career readiness across grades and subjects, and that is not nearly enough.

So we are excited about the progress that we've made, but we know we still have a really long way to go.

MR. DUNCAN: But take a minute and walk me through, because I'm always interested not in absolute results, but in growth or gain or lack thereof. So for you guys to be the fastest improving

district of large urban cities that's big in size, by definition that means you guys are doing some things differently than other districts around the nation.

So, again, over the past X number of years why do you think you're getting better faster than everybody else?

MS. KANG: I think the expectations we have for our students and for our educators have changed dramatically in recent years. So I had the benefit in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years of working in a role in D.C. where I was managing a team of instructional coaches who had teachers in both public charter schools and in DCPS schools. So I was spending a lot of time in classrooms during those years and got to see the work that was happening.

And then I stepped away and went to Tennessee for four years and coming back to the district now with the benefit of having just had that gap I was able to really see and feel viscerally the different type of teaching we were aiming for, teaching and learning we were aiming for in our classrooms. So I had the benefit of seeing the progress that's happened in D.C., not just in our data, but actually in what I see in classrooms. So I see teachers and students aiming for something very different than they used to. I see people reading real text in classrooms and writing about those real texts and talking with each other about those texts. In math classrooms I see not just sort of rote drilling of problems, but really people aiming for conceptual understanding and problem solving in a different way. And I think the ways in which our LEAs, our Local Education Agencies, have aimed for those different expectations, the approaches they've taken have varied, and I think that diversity and range of approaches is one of the strengths of D.C. That we have 64 different LEAs that have tried 64 different things, but it's been very exciting to see that consistent raising of expectations across the board.

MR. MINNICH: Yeah. Arne, can I get in on this?

MR. DUNCAN: Sure.

MR. HANSEN: Because I'm hesitant to talk about the standards with you sitting here, but I do think that we raised standards across the country. And the states did that and that was a big deal. Whether or not we think we're way past this conversation about higher standards, we aren't. Teachers are still learning these standards and in states where they have internalized the idea that kids have these higher expectations. We are seeing different results. When I visit schools in D.C. I see the teachers engaged in the standards in a different way than other places, that they know where they're going, they know their targets. And so granted all the politics around higher standards aside, we've changed the country's expectations by setting clear standards and going for them and helping our teachers get there.

I don't think there's a better way to say it than we've set higher expectations and kids are starting to hit those expectations. So I think it's a huge thing.

MR. DUNCAN: And, Chris, walk me through, and we'll get into nuts and bolts later on the substance side, but we sort of talk about schools not improving. That's largely minority schools around the nations, not exclusively.

MR. MINNICH: Absolutely.

MR. DUNCAN: When you talk about gaps we're talking about racial gaps. And so I just want to put race out there front and center because I think we can't have an honest conversation if we're not talking about those gaps. We also as we know have a set of largely white schools that are mediocre at best that aren't knocking the ball out of the park.

But as you think about all these things, how do you think about race, how do you talk about race, how are states able to deal with the very tough issue, but again I think if we're not dealing with it we're frankly not in the game.

MR. MINNICH: No, that's right. Well, I mean the first thing is for us to

acknowledge that we haven't treated every school the same. And in states that we have under resourced certain racial groups in a way that is irresponsible and also just not fair. So we have to own that as a country. And so as state leaders we are having tougher conversations about okay, so if a school really isn't getting it done for a group of kids how do we lean in and change that. That it may mean that we have to spend more money in a certain place than we have, it may mean that we need to try to invest in leadership. I see a lot of these schools. When I'm traveling and visiting schools the schools that turn around the fastest are ones with leaders that are inspirational. And that's across racial groups. So we absolutely have to have the conversation and I really appreciate what you're doing now, Arne. You didn't have to step up in Chicago, but that's one of the places, among others, that need to have a conversation about how race plays into those academic outcomes. And if we're not saying it, I think that's a huge problem. There are a lot of places that just still aren't talking about it. And so when I go into places and I bring it up sometimes I get the -- either people don't want to talk about it or they'll say you're race baiting or whatever. I just think we can't have this conversation honestly unless we step up and say this hasn't been fair and we've got to make it fair now.

So that's how I'm talking about it.

MR. DUNCAN: And again D.C. is largely a minority district, minority poor district. How do you guys here think about both race and class?

MS. KANG: I think it's critically important that we're first just transparent and honest about where we are.

MR. DUNCAN: And give your demographics so people know.

MS. KANG: Yeah. Absolutely. So I believe we're about 80 percent African-American across the District and also a significant and growing English language learner and

immigrant population in the city which are important needs as well.

And so -- sorry, I said 80 -- I think I meant 70. But I think, you know, it starts with again being honest and transparent. So when we released our first year of PARCC results I mentioned that about a quarter of our students were on track for college and career readiness across the board. But the gaps that existed were incredibly stark and it was important to us that we immediately followed up the overall results by also saying these are how particular groups of our students performed. In particular, we saw that on some grades and subjects 80 percent, nearly 80 percent of our white students were already on track for college and career readiness and only about 17 percent of our African-American students were, and our Hispanic students had similar results. That gap is unbelievably stark. And we know that the bar for being on track for college and career readiness on the PARCC exam is a really high bar, and yet 80 percent of our white students across the city are there. And so how we support the rest of our students in getting to that place is deeply important to us.

When we created a strategic plan at my agency, the Office of the State Superintendant of Education, the title of our plan is A Commitment to Equity, because that is our true focus. I think one of the things that D.C. has done that we can be really proud of is actually looking at the question of resources. So the city council and the administration have made this commitment to providing additional funds to schools that serve our most struggling students. So it's called The At Risk Formula in D.C. and it's additional funding that schools get for students who are on SNAP or TANF benefits, who are homeless or in foster care, or who are in high school and over age and under credit. And that's really a true focus on delivering those resources to the schools that need it.

MR. MINNICH: Arne, I mean I just want to add one more thing. I just think equity cannot be defined as spending the same amount of money on every kid. We've got to

over invest in places that have traditionally not had the resources. We have to change fundamentally what's going on in those places. I'd like to hear about what you think about in Chicago as you're talking about this. If you'd be willing to share that.

MR. DUNCAN: Happy to.

MS. KANG: That's sneaky, Chris.

MR. DUNCAN: Chris is good at turning it back on me. (Laughter)

MR. MINNICH: Well, yeah, because we're not going to go on talking here.

MR. DUNCAN: Well, just to say first I couldn't agree more with Chris that this has to -- you know, the words a weighted student formula or something, kids who have more needs, whether it's poverty, whether it's health issues, whether it's special needs, it takes more resources to educate them. So I agree the challenge is we live in a nation where much of the funding is local property tax based. And so the children of the wealthy get a lot more spent on them than the children of the poor. And it is fundamentally unfair and inequitable. And to be very personal, on the Chicago side we, in Chicago, where our kids were 90 percent poor and 85 percent minority, we received less than half the funding each year of children who happened to live 5 miles north of us in Wilmot and Winnetka. You think about half the money for the kids who need the most over 13 years, K-12, it's devastating. And we sued the state, we lost, but the system itself perpetuates inequality, it perpetuates the haves and the have-nots. And so how we do something different -- you know, I tend to be pretty radical in this stuff. One of my simple to articulate hard to do is what if teachers who are teaching pick a number and schools that were 50 percent poor, 75 percent poor, 90 percent poor, what if they had a 50 percent bonus for teaching in those schools? And social workers and counselors? And I think every teaching job is hard, some jobs are harder than others. And I think about social workers in a high school on the south

side of Chicago, Dunbar, where they had four kids shot and killed recently. That's a very different job for that social worker than a social worker in another school. Again, not that any of those jobs are easy.

But until we start to overinvest, until we start to incentivize the hardest working, the most successful teachers and principals and counselors to work in disadvantaged communities, be it inner city urban or rural or on Native American reservations where there's the largest gap, I don't think we're really serious about it. We're talking about it but not quite doing it.

Take a minute and D.C. is pretty unique, you know, for an urban district, of being sort of basically 50 percent traditional, 50 percent charter. You have New Orleans, it's 90 percent charter and a little bit the other and there's not much in between there. Does that mix feel right, not feel right? In some ways it's more innovative, in some ways it definitely complicates your life. How do you think about having a real true portfolio here?

MS. KANG: So I think one of the things that's been really exciting is over the last four years we've seen enrollment in D.C. school as a whole go up and we've seen that growth in enrollment in both sectors, both in DCPS and in the public charter schools. And so for a long time that percentage of students who are enrolled in the two sectors was dynamic and shifting, and over the last four years it's really stabilized close to that 50-50 mark.

And I think the executive director of our public charter school board and the board chair at that time wrote a piece in The Washington Post last year saying, you know, sometimes people call for, you know, should we be more like New Orleans in terms of the ratios and they said they think that the balance we have right now is about right. And I think the most exciting thing is that our parents have choices and that there are really two vibrant sectors and really wide range of schools for them to choose from.

MR. DUNCAN: Let's start to get into sort of the meat and potatoes of this. So, Chris, walk me through -- I agree with you totally, NCLB focused on transparency, focused on de-segregating data, was also a focus on a single test score that was everything. And I think all of us can agree that was too much weight on one indicator. Going forward how do you think about accountability systems that are more holistic, that are more comprehensive, but also are understandable, that you can communicate them and not be a, you know, wonderful thing in a black box no one can talk about.

So there's an opportunity, but a risk now. Walk me through sort of very concretely, is this more flexibility, more autonomy, what are you encouraging states to think about, what's the mix of indicators, and then how do we talk about these things publicly?

MR. MINNICH: Well, so before No Child Left Behind we gave tasks and they didn't have a whole lot of stakes attached to them. And nobody was concerned about over testing and things like that. So I think there's a lesson to be learned there. As states are thinking about other metrics, so things like student engagement metrics. I've seen a lot of those surveys, schools get a lot out of those things, so whether or not students are engaged in their own learning, there's questions about sort of do they feel safe at school, do they feel like they have an adult that cares about them at their school. Those are really important things. The question is when you put them into an accountability system do then the school begin focusing on that so much that kids feel pressured to be engaged with an adult. Like these things have to happen organically and I think we have to focus on them without putting too much pressure on them.

So what does that lead me to? It leads me to proceeding with caution as we get into these new metrics. So thinking about what are the things that we want schools to really focus on, what do we value in our systems. So states like Tennessee and New York -- and there are others, but those are the two that I'm most familiar with -- are engaged in their community

about a conversation about what do they value in their schools first before they even talk about the metrics. I think that's a really important thing to do because if you don't do that you'll end up just picking a metric and putting accountability on it and then all your schools will begin chasing it as the holy grail. Like we need engaged kids and that's all we need. We don't care if they can read or write, we just need engaged kids.

And so I think as we balance this, as we try to go away from a single test score, as you pointed out, Arne, we need to be sure that we aren't setting up another situation where we're going to come back in five years and say people are chasing a different metric that isn't helpful or isn't the only thing we want kids to focus on.

So how do you do that? I think you pick a few metrics that could either independently be reported or reported as you roll up into an index. And so I think there are pluses and minuses to both of those systems. There's no side. I'll probably get the question about the single metric at some point. I'm happy to answer that. But I do think there are ways to do it either with a single metric or clearly reporting out like four categories. So academic proficiency, academic growth, and high school graduation rates, maybe career readiness, whether or not kids are getting certificates in a career field, some type of safety engagement metric. I mean those are the types of things that we're seeing and the types of things we're advising on. I'd really hope that a state doesn't end up with 15 or 20 metrics. I think that would be very hard to communicate to parents. I think also if everything matters then nothing matters. So we've seen that in accountability system design.

So all that, Arne, to say I think a few clear metrics I think are really important for any state's accountability system. And also thinking more about how you're going to communicate this than the actual metrics. If you go state-by-state, the bottom 5 percent in most states are the bottom five states in almost any metric. If I was sitting in a state I might even

consider just using test scores for the bottom 5 percent because, you want to know what, the more you add to it, it doesn't really matter because you aren't differentiating at all between those schools. But I think it's really important the signaling part of this to say other things matter as part of that formula.

So I can go into a lot more detail on that. I can work out if you want me to, but having had to design one of these systems, these are important tradeoffs to have a conversation about.

MR. DUNCAN: Chris, I couldn't agree more. If you have 15 it's too much, you can't communicate it. So three or four very, very clear ones. One just to ask should success, whether it's preparedness for college or success in college completion, should those kinds of metrics be part of a K-12 accountability system or not?

MR. MINNICH: I think absolutely and I think you're going to get some push back from schools on that. But I think we've got to have a -- I actually think one of the best parts about ESSA is it gives us an opportunity to iterate. So if I was sitting in a state I'd begin reporting those, but probably not put them in my system until I could figure out how good the data is. Because right now every state is following high school kids into college or career or long-term success. But I think a high school or a middle school should be accountable for whether or not those kids are successful three years down the road. Now the question is how do you do that and how do you it in a way that doesn't sort of replicate the challenges we have now about kids going to college and then the set of kids that don't go on to college are much harder to track actually, and whether or not -- and success is much harder to define for them actually.

So I think in concept that's absolutely right. So I would try to figure out a way to report that data without making it part of the formula early on.

MR. DUNCAN: D.C. again has been a leader I think and more sophisticated on the accountability side than many places over the years. Do you see the passage of the new law, is this a chance to start over, is this a chance to tweak how you're thinking very concretely about the opportunity this law presents, and what do you want to do differently, what do you want to maintain, what do you want to do better?

MS. KANG: So in D.C. really over the last several years we have had multiple accountability systems running in parallel with each other. So D.C. had an ESEA flexibility waiver that was operated by my agency, the State Education Agency, that categorized schools in one of five different levels. And then the public charter school board here, the charter authorizer, has had its own system called the performance management framework that it uses to manage the performance of its schools. So making decisions around closures, for example, or which LEAs are able to expand. And the public charter school board I should say has been one of the most aggressive authorizers in the country I think in really focusing on performance and making tough choices based on that data. And then DCPS as our largest traditional district has had its own way of looking at its struggling schools that it calls its 40-40 plan.

And I think what we've really seen is that having these multiple systems running parallel has had some benefits in that we can see how different metrics are playing out, but also has led to a lot of challenges and confusion, both for schools and trying to figure out sort of what are the best schools across the city that we should be emulating and learning from and what are the most struggling schools where we need to provide additional resources and supports, and also confusion for families as they're making choices. Many of our families look at the performance management framework when weighing different charter schools, but they don't have that same information when it comes to the traditional schools and the choices they may be making there.

And so we think this is a real opportunity given where we are in the city, again, with nearly half of our students enrolled in on sector and the other half in the other, to step back and say what is a system we could build that could be consistent across all schools and that gives us a chance to have that consistent information, both for parents and families and for our schools and educators.

So we're excited about that opportunity and partnering with our stakeholders in developing these systems. I should note in particular that our State Board of Education has been incredibly involved and engaged in this process. We actually have a couple of members from the State Board in the audience here. So I thank Laura Wilson Phelan and Ruth Wattenberg for being here, as well as some of the staff members. We've also been working really closely with the authorizer of the public charter school board and I think one thing that we're particularly excited about is not just having a consistent system across all schools, but the opportunity for both the state and the authorize to potentially be using the same system and thinking differently about sort of what our role is in that system, but the chance to really have common information and for both organizations to be using it. And I credit a lot the leadership if our public charter school board for being as excited about this opportunity as we are.

MR. DUNCAN: And take a minute again, the theory of choice is fantastic in creating options that didn't exist before and having one system accountability helps in terms of the communication both you and Chris have talked about, that these can't be academic exercises, these have to penetrate the parents. But how do you guys think about how do you make sure that when you have a system of choice it's just not the engaged parents, the affluent parents who are exercising choice and the child whose dad is incarcerated and the mom is on crack, how are you making sure that those kids somehow have access to this information and choice so there's actual real choice for them and not just in theory?

MS. KANG: We've made strides each year in sort of getting better at sharing this information with parents. So one step that D.C. took in the last few years that's been really important is a common lottery system that applied for all schools of choice across the city, both schools of choice within DCPS and among our public charter schools. So it's called My School D.C. and there's now a common enrollment process deadline format and the team that works on this is fielding calls from parents every day, both in multiple languages and also finding opportunities to engage in the community to makes sure that parents really do have access to these choices.

MR. DUNCAN: Chris, concretely, there are two or three states that you think are ahead of the curve on this, that are sort of models for the nation. If you could sort of specifically say who those are and what you like about them. And then to your point, you know, there's a chance for states to do some great things and there's a chance for states to backslide. And frankly we will probably see both. And so talk to me about the highlights, but talk to me about how we collectively should be thinking about states where there is less creativity, less courage, less innovation, and what happens for kids in those states.

MR. MINNICH: Well, so a bunch of the states -- and I always hesitate to name states -- I'm going to but there are more states out there doing good things than I could list.

MR. DUNCAN: I'll keep asking you if you don't, so spit it out.

MR. MINNICH: So many of these states took the opportunity of the waiver from No Child Left Behind to start down the path of these systems. So you see a state like Minnesota, who has already begun giving gap closure reports to their districts and writing them --

MR. DUNCAN: Explain that.

MR. MINNICH: I mean it's a big thing is that they've actually set out goals for

their districts in terms of improvement in each of these racial groups in their state. And they're starting to see progress on that, they're starting to see their districts begin closing those gaps. They focused on them to the point where they're sending very specific letters with goals to their districts, to the school boards of those districts, to the superintendants. I don't think everybody in the state loved getting those, right. It didn't start as a good thing. But what it did bring is a focus to those numbers and now we're seeing more kids actually achieving on proficiency levels in the state of Minnesota because of how they incentivized those pieces.

D.C. has an equity report. So I'll have you talk about that because you know it better than I do, but the focus on actually improving these things and not just talking about improving them, but actually putting words behind it has been huge in those two places specifically.

I'd also add Tennessee, New York, Kentucky, not surprisingly. They're all having in state conversation about their values right now. And what do they think is the most important thing to put in these accountability systems. I think that what they've done well is -- I talked earlier about not having too many metrics -- I think Tennessee and New York are putting guard rails around that conversation so you don't end up with everything people value in the state, but that they actually talk about the things they value the most. They're doing some things like first choice, like if we had to put one of these two things in our system what's more important to the success of our kids.

And I think California, despite the fact some of the early returns on that may be that they have one too many metrics. I think they're headed in the right direction. I really do believe that California is out front in terms of thinking about what does a holistic system look like to improve their schools. And boy wouldn't it be great if California had a system like that given how many kids are affected by that. So I'm hopefully that California will take their early drafts of

their accountability system, continue to improve them, and hit the mark that will actually drive change in the state. I mean, again, I can't emphasize enough the states that are being the most successful are talking less about the formula to get to accountability and more about what are they going to do to improve schools, how are they going to help kids, what are the systems that we need to put in place to break down some of these racial gaps. Those are the conversations that are real in states. And formulas are exciting and I really like formulas and so I like talking about them, but the bigger question is what are we going to do on the backside of identifying these schools.

MR. DUNCAN: And take a minute, again not to name them, but where states are -- you're more concerned, you're seeing again less courage, can we do anything, should we do anything? Do we just let that play? What should be the collective response?

MR. MINNICH: I mean all our states are great (laughter), but the challenge space I think comes in when you don't have an engaged community in the state. So many of you work for either civil rights organizations or advocacy organizations in this room, even if we have an adversarial relationship in a certain state I really value what you do because I think you're calling the right questions for us as a country. Are we going to just go forward, build a new system, not really have much change, and then 10 years from now we're going to have the same schools serving the same kids? Like that's the question. And if that's where we are, that's not the business I'm in, and I know that's not the business you guys are in. and so if we look back in 10 years and we have the same schools in a state underperforming for kids, we haven't been successful.

And so where I worry is where there's lots of words but there's no sense of urgency. And so I think that -- and, again, I don't see that in many places, but when I do see it I really try to push us to think about okay what's going to be different this time. Like we had a big

difference between pre-NCLB and post-NCLB. There is a big difference. You know, argue about what ever happened in terms of testing and all that, things changed for kids in most states. I want that to happen again. I think we had sort of outlived the usefulness of No Child Left Behind. Now we're in a new era where states are going to have more control, so any excuse they had to not step up has sort of been pulled away.

So that's how we're working with states. And so I mean I think the thing that I'm looking for the most is can we actively really disrupt these systems that haven't been working for kids?

MS. KANG: If I could just add onto that. I think Chris is absolutely right, that the power in this comes not just in the design of a system, because there are really important conversations to be had in that stage, but in how we use this information and the power of shaping the conversation.

So I spent almost four years in Tennessee as the chief of staff at the Tennessee department of education and I came into that role just as we were getting our waiver or developing our waiver application for the first time. And then several years later we reflected on the accountability system we built through that process as we were going for our waiver renewal. And so it was a chance for a really unique opportunity to be part of two design phases of an accountability system. And I think what we saw is that there's so much power in shaping the conversation alone. There were other impacts as well, but when we built our waiver system we really focused on this notion of growth for all students but also ensuring faster progress for the students who are furthest behind. And it led to a more focused conversation on closing gaps than had existed under No Child Left Behind. Long-time superintendants were coming to us and saying we're having a different conversation about what's happening in our schools because of the way you've designed this system. And that's incredibly important.

And it also called out in a different way the districts and the schools that we were holding up as exemplary, as the places to learn from. And I think sometimes we focus so much on the struggling schools and that is obviously incredibly important, but also how we're defining what we're aiming for is incredibly important in systems as well. So under the system we designed our exemplary districts were the ones who were making the most progress, and that was sometimes already high performing districts who are also making great gains, sometimes it was our most struggling districts who were making tremendous strides. And similarly, when we looked at our schools, we defined as reward schools the schools that were both at the highest levels of achievement and the schools that were making the most growth. And the most exciting were we had a big group of schools that were actually at the inner section of both of those, so to be high achieving and making high progress, the schools that were making tremendous growth, those were really exciting things to celebrate and to learn from.

MR. DUNCAN: One more concrete question for both of you on metrics and then we'll talk about some other stuff, is I think there's a legitimate conversation debate -- and again if we're going with a small basket and not 15 or 30 indicators, how many of those should be input based metrics and how many of those should be outcome based metrics, or what percent, what's the mix of that portfolio.

So do you guys think -- maybe start with you locally and then sort of nationally, what's your sense of, you know, should they be all outcome, all input, some mixed. If so how do you balance those things?

MS. KANG: I guess I would say that I think the hardest thing -- I don't know that there's a magic balance, but I think that one of the great benefits of ESSA is obviously the chance for every state to sort of step back and say in our context given where we are what is most important to focus on and then how do we design our measures around that context.

I think with all of these choices, inputs versus outputs, the number of measures, whether they should be leading or lagging indicators, I mean with any of these choices I think the key thing to look at is just how you strike the right balance given the contest that you're operating in. And also just what kinds of signals are you then sending? I think the heart of education is the interaction that's happening between a teacher and a child in a classroom, and everything else we do is just shaping the environment that operates around that interaction to try and focus that conversation or those expectations in a different way. And so I think it's not only -- I think the answers come down to sort of what signals are those measures going to send by including them in the system.

MR. MINNICH: Yeah, I mean I agree. The only thing I would add is I would stay more focused on outputs because I think in a system where you're trying to show what you value I still value in our schools that kids are being able to read, they're engaged. I think an engagement metric is an output metric because kids then have hope for their future. So I think that those are more outcome measures.

I would say on the input side I would really lean in on the school improvement side with all the input metrics. So I don't know that I would put them in my formula for accountability. I think I'd say we're going to identify some schools and then I would click the whole lot of input metrics on the schools that are lower performing and use them as part of the school improvement process. Because I don't think -- output metrics don't tell you how to improve, they just tell you where you are. The input metrics are much better at telling you how to improve. So I think I would divide those two up if I was building a system.

MR. DUNCAN: All right. Let's stay right there because I want to shift a bit because I think we're all strong proponents of accountability, but I think it's a very fair statement that no accountability system ever taught a kid to read or helped him go to college. And so you

need a system but to what you guys have both said, it's what you do with that system, what are the tangible, practical interventions or changes that happened for that child or for that school or for that district that helps them get a better education this year compared to last year.

So, Chris, if you could talk and then, Hanseul, on how accountability information can and should translate to something different happening for a fifth grader or a ninth grader.

MR. MINNICH: Well, I mean I think there are two things that a state I think needs to do. First, I think they have to work with their districts closer than they have. I think generally we've been giving districts and schools information and haven't been sort of leaning in on how do we improve this school. So first off is the district has a huge role in helping here. And given that states don't hire teachers, don't hire principals, a lot of this is about leadership in these buildings. And so we have to have the conversation -- you know, one of the things that was really controversial under SIG was replacing half the staff, right.

MR. DUNCAN: Explain SIG.

MR. MINNICH: School Improvement Grants that were under -- when Secretary Duncan was in office there was a program where states could apply to have their lowest performing schools part of the School Improvement Grant program. And then there were four models in that grant program, one of them was to replace the principal, replace the staff. It was an aggressive intervention. And I think some of that -- we've got to be honest about whether or not it will work in certain places. Rural communities it's much harder because the staffing isn't available. There were some challenges with that. But I think we have to be honest about leadership matters deeply in many of these schools.

And so states I think should be leaning in to help their districts understand that after three or four years, if we can't see some growth -- now I'm not talking about proficiency, I'm

really not, I'm talking about on a pathway why is D.C. getting so much attention -- it's because they're the fastest growing district on NAEP. They are headed in the right direction. So I'm much more willing to be patient when we're headed in the right direction than if I just see stagnant growth as a state.

So I think the state has to define their role clearly for their districts and then help them think about what does it really mean to improve these schools. In many places we just lack the courage to go in and do these hard things. And I think we have to do some of those things.

I also think we have to engage the community in what the change looks like because that's one of the things that has been missing, is -- especially with state takeovers or things like that -- when it's worked it's been that the community has risen up and said our schools are going to be better than this. And they have led on it with the help of the state. When the state has come in and said this is our job, we're going to run these schools, it's been harder, it's been much harder. So I think we've got to have a conversation about how that takes place.

In terms of really concrete things, though, I just think early interventions around reading, I think early childhood is an important intervention, especially in low performing elementary schools. They're getting kids that aren't ready for kindergarten. So I think we do need to invest in the early years, I think we need to invest in reading interventions, especially up to grade three and beyond. We're finding the gaps just get bigger in elementary school. So many of the middle schools and high schools that are failing in the country are a result of what happens beforehand. So getting kids on a good start. I know this administration was active on trying to get early childhood at the federal level, but as state chiefs we see many states stepping up and passing early childhood, trying to figure out what we're doing with four year olds. I have a 4 and a 1 year-old so I'm pretty interested in that. So it's something that I think is really important to the long-term success of the country.

MR. DUNCAN: Walk through again here in D.C. the best accountability system is simply information. What do you guys do with that information to make changes for the kids in schools who need the most help?

MS. KANG: I think first just to grab onto something Chris was saying at the end there, we in D.C. believe deeply in the importance of early childhood education and we're blessed that we have a universal pre-K system in the district and we also at my agency we are governed all of birth to five early childhood actually, so the licensed childcare centers in family homes across the city are an important part of our portfolio of work and we're very focused on how do we improve quality and access to all of early care and education from birth to five in the city, and we agree that that's an incredibly important strand of how we'll set up our students for success later in their educations as well.

I think when it comes to sort of how you support struggling schools I draw a lot of lessons from my experience in Tennessee. And one of the places in Tennessee that we really looked at was Memphis. When we first ran our list of priority schools, the bottom 5 percent of schools across the state, 69 of the 83 schools were in the city of Memphis. And so we really needed to focus there in particular in that community. And there's been a lot of attention paid I think to the work of the achievement school district, which was a state led turn around district, but at the same time a huge part of our work from the state level in thinking about supporting our struggling schools was also helping our local education agencies develop innovation zones to lead their own efforts to turn around schools. And in Memphis one of the things that was most exciting was this was a real chance for both the achievement school district to operate, but also Shelby county schools, the traditional district, to establish and lead an innovation zone. And I think having both those entities operating there the schools have really pushed each other about what's possible and how much progress can be made. And I think that both strands of that state

approach, both supporting our local education agencies with resources and strategies as well as the state turn around district have been critical to the success there.

And I draw again lessons from that in thinking about where we'll be in D.C. as we think about partnering with our local education agencies and our public charter school board, thinking about sort of how we make information common but also remain flexible and strategic about the different roles that each entity plays in supporting our struggling schools.

MR. MINNICH: Just to add, I just think struggling schools, we've got to find a way to give kids hope. Like that seems to be -- when I go into communities, you know, I travel to the Blackfoot Indian Reservation in northern Montana and the places where the kids were doing the best were they felt like they had a pathway either to be in the community and serve in that community, or a pathway to higher ed or a pathway out into a conversation and then come back into the community. There was just such cultural importance for their kids to come back. It was all they had, was the capital that those kids could produce. I just don't think we can talk about a single solution in all of these places because culturally it matters deeply what we need to do in each of these places. The commonality is trying to figure out how we give kids hope and one of the ways to do that is to make sure they can read, write, do math, do science, have a holistic education. But the other way is to talk to them about their futures. And when the teachers in that community don't see a future for those kids, then those kids don't see their futures.

So I think that's a huge piece of this too.

MS. KANG: I couldn't agree more, Chris. So I started my career as a high school social studies teacher teaching on a reservation in New Mexico actually, in the Navajo nation. And I think again seeing the difference between sort of what was needed in that community versus where I work now in D.C. I think is a critical part of why I think the importance of ESSA is being able to fit the context that you are operating in. And I just appreciate both of

your leadership in bringing more attention to the needs of Native American students because I think that's just critical in our country.

MR. DUNCAN: Talking about gaps, that's the most devastating gap by far, by far.

We've talked a lot about accountability. Chris, you've talked about the importance of high standards, and while there's some controversy there it's hard for some to make a case we need lower standards. Someone can try and make that case, that's not very compelling to me.

What we haven't talked at all about is assessments. And you're an assessment guy. Just to take one second, as a nation should we have 50 state assessments, should we have one assessment, should we have somewhere in between that. And, you know, again, if we're trying to really accelerate the pace of change, have transparency, know who's moving the needle, whether it's on a reservation or in a rural community or an inner city community, if you could sort of fix this, wave a magic want, what would assessment look like for the nation?

MR. MINNICH: Well, I know how you feel about this (laughter), but I think that we entered that conversation with the assessment groups thinking that we didn't know quite yet what the strongest assessment would look like and that's why we wanted more than one group. We produced two really good assessments in those groups; Smarter Balanced and PARCC have produced really high quality assessments, better than any state has been able to do in my opinion. And so ideally we would have the same metrics across the country. Is it going to take us some time to get there? Absolutely. So I don't think -- I think as we iterate we will begin to start seeing more commonality. States desire the ability to compare outside their state lines, they desire that. You know, all politics aside about whether or not you can give PARCC or Smarter Balanced, I hear from state chiefs very consistently, want to be able to tell my kids how they're

doing against kids across the country, and let alone the country, across the world. And so I don't think that desire is going to go away, so I think we're going to move towards commonality. I don't think PARCC and Smarter Balanced necessarily will be end solution to all of this. Right now we have very strong assessments in those states. But I could see a PARCC 2.0 that included more metrics, included more states, or another way to engage with Smarter Balanced where maybe you didn't have to give the whole test but you could give some of those items. There's a lot of conversation about how states engage with those types of tests.

I could also see a group of states starting up a group to give a test together. You already start seeing states like Utah and Florida are sharing the same item pool and they're not connected in any sort of way. So we are beginning to see that there's only a certain number of ways to write these high quality items. And I think you're going to see them more and more across the country.

So do we get there? We don't get there via the assessment consortia, but I think we get there eventually. And I think this is something that I don't know why we have to have more than one assessment, other than local politics play out. And so that doesn't seem like a good reason to me to not continue to fight for some comparable data.

I also think that the reason behind the data is really important because as a country we haven't had the same expectations for our kids, depending what state you live in. I'm going to say that again because I think it's really important -- as a country we haven't had the same expectations depending on what state you're living in. There have been lower expectations in many of our states for their kids. And I don't think any state wants to be in that position. And the fastest way to solve that is to begin giving similar or the same assessments. Now there are ways to do this so states can hold on and have their teachers be part of this process, so there are creative ways we could write items in a state and make sure those items are on their state test.

Like there are a lot of ways to do this that don't involve everybody giving the exact same test, but we're going to move towards that. I don't think we're giving up on that. And by no means do I think either of those consortia are going to fail. I think they've already been wildly successful.

MS. KANG: I would just add D.C. is a member of the PARCC consortium and it's been a huge part of the efforts in our city. You know, I talked about the raised level of expectations, but PARCC is where those expectations become concrete for educators to latch onto and to see the difference. When we released results last fall for the first time we shared what a writing item used to look like on our old D.C. CAS assessment versus what it looked like on PARCC. In seventh grade the writing item used to be, in your own words describe what you would view as your perfect vacation. And that was the writing question for seventh graders. Narrative, no, you know, just out of your imagination write about this. On PARCC instead a sample item was you've read these two texts, “The Count of Monte Cristo” and “Beloved,” compare and contrast how the author develops theme in these two texts citing examples. And you think about the writing expectations for our students when they get to college and which of those questions is going to better set them up for what they need to do when they get to that first year of college and there's just no comparison. And so I think the work that we do through PARCC is critical to our work her in D.C.

I would just add to what Chris said, that I think comparability is not just important to states, it's important to districts and to schools, which is why we need it. Right now we have NAEP which gives us information across all states, but I've heard districts and schools say I wish I had NAEP data too, like beyond just the Trial Urban District Assessment. I wish I knew how I was doing compared to these other places. And that's the promise that PARCC holds out. Not just that we can see which states are leading the way, but which districts, which schools can we learn from, who is doing their best in serving the special education students within their

community. It's something we are critically interested to see. Who is making growth among the students and how can we learn from and emulate those practices.

So this is not just for states, it is for educators, for schools, for district leaders to be able to learn from.

MR. DUNCAN: Two final questions and then we'll open up to you guys. And these are tough questions but try to keep your answers a little bit short because I want to get to the audience.

So for better or worse, I'd say largely usually for the worse unfortunately, the inner section of education and politics or policy and politics, we all play at that nexus. And it's interesting whether you are talking about accountability systems or whether you're talking about trying to get more money for poor kids and poor schools. Chris, you talked about the politics this shapes, that you interestingly have often the unions and the right pushing against more accountability and pushing against more money for poor kids, and the civil rights pushing for stronger accountability and for more resources for poor kids.

So I'd like to her both you guys just sort of personally in that debate around stronger accountability or not, more resources for poor communities nor not. Where do you guys think we should land?

MR. MINNICH: I think this is a really tough question because I'm drawn towards more -- to use the words stronger accountability. That would be where I would be drawn towards. I think the harder part is sometimes we've been so -- what we thought was strong accountability was actually just reporting out data and telling schools how they were doing and not giving them any support and sort of saying good luck.

MR. DUNCAN: No strategy.

MR. MINNICH: Yeah, right, no strategy behind it. And so I think that in many ways breaks down trust even more than like a weaker accountability system with a lot of support. So I think that that's why these conversations -- I understand how you pose the question, but I'm trying to break down those lines. Like I don't think you have to be against accountability to be for supporting schools and trying to do something different around only using a test score and things like that. So I just think there's a new way that's going to emerge here where states can be for kids and I'll have a clear accountability system that gives us good information, but that we actually take action on it. Because that's what we're all interested in honestly. All factions of that group that you described are interested in kids having a better experience, honestly. I mean there's a handful that I would maybe say aren't, but almost everybody is in this because they believe that kids can do better. And they just have different pathways to get there. So I think we've got to have a different conversation in the country about sort of holding the bar on giving good information, making sure that we're being ferocious about we've got to change something in places where we need to change something and that we don't come back in five years and say yeah, we talked about it but we didn't get it done. So be really hard on the side of action, but don't be hard on sort of which metrics we're using or are we sending the right signals, like we can do that and that's something that's very important. But action is the thing that's going to change things for kids.

MS. KANG: That's right that you have to think about that balance between accountability and support. So I think about DCPS, for example, which had one of the first teacher evaluation systems in the country, but has also done more work than almost any district that I can think of in terms of planning our curriculum and providing instructional resources and tools for their teachers. And I think that that makes a lot of sense to think about both support and accountability. I think about charter networks in D.C. where I see incredibly high expectations for

their educators and what they'll do for students, but at the same time really investing in instructional coaching models and the kinds of mentoring and professional development that are available in classrooms and schools. And so I think that when you look sort of at the -- when you look closer to the ground you see people finding ways to balance those really high expectations for what will happen with the supports needed to get people there.

MR. DUNCAN: Last question, this is a serious question. What are you each most looking forward to in a Clinton presidency and most worried about, and what are you most looking forward to in a Trump presidency and what are you most worried about. (Laughter)

Who's first?

MR. MINNICH: Do you want to go first? (Laughter) I can go first. So, you know, I'm actually just confused about where both of them will be. So that is the thing that I think I have the hardest time commenting on. Education hasn't been a serious topic in either campaign in my opinion. So trying to make sure that whoever wins, as we transition, I'm actually looking forward to them setting an agenda and that we can be a part of setting that agenda for them.

And so thinking about the transition time as being really important for whoever wins. So that's probably what I'm looking forward to the most.

I mean a concerning thing is whether or not on the republican side whether or not we would prioritize education as a country. We can argue about whether states should be in charge of federal government and there is a federal role in education so, you know, like states are okay with that. And trying to figure out what that role is and making sure that we just don't get into a conversation about kicking everything back to the states I think would be the concern.

I think under a Clinton presidency I would want to make sure, and I think our states would be really interested in making sure that we're able to continue in the momentum that

we have with the current planning we're doing on ESSA, that we weren't asked to sort of re-litigate some of the things that we've litigated in the past, especially around making sure all kids are served through our accountability system.

So, you know, all those concerns are quite easy to deal with actually. And I think one of the -- you know, everybody has been asking for a conversation on education in this campaign. I'm not sure we want that guys. I mean I'm just being honest. Like I think being able to set that going forward is a better place to be than trying to live in the campaign.

MR. DUNCAN: Thank you.

MS. KANG: I guess the only thing I would add is just that, you know, states are working now closely on these ESSA accountability plans and we know that they'll be due to the U.S. Department of Education in 2017. And I think uncertainty around direction is tough, but I think everyone is sort of buckling down and saying we're going to focus on sort of what we need at the state level within our own context and hope that the federal support will be there for continuing the work that we're already planning on.

MR. DUNCAN: All right. Let's open it up. We have about 20 minutes. And to state the obvious, please ask a question, don't make a statement, don't re-litigate something. What's your question very directly so we can get to as many as we can and we'll try and answer them very directly.

You're the boss.

QUESTIONER: That's delegation. Good morning. In this room I've heard panelists talk about education and former educators in the advocacy realm say that you couldn't pay them enough to work for a bad principal. On the other hand, I've also heard people say that there's a disproportionate expectation on principals with high achievement gaps versus ones with

low achievement gaps. And principals are valued more for managing up than managing down.

So in terms of those things said in this room in different panels, how do you see that playing out in different standards for schools?

MS. KANG: Yeah, I mean I was actually going to just give an example from my past experience in Tennessee where I agree that the role of the school leader is critical. One of the things we did as part of the common core transition was provide optional trainings for school districts to participate in, both at the teacher level, but also at the school leader level. And one of the things we heard was while the initial frame was around the transition on standards that many school leaders said this is actually one of the most helpful leadership experiences I've ever had in getting ready for this role. And I think it was really around finding -- the crux of that was finding really highly effective current principals and assistant principals who were leading that training for their peers and that ability to be able to speak at a really concrete level around here's how we're managing this change in my building and here are the steps we're taking.

So I think that power of peer to peer learning and the importance of providing support to our school leaders is something that we can all draw lessons from.

MR. MINNICH: I think we should over-invest in places where things haven't been going as well, so I don't think you have to set up the situation where the principal has to be the hero. So what that means is for me maybe we need three or four leadership people in a building that needs turn around. Like we've got to think differently about what it means to be a principal, especially in buildings that you're asking a principal to take on so many different things, be the instructional leader, be the vision setter for the school, deal with discipline. So I just think there's a lot of things we could do as districts to think differently about no investing identically in every school in your district.

And I think this comes from a lot of the charter model too. Like sort of what do we need to be successful with those kids is what we should be doing, not necessarily just putting the same staffing structure into every school.

MR. DUNCAN: I'll take one in the back.

QUESTIONER: Good morning. A question I think mainly for Dr. Hansen about the selection of school measures. I'm a public school teacher across the river in Virginia and a couple of years ago we got told the state of Virginia just decided they're not going to collect certain data really at the intersection of income and race. They just told us they're not going to. I'm a former professor of education research too and so I know this data would be really helpful.

So my question is -- and this is a couple of years ago before ESSA -- is there transparency mechanisms in ESSA so that the selection of this stuff really is one of the things that's communicated to the communities?

MR. MINNICH: Dr. Hansen is down here. So I'm Chris Minnich; I'm the executive director of CCSSO, so I'll answer on behalf of the states. If you have some thoughts on that I'd love to hear them actually, but so I think in terms of transparency in ESSA there are many new data requirements that are not being talked about yet and I think one of them in school finance. And we didn't touch on this yet, but I think schools are now going to be required to report out how much money they're spending in a way that we haven't had to be transparent about in the past. So that's one place where I think we're going to get more transparent.

I also think every state is required to engage stakeholders and the law, so there are meetings going on about ESSA in your state whether or not you know about them yet. We've got to do a better job as states communicating that out because I just think that a different conversation is going to go on in the country about metrics and you're going to want to be in

those discussions because you care deeply about those previously reported data that you could use.

The only other thing I'd touch on is there is a real conversation in the country about privacy and how much data we're collecting. And I think states are trying to balance those two things. They're trying to balance the idea that we need good information, especially in the aggregate. Nobody should be arguing about aggregate information, but we also need to protect the privacy of our kids from things that we -- either data we collect that we don't use or data that's inappropriate to collect.

So I think we have to have all those conversations and I would lean in in your state, especially -- I know for a fact -- I've been to one of them -- so Virginia is having conversations and I could talk to you afterwards if you want to know more about that. But it's important to engage in these discussions now because states are making those decisions in the next six to nine months.

MR. DUNCAN: I'll take one up front.

QUESTIONER: Hi, good morning. So earlier when you all were talking about state's ability to influence teachers actually teaching kids how to read and how limited that role is in hiring teachers. As someone who just took my certification exams I couldn't help but think about the state's role in teacher certification and if you would consider that as a potential pathway to increase quality of instruction.

MR. DUNCAN: That's a whole other panel we need to do on that one.

MR. MINNICH: We could do another hour on that. I'll do a little bit if you want to do --

MR. DUNCAN: Take one minute.

MR. MINNICH: But that's a huge, huge great question. It's a great question.

MR. DUNCAN: Did you pass? Congratulations. (Laughter) glad you're going to be a teacher.

So I think certification is an underused lever in most states. And what happens in most places we're checking boxes, we're doing background checks, we're doing things like that. And in reality I think we should be talking about -- I think certification should be an ongoing process where, you know, you may get an initial certification but you've got to come back and show that your skills have improved over the first two years or something like that and not necessarily be a test that you take, but a process that you go through to continue to improve and then show at some point that you are certified to help kids learn to read and do math and all that. So I just think it's not a one-time thing and I think that's where states get caught up. You have a test that you pass and then you're certified. So that's how I would -- I'm trained to talk about it.

MS. KANG: I think that's the right distinction to draw both between initial certification and licensure and renewals, which usually in states it's a multi step process. In D.C. one of the things we've looked at is for renewals adding a pathway. So keeping our traditional pathways to renewal that were more based on exams or professional development credits, but also adding a pathway that's based on demonstrated effectiveness so that that can also be a route toward showing that you should be able to renew your license.

MR. DUNCAN: One in the back.

QUESTIONER: Hi. One comment and one question. First my comment. There have been a lot of comments about the extraordinary progress that D.C. schools have made on NAEP, and I just want to make the point, as I think Hanseul Kang did, that that great progress is mainly about our average progress and it's not about the progress of the lowest performing and

the lowest income kids in the city, who by and large have been doing somewhere between low and stagnant, now it depends on your baseline in year and it depends on your grade and it depends on your subject, but I think it's really important that as we go forward we learn the right lessons from D.C. And I'm a D.C. parent, have been for -- was for a long time and there's great things going on here, but we shouldn't overlook that fact.

But now my question. Secretary King has talked a lot about the importance of a rich curriculum and how ESSA is an opportunity to move beyond just reading and math. And there have been a number of articles and people have talked about the different titles in ESSA that create funds and grants to focus on rich curriculum. My question is as long as the testing accountability is just on reading and math how much can we really expect schools to take that seriously and move on it and what, if any, recommendations do you have on that?

Thanks.

MR. MINNICH: I'll talk about the second part and let you talk about D.C.

I think states should be using other metrics that aren't just reading a map, so that's what we should be doing. Again, I think it ties to the values conversation. What do you value that your student would be able to do when they leave high school or they leave the school that they're in? And, for me, I would value them being able to do other things other than reading and math. Now it's pretty essential that they can do reading and math. So I don't think we need to back away from that, but I think we also need to make sure that we're adding other things to these conversations.

If I was in a state and I was designing a system, my academic performance indicators would include as much information as I could get on other subjects. The problem we have is I don't think the solution is to give a test in every subject. I think (a) that's not politically

viable, and (b) we're just sending the wrong signals and then everybody would be chasing different things. And so I think using academic performance out of reading and math, seeing if we could get a science metric in there, seeing if there's a good way to incorporate social studies and world history into some of those systems. Career readiness and those types of things are really important as well.

So how do we make sure that we're signaling the right things but we're not adding so many things to the metric that you can't even determine what I should be going for as a school.

So that's how I'm talking about it. I completely agree with you that the reading and math only conversation has to end, and I think it is ending actually.

MS. KANG: I guess I would just add that I think one of the shifts with common core and with common core aligned assessments is that literacy is not just fiction, it's also informational text and its literacy and science and the humanities and then technical subjects. And I think that's a really exciting step. So in Tennessee our career and technical education team was doing a lot of work around building model units for CTE teachers to use looking at literacy and those technical subjects and how they could advance that. And I think because of the importance of literacy, because of the challenge of it, having more and more people within the building who are focused on having it not just live in English class is a really exciting step and it's about building I think students' context and fluency in those subject matters as well as in literacy. That's really key.

Just one other point that I think -- you know, Ruth, we can certainly continue the conversation, but I think when you look at NAEP data broken out by quartile you see that the lowest quartile and the highest quartile, all quartiles have actually increased over time and that progress really, while it's not enough and while it's not reaching enough of our students yet, that

the progress is pretty widespread across different groups of our students.

MR. DUNCAN: Up front.

QUESTIONER: So in thinking about racial achievement gaps and the barriers to success that exist beyond the classroom what do you think schools could be doing better to respond to the mental health needs of at risk students and how -- are there any opportunities under ESSA to start aligning systems?

MR. MINNICH: Well, Title IV, which has been called a block grant, I don't think really is a block grant. So I think there are some very specific things we should be doing with that money. States have the opportunity -- Title IV in ESSA is the consolidation of a bunch of programs, so safe and drug-free schools, some of the bullying stuff is in there. Like so Title IV now has the opportunity to be used in really creative ways in the ways you're talking about. So if I was sitting in a state or a district that gets Title IV money, I would be thinking about what do I need to do to serve these kids. Is it doctors' appointments, is it, you know being able to see the board, is it mental health. There are a lot of things that you can do with that money now. So that's the biggest opportunity I see, is under the Title IV funds, which are now much more flexible than they were in the past.

MS. KANG: I'll just add in D.C. I think this is something we're really looking at. And we, over the past year, in partnership with the State Board of Education, have revised our health standards and one of the big shifts was putting more of an emphasis on mental health in our health standards across grades. And we're also thinking about how we use information from our health assessment, the youth risk behavior survey that's given and school health profiles to sort of triangulate information and give more information back to schools about how they can better meet the comprehensive health needs of their students.

MR. DUNCAN: One in the back please.

QUESTIONER: Returning quickly to the question of measures I wanted to talk about measuring achievement in high school. A lot of states are moving back to using SAT and ACT as their proficiency measure. And I know there are a lot of concerns about the fact that those tests were not necessarily designed with state standards in mind, and even states that are using Smarter Balanced, like Delaware, are then switching and using SAT and that will be really the key point of data for accountability systems.

I'm wondering if you guys could talk a little bit to that and how states should be thinking about using college entrance exams more broadly in their accountability systems. It seems better suited to a student's success measure than necessarily an academic achievement measure.

MR. MINNICH: You want me to talk about that or do you want to?

MS. KANG: I can.

MR. MINNICH: Okay.

MS. KANG: So I think it's a great question. I think the challenge in our high schools is that students are taking a lot of different types of assessments for different purposes. Students are taking standard based high school assessments, they're taking college entrance exams, they're taking AP courses and exams. And I think everyone is trying to figure out sort of what's the right balance between -- and how we use these assessments.

In D.C. we've been providing free access to SAT for all of our students in our schools, but we still have a standards based high school assessment through PARCC and I think other states are just trying to figure out sort of what's the right balance there right now.

MR. MINNICH: And I think we're encouraging our states to think about balance

here. High school is where this over testing thing plays out the most directly. And it's hard to justify for a college going kid that they've got to stop and then take a state test after they've taken the SAT or the ACT three or four times. Now I would argue that we possibly are encouraging our kids to take those tests too many times. So the retake effect and all that is an interesting concept.

The thing that we should acknowledge though, both those brands mean something to parents. And I think we have to lean in on the SAT and the ACT side and say to them, look, your college entrance is really important for you guys, and that's something that you guys were designed for, you're predictive of college success in some ways. And so thinking about how do we use those test in a high school setting I think is really important. More importantly though is the signaling to kids, I think. I think states are going towards these test not so much because they love what they do for their accountability system, but you're signaling to every kid in the state that you have a future, whether it's in college or a job training program, that you're already setting that expectation for the kids. So I kind of like the transition because I think it's setting a good tone for what the kids are doing. I do think we have to work on the assessments to make sure that we're getting the information that we need.

MS. KANG: And if I could just add to that. I think one other thing is the whole reason behind the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessment consortia, and even the moves that states are making outside of that, is too many kids were doing well on high school assessments and then struggling when they got to college. And having that information sooner when you can do something about it in high school is really important. And I think, you know, I mentioned our writing questions, one of the key skills we see students struggling with is writing when they get to college and writing based on text. And so how we think about getting that real information to our students and our families while they're still in high school and can address

those needs I think is critically important.

MR. MINNICH: Agreed.

MR. DUNCAN: Let's do one more up front and one in the back, and then, sorry, I have to close at the point. So last one up front and then one more in back.

QUESTIONER: A somewhat political question. Race to the Top as a federal policy under the current administration. Is that still out that, Race to the Top, or under ESSA, or am I mixing apples and oranges?

The reason I bring up this topic, Race to the Top, having been in education for many years myself I know that it created a lot of upset among teachers and among administrators that were competing among ourselves, among the space, when the problem is really deeper and on a more cooperative level. So I was wondering again to clarify, is Race to the Top still out there, and whether or not it is, would there be comment about the helpfulness of that policy in terms of where we are now?

MR. MINNICH: Do you want to comment on this? Okay. (Laughter) I'm happy to comment if you want.

MR. DUNCAN: Yeah, go ahead.

MR. MINNICH: So I mean I think, to sort of take you off the hook on this, because I don't think -- so that's the guy that was in charge of it. (Laughter) So there you go. So I think Race to the Top was in my opinion some of the most innovative policy making that we've seen because it gave states choices. There was a real choice between doing this or not doing this. They set out some clear expectations, they said if you don't want to do this, you don't have to, but these are the things that we're interested in funding as a federal government. Did it create some challenges in states? Absolutely. But I will tell you those decisions were made mostly by

state policy makers, not by the federal government.

Now that I said something nice I'm going to say something not nice. I think the waiver policy, which followed Race to the Top, didn't create real choices for states. So the choice was between keeping your NCLB system or doing the things that the administration wanted you to do. And I think that was not a real choice. So what I think was really innovative about the Race to the Top system is that states did have real choices. Like they could either do it or not do it. I think under waivers that wasn't the same thing. I think states were either stay with your old system that's not working or do all these things that we want you to do -- all these things -- there were four things -- and so I don't think -- I think I would say Race to the Top I think was excellent. I think the waiver policy could have been possibly better designed so that states had real choices between things they could do to get out of No Child Left Behind.

And in terms of competition I think competition to a certain extent is a good thing. I think we want to do better for our kids. It's when we are competing for resources that I think it becomes a challenge. So competition to do better for our kids I am all for. Competition around sort of dollars and cents and where they go, I think that's a bigger challenge.

MS. KANG: I'll just add that Tennessee was one of the first two winners of Race to the Top and I think it was key in galvanizing people across the state, educators, policy makers, from across the state to come together and create a real vision for education. And it was the foundation of all the work that happened. And that was I think the right role for the federal government to set a context and then for the state to take it and run with it and say this is what we think needs to be true. And it led to real change on the ground there.

MR. MINNICH: Yeah. Do you want to comment on that or?

MR. DUNCAN: Thirty second and then we'll take the last question and get out.

(Laughter) Just I think the legitimate policy debate is how much federal money and state money and local money should be formula versus trying to incentivize change. And just point of fact, Race to the Top was $4 billion over 4 years, 5 years, which sounds like a lot of money. As a nation we spend $650 billion each year. So relative to the pie of K-12 funding it's less than half of 1 percent of funding. I think again legitimate conversation for all of us is how much money should be straight formula based and how much should be trying to do breakthrough innovation stuff. And I have my own opinions, but I think there's an honest debate there.

Last one in the back.

QUESTIONER: Hi, Rachel Fortune with America's Promise Alliance. We've made a lot of progress improving grad rights and closing gaps for key subgroups of students, but of course we have a lot of work to do, especially for low income students, students with disabilities, students of color, and English language learners. Through the GradNation campaign we're supporting states and communities to continue to do work to improve grad rates and other outcomes for students.

So I'm wondering if you can comment on what you see as the greatest opportunities for states under ESSA to structure their accountability systems in ways that result in continued grad progress.

MR. MINNICH: I'm really focused on the requirement in ESSA that any high school with less than a 67 percent grad rate automatically falls in the bottom tier. I think that's something we negotiated and I think it's something that's really important for high schools to look at.

I also think the big progress on graduation is going to come from focusing on younger years. I just think we're sending too many kinds into high school not ready for what

they're going to experience there and we're sending too many kids into college. We're just sort of continuing to pass kids through. So I think focusing and making sure there are some gateways.

Third grade reading policy, you can debate the sort of how you do it, but the idea that every kid should be able to read by the end of the third grade is something that I think we should all be able to stand for. I think we also -- there's a key point around eighth grade, seventh-eighth grade in mathematics where there's a certain skill set that you're going to need to be able to be successful in high school math. So I think those are two places where I think states could really lean in.

The last thing I'll say is on the high school piece. We've got to get better at making sure that we're giving every kid every opportunity, but that we're customizing, especially in high school, to their next plans in life. Because where lose kids is when we start telling them they have to take all these advanced academic courses when they don't see themselves in that way. And so we've got to help them change the way they see themselves so that they have the advanced academics, so that they do have a future. You know, I'm not talking about tracking. I want to be very clear. I'm not saying that some kids don't get the stuff that other kids do. What I am talking about is that we've got to give kids a pathway through this. We've got to help them understand what their future looks like.

So I think high schools are a place to lean in on ESSA with those new requirements.

MS. KANG: I think just two quick comments. I think first improving the graduation rate is critically important, but so is what students are learning during that time and making sure that that diploma signifies something meaningful. In Tennessee I think one of the interesting things was we saw our graduation rate increase dramatically at the same time that we had also increased the requirements for graduation. And that was really exciting. One of the new

requirements was for all students to take Algebra II as a course during high school. And some of our highest gains we saw on state assessments was on the Algebra II end of course assessment even as more and more kids were taking it than in the past.

So I think that's what you want to see, that both the requirement is meaning and that more kids are meeting that bar.

The second thing I would say is that in D.C. one of the ways we're thinking about graduation rate under ESSA is looking not only at the four adjusted cohort graduation rate, but also at five and six-year graduation rates, particularly because we know that as much as we want our kids to be ready coming into high school that's not the reality for all kids right now. So we do have some schools that are saying, look, if it's better for our students we're going to say we're going to take five years and we're holding ourselves accountable, but we want to take that extra year because we think it's meaningful.

So we think it's important to look at the four year ACGR, but also look at the extended ones.

MR. DUNCAN: I want to thank all of you for really, really thoughtful questions. And we have two amazing leaders that we're very, very fortunate to have fighting on behalf of kids locally and nationally. So please give our two panelists a huge round of applause.

Thank you. (Applause)

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