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REAL-LIFE CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. BUSETTE: So, I want to start by welcoming all of our audience here, joining us here at the Brookings Institution, and also everyone who is joining us via webcast. We are absolutely thrilled that you're here, and we have a tremendous session in store for you. So, I'm Camille Busette. I am the director of the Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative here at Brookings. Which is an initiative that really focuses on economic mobility and equity for poor and low-income Americans and for communities of color.

Within our Initiative, we have a particular focus on educational equity, and also on the role that narratives play in equity and in inequity and so the types of results that we see, every day, in the U.S. population. I want to mention that this particular event is partially funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. And I do want us to start, before I introduce our very, very, impressive panelists, with a bit of a reflection. So, you know, the earliest American philanthropists were Native Americans. Giving in native cultures is a way of life rather than an obligation or a responsibility, and that continues to this day.

In addition, when there have been surveys done and data collected on giving, it turns out that African Americans give away 25 percent more of their income, per year, than Whites in the U.S. And 63 percent of Latino households make charitable contributions. So, this demonstrates a commitment that people of color have to their communities here in the U.S. A commitment to a whole that is greater than just them. And yet we still confront a range of negative narratives that show up, not only in opinion surveys, but also in the ways in which people of color are treated in school and in society.

So, in the U.S., people of color face a really challenging path. They face low rates of economic mobility. African Americans and Native Americans, in particular, have much lower rates of intergenerational upward mobility, and much higher rates of downward mobility than other racial and ethnic groups. People of color also face higher rates of incarceration.

In 2017, for instance, Blacks represented about 33 percent of the sentenced prison population. Which is about three times your representation in the larger population. For Hispanics, they represented 16 percent of the adult population, but yet they accounted for 23 percent of inmates.

And for Native Americans who make up about 1.3 percent of the U.S. population, they account for 2.3 percent, so double -- 2.3 percent of inmates, so roughly double their representation in the larger population.

Now high incarceration rates are particularly problematic because people who are -- have been incarcerated, face even more challenges than when they -- prior to incarceration. So ex-prisoners face -- tend to fare very poorly in the labor market and it turns out if they -- if folks who are incarcerated happen to have grown up in poverty, that their family, their friends, their children have a much higher likelihood of future incarceration.

So boys particularly who grew up in families in the bottom 10 percent of the income distribution, are 20 times more likely to be in prison on a given day, in their early 30s than children who are born in the top 10 percent of families in the U.S. And prisoners are disproportionately likely to have grown up, in general, in socially isolated and segregated neighborhoods with high rates of child poverty and in predominately Black or American Indian neighborhoods.

One of the top 10 neighborhoods in the country, with the highest incarceration rates for men and women at 30 years old, is Richmond, Virginia. Which is about 80 percent Black and has an incarceration of 10 percent.

People of color also face tremendous disparities in education and one statistic will show this. So, in 2018, the high school graduation rate for Whites was 89 percent, 78 percent for Blacks, 80 percent for Hispanics, and 72 percent for American Indian/Alaska -- Alaskan natives.

So every young person who comes into this world is a blessing and yet, as you can tell, many face challenges and even neglect. So how do we counter those trajectories and the narratives that are -- that accompany those trajectories?

We're going to have an opportunity to talk about that today with our two very distinguished panelists, Rodney Robinson and Danielle Riha. Rodney Robinson is the 2019 National Teacher of the Year. He had a 19-year teaching career and he became -- he has -- he's had a 19-year teaching career and he became a teacher to honor is mother who struggled to receive an education after being denied an education as a child, due to segregation and poverty in rural Virginia. In 2015, Rodney started teaching at Virgie Binford Educational Center, a school inside the Richmond

Juvenile Detention Center in an effort to better understand the school to prison pipeline.

Rodney uses the Whole Child Approach to education to help students who are most vulnerable. As he has said in previous interviews, you encourage social, emotional growth before you get to academic growth, showing the kid that you care about them. You care about their well-being and you want them to be a better person, when they see that, they tend to buy into whatever teaching strategy or methods you engage them with.

His classroom is a collaborative partnership between him and his students and is anchored in him providing a specific and centered education that promotes social and emotional growth. Robinson uses the knowledge he has gained from his students to develop alternative programs to prevent students from entering the school to prison pipeline. He tries to help his students integrate back into society, including making sure they are registered to vote if eligible. If they are ineligible, because of felony convictions, he teaches them how to get their rights restored.

Rodney has been published three times by Yale University and has received numerous awards for his accomplishments, both in and out of the classroom. Most notably the R.E.B. award for teaching excellence. He is a member of Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney's Education Compact Team. Which includes politicians, educators, business leaders and community leaders and is working with city leaders and local colleges to recruit underrepresented male teachers into the field of education.

He has also worked with Pulitzer Award winning author, James Forman, on developing curricular -- curriculum units on race, class and punishment as a part of the Yale Teachers Institute. Rodney earned a Bachelor of Arts in history from Virginia State University and a master's in educational administration and Supervision from Virginia Commonwealth University. Welcome Rodney.

MR. ROBINSON: Thanks. (Applause) It's good to be here. (Applause)

MS. BUSETTE: So, we're also joined by Danielle Riha who is the state of Alaska Teacher of the Year for 2019. She was also one of the four finalists for the 2019 National Teacher of the Year. Danielle moved to Alaska in 1995 and fell in love with the state. Substitute teaching in Alaska inspired her to earn a teaching degree from the University of Alaska. Danielle taught in rural

Alaska for seven years with the Southwest Region School District where she learned the value of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Which incorporated Indigenous knowledge and developed a successful reading program that included Yup'ik elders in the classroom.

She's now in Anchorage and in 2008 she was recruited to help open the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School. Where she helped develop a culturally infused curriculum, created the morning gathering, and implemented culture week. Danielle also works on the Alaska Humanities Forum Educational Advisory Board to help new teacher and all students understand and connect to Indigenous culture and lifestyle. And she helped create Math in the Cultural Context modules used in districts statewide.

Danielle holds high expectations for every member the learning community. She inspires everyone to be their best self and master personal challenges by recognizing strengths and working through difficulties. She believes that teachers much work collaboratively to form bonds that create supportive, successful, learning communities. Danielle holds a bachelor's degree in Education from the University of Alaska, a Master's in Education from Grand Canyon University and is currently working on her Doctorate in Education at Capella University. Thank you and welcome. (Applause)

So I feel particularly odd by that -- those incredible resumes and I'm sure you do as well. I think there are no better people to ask about how do we really counter damaging and negative narratives and stereotypes than these two impressive panelists. So, I'm going to start, first by letting you get to know them. Our -- you know, I want to -- each of you to say a little bit about yourselves and that can include, you know, your family and any other little tidbits that are interesting that you want to share about yourselves. I also want you to talk a little bit about the work that you do with your students and who your students are.

So, Rodney why don't we start with you and then Danielle we'll continue on with you.

Mm-hmm.

MR. ROBINSON: Well, like it said in my intro, I became a teacher to honor my mother. My mother, you know, she wanted to become a teacher, you know. She was the best teacher I had, even though the majority of her life she only had a sixth-grade education. But, what she did, she didn't let a license stop her from teaching. She raised every kid in our community often with little or no

pay. And she would always tell us that it's your job to make things better for the next generation and to teach them how to make things better for the generation after them.

And so, growing up in that type of environment of equity and being loved and nurtured really pushed me toward the classroom, and so I've always felt the need to work in high-needs schools. Because I've always felt that kids in, you know, non-high-needs schools, they're going to get their education regardless. But I feel that kids that come from high needs, they need a dynamic teacher; a special person in the classroom who's willing to go the extra mile for them, and so I've always worked there.

My 20 years of experience, you know, before I moved to the detention center, I worked at Armstrong High School in Richmond, Virginia. Armstrong High School pretty much is that area of the city that's segregated economically, racially, from the rest of the city. You know, for example, five of the six housing projects in the city of Richmond fed into that high school and so I always felt that those people are the best people. You know, poverty and that struggle creates some of the best people you will ever want to meet and work with and so I always was engrained in that community.

However, after working there for 12 years, it's just -- started to experience burnout. You know, working in a high needs school with 1,500 kids with all sorts of needs, really started to burn me out, and so around 2015 I started to look for something different. I still wanted to work with high needs students, but not 1,500 high needs students. And so what I did, I got a call from my current principal, who was down at the Richmond Juvenile Detention Center and she called me to ask me did I know someone who was interested. But she really told me she was calling to ask if I was interested. (Laughter) Because she knew -- she said I would be impactful from day one with the kids, and so I thought about it. But then to think something happened in 2015.

That Department of Education Report came out about the school to prison pipeline and it said Virginia was the number one state in referring schools to the juvenile justice system. And so, I figured I could read as many books as there are written and reports, but why not go into the Juvenile Detention Facility and teach. That way I can see what is going on. How are kids ending up here, and I had a major philosophical change. Because I always believed there's a poverty to prison

pipeline in American and that we criminalize being poor and so I was like I want to go and see what this whole school to prison pipeline is really about.

And one thing I remember my first day on the job, you know, my first class comes in and there was a student who I had just failed from my comprehensive high school in that classroom. That was my wake-up moment. I was like, I failed him, he's in jail, and so it really caused me to reexamine everything I did from grading practices to attendance policy to pedagogy to relationship building, everything. Because I know, when you fail a kid it increases the odds that they will end up in a prison system, and so I'm working in a prison system.

Not only am I working but I'm starting to develop alternative programs, starting to talk to city and state leaders about what can we do. And when I talk to them it's not me, it's my kids. I'm telling their experiences; how they ended up here, how it starts with a simple suspension. You know, in how schools -- you know, they discipline, and some school practices play into the school to prison pipeline. And so, I'm just happy to be out there advocating for my kids, but it's their advocacy. I've taught them to advocate for themselves.

So, when I'm telling these stories and I'm telling politicians and all, this -- these are what the kids are telling me. This is how they ended up here and so, then, I also encourage the students that once you leave, you can still advocate for yourself, and so we work on the civic centered approach.

I wrote curriculum units on the school -- the Virginia Juvenile Justice System which is part of the Yale Teachers Initiative. Because my students didn't understand the system and so I wanted them to understand the system, to advocate, to make better decisions for themselves. Because I told them, when you come here, you know, sometimes a temporary setback is what you need to refocus and get ahead and so let's take advantage of this time that you're here to move on to the next level. And that's really my approach when I work on my students every day.

Even, you know, unfortunately we have some kids there that are 11 years old to kids that are 19 years old, so I just vary the approach. But the whole purpose is to make you a better person when you leave my class from than the day you walked in.

MS. BUSETTE: All right. Thank you very much. Danielle?

MS. RIHA: So, I got into teaching merely by accident. I was -- I came to -- I went to Alaska to work in the fishing industry for six months to save money for a graduate program as a physical therapist and while I was there the Superintendent asked me to substitute teach and my first answer was no-way. And he said he'd pay me \$120 a day and I said okay I could be persuaded and that's where I fell in love with teaching.

I was put into a classroom, unbeknownst to me, where there were going to be a couple of kids who were emotional behavioral. They had beat up teachers, they had put the chemistry lab on fire -- a whole bunch of crazy things, these kids. And I connected with them and I -- I didn't know that they were special needs in any way and the principal was like woah you are a natural. And I was like okay and I got a full-time job working there as an aide.

I got to do physical therapy with a young lady who had Cerebral Palsy and the -- out in rural Alaska the help, like aides, PT -- physical therapist, any kind of job like that is itinerant. And so they travel from village to village and that person might only serve the student maybe once every two months. So I got to do physical therapy with that kid and I just fell in love with teaching and I fell in love with the Indigenous culture.

And that's because my parents -- my mom is Sicilian and she grew up being smacked upside the head, being told not to speak her language to be American and speak American. And as I got to know the Indigenous population, they had the same situations growing up. They were forced to not speak their language and forced to act American and it's traumatic when you learn the history, and that's what I did is; I learned the real history of the people I was working with. And I went to UA, got my degree and instantly decided to go teach in rural Alaska.

In rural Alaska, you can only get to most of those sites by a six-seater plane, on a snow machine if the river is frozen in the winter, or upriver on a boat. There's no -- there are no grocery stores, there are no Starbucks. Most the kids -- well the kids, unless they've left the village, which most haven't, have never been on an elevator or an escalator. They've never seen a fresh fruit other than maybe an apple because apples last a long time. Milk, everything is canned. They never had what we just consider part of our daily life and Alaska native students score lower on standardized

tests than any other ethnic group in our state. Even people who come as refugees to our state and don't speak English.

And I kept hearing this over and over again and kept hearing politicians say oh the Alaskan native kids, they're bringing down our scores. And I know -- working with them I know that their people are geniuses. I mean, they've survived for thousands of years and created the kayak and created so many things and I thought, well how can I teach my kids that this -- those are the people they come from? And so, I started working with elders and got in a lot of trouble with the district.

Because they sent -- about every two years they buy a brand-new, \$80,000, curriculum that Washington said was tried and tested and true and worked for all kids to improve their reading or their math scores. Well all middle American White students, yes, true. But not Indigenous students who didn't have the same, you know, life experiences. So imagine, you know, you're a student and you've got this math test about slope and it's about a skateboarder going off a curb and they have never seen a curb. They don't know what a road looks like and they're trying to gather all this verbiage and they're not even thinking about the math and so I -- same thing with language arts. I had to teach the elements of literature to kids and we're reading stories about big city high schools and inner -- just things that they had no context, they had no idea.

And so, I brought in Yup'ik Elders and had them tell, oral, traditional stories and we learned about the elements of literature that way. I put those beautiful curriculums that were so expensive, in a closet put a padlock on it (Laughter) and I got in a lot of trouble. But my kids were learning, and my kids started doing better on the tests and those tests meant nothing to them. They lived a subsistence lifestyle. The only jobs in those cities -- in those villages are at the school or if you work for the Mayor's office. Which is usually a little shack.

Nobody works for an income. Everybody just lives off the land. Even bathing is different. They steam bath every night. So the men haul the water and the wood into this two room shack and one -- half of it is a steam room and you bring in a basin of water -- a basin in there. And you put a little bit of hot water from the stove and a little bit of cold water from the bucket and your shampoo and stuff, and you sit on the floor with other -- like for me, females, with other females. And you bathe and you talk, and you socialize and then you rinse and then you go to the cool room and

you cool off and you might go in and out of the hot room several times. But I can tell you this, when I became a teacher, even knowing that I was connected to the Indigenous culture I never thought I'd be steam bathing with my students and my parents and my grandparents. (Laughter)

So it's a different lifestyle and it's beautiful. And then I moved to the city and I always thought that everybody respected and admired the Indigenous people because in the communities I taught, they valued each other. But then I got to the city and I realized how much racism and hate there was for my students and how they thought that they were what society said they were. They were the drunks, they were the homeless, they were the non-successful people and I knew that I had to teach them who they really were and give them some confidence and that's my passion.

And I think that when you work as a teacher, your job is to become a learner and learn who your kids are and who your families are. So that you can show them how wonderful they are and that's my passion for teaching.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you both for sharing that with us. I know when we get to audience Q and A there's going to be a lot of audience Q and A. (Laughter) But I wanted us -- you know, you've mentioned a little bit about some of the challenges that you've encountered. But I wondered if you could give us a little bit more, sort of texture, around the kind of challenges you've faced as you've tried to make changes -- I'm good, thank you -- as you've tried to make changes, tried to be innovative. What has that felt like? So, Rodney?

MR. ROBINSON: Sometimes it's like banging your head against the wall. Because, in corrections, because ultimately, we can say detention center or whatever but we -- this is corrections, this is jail. You have outdated attitudes, they're very punitive and when you start to talk about empowering students and doing things that are student -- for the best needs of the student you incur -- a lot of people don't want to hear that.

A kid who's committed a crime, this kid should be punished and so when you try to implement change you get people who don't want change. They're so used to things, they're so rigid, you know, they run things like a strict prison and when you're empowering students they're just threatening to the system.

You know, I always say, you know, I believe in abolitionist teaching the quote Bettina

love is, you know, understand the system you're in if it's not working for you let's work to change it. And so when kids -- when you're empowering your students and they're starting to make changes, jail officials are threatened by that. And so what we had to do as teachers, we had to show them that hey, empowering students only makes things better here.

You know, for example, you don't have any incidents during school, you know, because the kids are engaged, they're doing things. So let's extend this to the other side, let's get more programs, let's do more things, let's get some restorative justice in the mix. And just getting that change of attitude to where you're not viewing them as criminals or convicts, but you're actually viewing them as teenagers who made mistakes.

That is the hardest obstacle to overcome and I'm not just talking about detention staff. I'm talking about state officials, you know, having to understand that this is a teenager who made a mistake. This is not a convict. You know, I've had this conversation with state officials and starting to get them to understand what cultured responsive teaching looks like.

For example, in the state of Virginia, in our state operated programs that runs our juvenile correction facilities, you know, we service 71 percent minority population. There's not a single minority in upper-level management of state operated programs. That is a major problem and a major issue because if we want kids to succeed, they need to have people in power who look like them and value them. And the people that are in power don't necessarily have those beliefs. So they -- that would be my biggest obstacle.

The second obstacle is probably just general education practices. You know, sometimes I tell my district look, the same thing as Danielle said. This ain't going to work for my kids, you know, the traditional way of doing things doesn't work. So these kids are in survival mode and so my whole purpose is to get them out of survival mode and to get them to a relaxed, productive environment where they can do things that they really want to do.

And so it's really about creating that positive experience, because one thing I always ask my kids, is like, when was the last time you had a positive experience with school? Some of them go back to kindergarten, first grade, some say never and so what I'll do, I'll say this is a good school. You know, when was the last time you had three square meals a day? A roof over your head? When

was the last time you actually physically felt safe? Or when was the last time your opinion has been of value in a classroom.

And so you have to get them to overcome the negative ways they feel about themselves in order to participate, and so those are my two hardest things as -- that old ideas are punitive punishment versus the building up of self-esteem with the students so that they can be productive.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you. Danielle.

MS. RIHA: One of my things is the systems. So we are a charter school but we're a Title One charter school. Ninety-three percent poverty at our school and because we're a Title One school we do get federal funding and they think that they need to infuse our school with the curriculums that I told you don't work for my students. And because we're Title One, they say in order to keep those funds you must teach these curriculums with fidelity. Which are -- is against everything we do. So of course, we don't use those curriculums, or we use them very minimally and we've gone round and around with the district and with the state.

And then I think for a lot of our students -- some of our students are really connected to their culture and they subsist and they hunt and they fish and they store their food and they eat muck tuck or whale fat or they produce seal oil. But some of them don't and so we've incorporated the science and the math and how you do those things into our classroom and so we have found people in the city who subsist, and we bring in that learning for our Indigenous students.

And -- so then they feel more connected and some of the lessons I've created with math in the cultural context, it shows them that their ancestors and that their ways of life are valuable. Willie Hensley who's an Inupiaq man who helped write the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act where Indigenous people in Alaska weren't put on reservations, instead they formed corporations and they make lots of money for their people and their people get to live their own way in their own lands.

He said you stand on the shoulders of your ancestors and so I teach my students that their ancestors are wise and that that wisdom flows through them and that they can grow and be anything. Because they don't believe they can, for sure, for sure. So, I tried to get them connected because there is a disconnect and then fighting the system 100 percent. Even Indian Ed -- Education,

Title Seven has been against some of our programs and that's really disheartening to me and to my students. And then teaching my students to advocate. There's nothing more powerful than when a student is heard. I have them write their legislators. I have them study the issues that are facing Indigenous people all over our state.

Global warming really is real. Some of their villages are falling off into the ocean. The animals that they hunt are going out farther into the ocean and they're not able to subsist the way that they used to. Their languages are dying. We already lost one Indigenous language in Alaska and how to get them connected with the people who speak their language so that they can make sure their languages stay alive. When they get letters back from legislators or from corporations, there's nothing more powerful.

And there's a meeting, I just was telling Rodney today, it's called AFN, Alaska Federation of Natives and they have a yearly meeting that discusses all of this stuff. But for 36 years they've had an Elder's and Youth conference that proceeds this and elders and young people from across the state come together and they talk over these issues. They write resolutions and they bring them to be voted on. They run for office in their corporations and my students thrive there.

We just fundraised to take 21 kids from Anchorage to drive up to Fairbanks, Alaska, seven-hour drive through the mountains, up there and unbelievable. They're stopping and interviewing people. They're meeting people that -- they've met elders that have experienced the trauma of boarding schools. The boarding school trauma where they lost their identity, they lost their language, they lost their connection to people and they become advocates.

And they came back to school and started advocating right away and telling other students in our school who were negative or not feeling it, that they needed to step up. Immediately they did. So that's -- those are the barriers and that's how we deal with it.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you very much. Wow. Very -- that's really inspirational. So, you both have had long teaching careers and have, you know, taught a number of different types of students. I want you to reflect on the students you work with now and tell me what has struck you most about those students? So yeah, Rodney we'll start with you.

MR. ROBINSON: I know there's this narrative that every young Black boy wants to be

the rapper or baller. But the reality is, a lot of them don't have dreams and that is the most frightening part of working with my students. The fact that they don't see themselves as being a productive member of society and so that lack of dreams is really, really disheartening. And so what we do is, we just have to show them that they are what they want to be and it's really hard to get over those barriers and get them to believe in themselves.

And then when you're working with, you know, my population, which is 90 percent, you know, Black boys, there's this issue of toxic masculinity in our culture that we have to address. Because our students they're hurting because of it. Their relationships with people are hurting because they don't understand. They see this world through this toxic ideas that are being pushed on them, not only by some things in the culture and the music, but by their families. And so it's really hard to get them out of that mindset to say, this is what you can be, this person deserves respect, this is how you treat a woman, and they don't have those types of things.

And, I mean, there are various issues. A lot of it is due to the fact that all the men that've been pulled out of our society by the prison system, you know. But it's really important for us to show them that you can be better than where you come from. And then the other issue with my kids is their mental health. You know, and especially in the Black community there's this stigma about mental health and it's a really hard barrier to overcome.

I remember I had a student one day, he came from court and he was just flying off the handle upset because he had been -- he had got sentenced to court ordered therapy and his whole thing was I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy. And so he and I had a conversation about why the judge sentenced you to therapy, you know. He said I had PTSD and I'm depressed and so we started talking and he survived a drive-by shooting in which two of his friends were killed and I was like, that's not normal. You know, it's okay to admit that I'm not here.

You're on a probation violation for drugs because you're numbing that pain, you know. You're not dealing with those mental health issues that you're working with. And so, he and I had this long discussion and I'm also a believer in modeling, you don't talk about any behavior that you're not modeling with your students and I was having some issues. You know, I remember I was at home and my wife told me, hey did you hear about the four-year-old on southside who got shot and my response

was yeah that happens. But I didn't realize, wait a minute, that's not a normal human response to something like that.

I was absorbing so much of my kid's trauma that I wasn't dealing with my mental health and so I started, you know, I sat down with this young man. I was like, you'll pick out a therapist for me if you go to therapy yourself, and so I figured I have to model this behavior if I want these kids to become healthy. And not just physically healthy but mentally healthy because a lot of our kids, they're out in the streets. They're not drinking and drugging because it's the cool thing to do. They're numbing the pain and it's important that we teach them how to address and deal with that pain so that they aren't constantly being violated for these little things when they're just trying to deal with the hurt and that trauma that they've been through.

And so those are some of the big issues, you know, that have struck me about this. Just the lack of mental health, the toxic masculinity in society and just they're overall lack of dreams and believing in themselves.

MS. BUSETTE: Wow. Okay.

MS. RIHA: I'd have to agree with him. With the Indigenous population that I serve as well, there's so much trauma. There's a lot of suicide. They have the highest suicide rate in the nation and just making our place their safe place and a place where they feel like they can learn. And the reality that they face racism on a daily basis, almost 24/7 and how -- and to recognize that and to speak openly about bias with my students.

Because they don't talk about it. They feel it but they don't talk about it. And I think that once I get them talking about it, it really helps them realize that it's real and what they're feeling is real and that it's very much in their face and it's so rude and disgusting sometimes. But that they have a right to stand up for themselves and they have a right to call people out. I didn't realize how strong it was until I started working in the city with Indigenous people.

Some of the other things that they face are very much like what he was saying, what Rodney was saying. A lot of their parents are in prison or dealing with a lot of issues and my kids face that every day and they come to school, hopefully, feeling safer, you know, where we're at. I think that in the bigger city -- bigger schools or in the schools where the population is a little bit different and the

teachers haven't been trained the way our teachers have been trained. I think that -- that it's harder for those kids and at our school, too, there are a lot more Indigenous teachers at our school.

So, the White teachers are -- there's -- it's about 20 percent and so that makes a big difference too is when kids can see themselves in their teachers. And then the teachers who are not of their race are culturally immersed and taught the history and really acculturated to their culture rather than coming in with their own values and trying to change the kids, and so, yeah.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you. Very, very sobering. So, let's talk a little bit more about narratives. You've both alluded to this, that public or cultural narratives often influence how we see ourselves --

MS. RIHA: Yes.

MS. BUSETTE: -- and how others seen us.

MR. ROBINSON: Mm-hmm.

MS. BUSETTE: And you both work with students for whom those -- that cultural narrative's extremely negative. Can you reflect on that and how your work really, explicitly tries to challenge that and create a positive alternative narrative? You mentioned, Rodney, that a lot of your students don't have dreams and obviously that comes from a place of having -- you know all kids have dreams, right?

MR. ROBINSON: Yup.

MS. BUSETTE: They start off wanting to be firemen or whatever it is, you know, go to outer space. They all have dreams and to get to a place where they're in middle school to high school and don't have dreams really means somebody has really crushed that. So, tell me about how you think about re-instilling that sense of opportunity and that sense of hope and optimism.

MR. ROBINSON: Well one thing, you know, when I walk into a school building, I have one philosophy is that nothing is more important than what a student sees, hears and feels while they're in that building. And so, when I walked into the detention center from day one, I walked in and I said, this is a jail. This is literally a jail, the white walls, the cold doors. Just the feel of it was a jail and so I -- this is not a place of learning and so one thing we did to counter that was we -- you know, I put up a timeline when you walk into the building of African American history. Just a reminder as you

walk down this hall of where we've come from, or when you're leaving of where we've come from. Just a reminder, this is only temporary, you know, you can still do things.

And then we went throughout the building and I told them one specific thing. I said jail is across the hall, over here, this is school. And what we do, we put up murals on every wall. We had the kids create murals of their heroes to give them ownership of the building, of the things that they wanted to do, the people they admired. Even though they didn't like some of the people that were up on the wall, I was -- these are the kid's heroes, these are the people they admired, and so we created that.

Then also, I put up college banners on every window in the building, and so I was like if you're going to look out the window and daydream, dream about college. You know, and just constantly inundating them with positive images of what they can be and encouraging them to be what they want to be. One thing I always do when I'll travel, when I see African Americans or LGBTQ people in positions that counter the narratives that they have in their mind, I take a picture with them. And I post that picture on the walls like, this is what you can do, this is what we're doing, and so they're constantly inundated with negative stereotypes of who they are and what they can be.

What I do is, I try to counter that narrative with everything positive that I see and so that is really -- that's what it's about. Not only do I show them the pictures but I bring in the people, you know, that is the most powerful thing for them to hear from, you know, lawyers, doctors, you know, dog trainers, you know. We had kids that are so into dogs and we've had kids that have gotten out and started businesses dog walking, thanks to gentrification. (Laughter) But that's a whole other thing.

But they're making good money in these businesses in things that they had never thought of and they're -- whenever a kid has a like or a dream, you have to feed that like and that dream. And you have to give them and show them that they can do it, no matter what. Even though society tells them they can't do it. Even from the literature that we pick out in the school. Everything is a positive representation of what they can be or something that challenges the narrative of who they think they are, and so you constantly have to create that positive environment. Because, I mean, let's be honest, jail is a negative experience, you know. It's an extremely negative time but --

MS. BUSETTE: And traumatic.

MR. ROBINSON: Yeah. Traumatic, yes. And I'll say even if our kids haven't been through any trauma, coming to jail is actually trauma --

MS. BUSETTE: Uh-huh.

MR. ROBINSON: -- And so what we try to do is just get them -- these eight hours that you're in school, this is it. This is the time for your mind to wander to do whatever you want, to dream the dreams that you thought were impossible. And we're going to make sure that you -- when you get out -- if it's no more than making a call, setting you up with a mentor, or showing you that you can pursue this even though you've made some mistakes in your past. I often say, you know, America's a country of second chances and education is the best way to get a second chance.

And so, I try to instill that in those kids with positive images, and even though it's hard because when they leave, they're going back to that same negative situation that I can't change. But I do want you to know there is a home, there is a positivity. While you're with me, I'm going to counteract all that negativity that you've dealt with every minute of your life from your people in your neighborhood to the every television and media image that tells you what you are. That you are not that, you are truly whatever you want to be in this world, and I'm going to support you to make you believe that.

MS. BUSETTE: Amen to that. Danielle?

MS. RIHA: So, for me, I -- when I connected with Indigenous culture, I connected through the values and there are cultural values that transcend race, they transcend gender, they transcend geographic location. Values like honoring your elders, taking care of the young ones, valuing your education, taking care of the land, taking care of each other because we can't live without each other. We need each other, we need other humans and I was always taught those by my grandparents and my parents. But then when I moved to a village and heard elders saying this is what we need to teach our kids and not what's in your schoolbooks, I connected so my school focuses on those values.

And in focusing on those values and making that the core of our school, we get a lot of other cultures or families that have a strong connection to their culture and it's a great mix of people

because of that. And it's beautiful to see kids find value in their culture and build on that and it's in everything we do. It's in our -- instead of having a regular behavior program, you know, like every other school in the district, ours is based on cultural values and they're the meaning behind everything we do. There's a meaning why we walk in the halls in a line. It's not because the district says you have to, we have reasons. We have safety issues and we talk about all of those values and how the cultural values help support systems in our school. They're not just systems because they're systems because somebody said we have to do it.

And I get my kids to interview elders and family members and then they share their interviews with the class. They learn so much about themselves and about their family that they never knew. We're the media age so everybody's on their gadgets and nobody's telling stories like they used to. Where I grew up listening to how my parents grew up, you know, they told me all the stories. That's not as common anymore and so my kids are doing that, you know, all the time.

For studying 9/11, my kids -- especially when I lived in the village, they couldn't even imagine that many people being in one building. You know what I mean? So, I have my kids interview people who were alive during 9/11 and tell them their experience because then they hear somebody's voice and they can connect to why is this a part of our history? Why is this -- why do we celebrate this every September 11th.

And I get my kids out in the public and job shadowing, I mean they're junior higher and so sometimes when I call people and ask about job shadowing, they're like oh they're just junior high kids. And I was like, let them impress you, let them show you that they're not just junior high kids, and they do. Every single time they do and it gives them a purpose and it also helps them find their dream.

MR. ROBINSON: Yup.

MS. RIHA: It helps them find, woah I could be in business or I could be a zookeeper, or whatever it is, and I help them find their placements that they're interested in. And so inspiring them to find what their dreams are and maybe even learn their dream wasn't the dream that they thought it was --

MR. ROBINSON: (Laughter)

MS. RIHA: -- And they want to do something different. And so --

MS. BUSETTE: (Laughter) So, we're getting closer to the time when we'll have -- entertain questions from our audience. But I have a question, which hopefully you can address rather quickly. It's around educational policy and reform so it's a big topic. But, you know, you're both very involved in terms of educational policy. So what recommendations do you have for school boards, PTA's, you know, school district administrators when you think about students like yours who could benefit from the approaches that you are using?

MR. ROBINSON: It's simple. We need more people of color in these rooms making decisions. Because as I've gone around the country, I've spoken, you know, to so many different people and places and policy boards and quite often I'm the only Black person in the room. And that's a problem and so we need more people in color at the table making decisions for our students.

And another thing, we need teachers on the table, you know, I'm always going to shout out Congresswoman Johana Hayes, but people don't realize this is some revolutionary -- we got a teacher on the actual education committee, you know. (Laughter) It's a revolutionary idea to actually have someone who -- but what she's doing, is she's letting policy makers know that, this is what policy looks like in Washington D.C., this is what it looks like by the time it gets to the classroom.

MS. BUSETTE: Uh-huh.

MR. ROBINSON: And it's having a really great affect on how they're viewing educational policy. So, I think we need more people of color at the table and we need more teachers at the table when it comes to making educational policy and, to take it a step further, we need students at the table.

MS. BUSETTE: Uh-huh.

MR. ROBINSON: You know, they're the -- no one's more -- can describe the experience in their classroom better than the students.

MS. BUSETTE: Mm-hmm.

MR. ROBINSON: So, we need to start giving student voices into policy and decision making and just give them control.

MS. BUSETTE: Mm-hmm.

MR. ROBINSON: You know, our kids are so wonderful that if we sometimes step out

of our way and let them lead, we'll be surprised at what we can get.

MS. BUSETTE: Mm-hmm. Great, thank you. Danielle.

MS. RIHA: Well, first of all, how many of y'all know that this is Piscatoway land? That's a problem. If you're from Washington D.C., you should know that. In the state of Montana, they have a -- they've created a bill that is Indigenous learning for all. Every student that comes through their public-school system has to learn who the people -- the first people were of their area, of their state. I think that that should be required in all states, I think that we should know that, and I think that would bring more value to the people who are the first people of their lands.

And just -- I have the same thing that he had, as far as bringing teachers to the table and really involving them in some of the policy making. I -- this year I actually was invited to several discussions and it made a big difference. My state almost went to a charter school program where private charter schools are allowed, and people make money off of kids and I got to stand up and say no. You don't want that, public charters are where it's at, you know. I think more opportunities for teachers to be involved like that would be great.

I think elevating educators and getting more educators in the classrooms. There's a lot of places where subs are there throughout the year. We didn't have a special education teacher at my school all year last year. Because they're just not out there and the burnout is high, and I think that we need to do something about that.

MR. ROBINSON: And if you don't let us come to the table, we're going to barge in the room and take over the table. (Laughter) Shout-out to everybody in Chicago right now, you know. (Applause) (Laughter)

MS. BUSETTE: Yes.

MS. RIHA: Yup.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you both very much. So, you know, you alluded to this, you've also said a little bit about this, particularly when you were talking about being out in the villages and I'd like you to start answering the question I'm going to ask here. So, most learning takes place actually outside of the classroom.

MS. RIHA: Absolutely.

MS. BUSETTE: Right. So how has that informed your approach to your students?

MS. RIHA: So, for instance, fishing game regulates subsistence, hunting and fishing for my students. Which seems awkward because they should be able to hunt and fish, that's how they live. But my students wanted to know why do they regulate or -- how -- why do they say I can catch this many fish? And so, I took them out to the streams, and we did a bug count and we tested our waters to see if our rivers were healthy to sustain more fish and then we brought in the whole debate of the Pebble Mine. Which my students did some deep-down research on what kind of damage an open pit mine could or would do to their river system.

So, again, it's inside our classroom, we're studying real science, real math but then we go outside of our classroom to really get our data and really connect to who they are and what their purpose is in their community. And, we've had some students go before state legislators and give them the facts and show them their data on the healthy, you know, rivers and what that would so --

MS. BUSETTE: Wow. Thank you. Rodney?

MR. ROBINSON: Well, to me, the community and the school can't be separate. They have to be merged together and when I was in comprehensive, one thing I always told the teachers, if the kids don't see you in the community then you're not part of their environment. Because, you know, if you're leaving and going out to your houses and suburbs and you're not spending time and the weekends in the community, seeing parents, seeing the kids at their jobs and getting to know them. You're not helping the kids; they see you as an outsider.

And more importantly, right now my kids are locked up, so you know. But what we do, we bring the community in to our school, you know. We have programs, we have mentors that come in and work with the kids. We bring in, you know, coaches, we bring in community activists, we bring in art programs, we bring in everybody in the community. We have career fairs, we actually have job fairs for our students so that when they leave us, that they have jobs in the community and that they feel a part of the community. It goes back to, you know, to the old African proverb, the kid who's rejected by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.

And so, our kids are in the process of burning the village down, so we want to let them know that hey you're a part of this community. You're a part of this family and so when you go out,

you're making positive decisions. When you are faced with situations you have somebody in the community who you can talk to, whether it's a member of The Divine Nine sororities and fraternities who we partnership to mentor our youth. Or if it's someone at Art 180, if it's a probation officer, we try to engrain our kids into the community so that when they're outside they don't feel like they're on their own. Because a lot of times my students are on their own.

So you want to set them up with positive experiences outside the classroom. Like I said, whether it's a community organization, a mentor, anybody. Because we can do as much positive stuff in our facility as we want. But when we send them back to the same toxic environments, all our productive work we've done is gone out the window. And so we try to set them up on the best path for behavior once they leave and so when -- even though they weren't in the community, they still feel a part the community because we brought the community in to them.

MS. RIHA: And those mentorships are so powerful, I think the most relevant person that I've brought in recently is Damen Bell-Holter who used to play for the Boston Celtics and he's Tlingit Haida, from Alaska. An Alaska native man, and he's half Black half Tlingit Haida and he speaks his language fluently.

MS. BUSETTE: Wow.

MS. RIHA: And he gave up playing for Greece to work for his corporation and travel the whole state of Alaska to teach men what it's like to be a man. To teach young boys how to treat women. To teach them how to survive trauma. He gave up his basketball career to work with his people, and my kids love him. They're always trying to learn the Tlingit language so when he comes in -- and he comes in a couple times a month, no matter what his schedule is, because he's really connected with my kids and they're connected with him. So, those people are really powerful.

MS. BUSETTE: Very, very positive. Great. One last question before we turn to questions from the audience. So, all the work you're doing is extremely valuable. I'm sure that, you know, you're learning all the time from your kids. When you think about your kids, the experiences you've had, both with them, their parents, the communities, et cetera. What is the most rewarding experience you've had as a teacher? So, Danielle, I'm going to have you start.

MS. RIHA: Okay. I've gotten permission to use this young man's name. I'm going to

talk about Isaiah. Isaiah came to my school, the Alaska Native Cultural Charter School, in fifth grade. His parents brought him there because they were literally at their -- they didn't know what to do. He was suicidal, he was a big kid, in fifth grade he was probably 5'11", maybe six feet tall, big guy. And he'd always been bullied about his race, his size, you name it, the way he spoke. Because in -- at home they spoke his language and he refused to speak the language, but he still had the dialect when he spoke English.

And in fifth grade, at my school, we teach his culture, which is Inyupiaq and Siberian Yup'ik and he came in, denouncing, I am not native, I'm Mexican. Because, he said, he felt like he looked Mexican and that he would rather be Mexican than be who he is. And my students really wrapped around him and embraced him, and they wanted to know about him, and we were learning his language in class, every day. And slowly but surely, he became connected and started wanting to hear his language and started speaking his language and practicing it at home.

And last year I brought my students to East High where he was getting ready to graduate and we went into (inaudible) program and he was the cultural bearer for the whole school. And he walked them around and then he sat them down and he said I'm going to tell you something, you're going to face racism against your people forever, it's never going to go away. I don't want you to be confused. I don't want you to think that it's every going to stop because everywhere you go, whether you're applying for a job or whatever. It's going to be in your face. Kids are going to tease you when you go to high school, it's never going to stop.

And I was just like woah and he said but, don't stop being who you are, and this guy, he now makes and sells Indigenous drums from walrus gut. He goes back to his home village every year and hunts and gives all the food to the village, and he has a national -- a drum and dance group where he's written over 50 songs in his language. And his dance group tours all over the world, singing and dancing and this boy was suicidal and he's still has suicidal tendencies and he'll call me and say, I just need someone to talk to because I'm not -- I'm going to be a strong Inupiaq man.

And I have lots of stories like that, but that's probably my most recent strong one, that this boy was hopeless, and his parents were hopeless, and he found a way to connect to his culture and it's his livelihood. It's his livelihood, he lives his dream of being an Inupiaq man.

MS. BUSETTE: Wow. Thank you.

MR. ROBINSON: My dream is kind of -- I mean my biggest moments are kind of selfish because I got into this thing to honor my mother. You know, who taught me to pass it down to the next generation and their job was to make it better for the generation after them. And so, I think my biggest accomplishment is that I have about 22 former students who are currently teachers. Some of them in the same schools that they grew up in and so that to me is my biggest moment. Not only them but also, I have another 10 to 15 who are social workers in their neighborhoods, or in the school, and so that's my proudest moment because to me that's my mom's dream. You know, I'm passing it down to them and to see them take it on and pass it down to the next generation. Even those who aren't teaching, I have students in the community, you know, who are trying to get into music but they're doing things like throwing back to school rally's, doing those types of things.

MS. BUSETTE: Mm-hmm.

MR. ROBINSON: And so, to me, I'm always proud when I see some of my former students giving back to the next generation. You know, even to the student I have now who got out and joined the Army and you know, because he wants to be an American for the first time in his life. Those are the types of things that inspire me, when those kids -- because I know you're taking those lessons. You know, you learn more than history that I've taught you. You learned the core aspect of Black culture and that is to pull up the next generation and so that to me is my proudest moment.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you very much. So, with that we're going to go to questions from the audience. So the way I'm going to work this, is I'm going to ask for three people to give -- to ask us questions. We're kind of going to group those three and then Danielle and Rodney will answer whichever ones they would like to answer. And we'll keep doing that until we hit time at 3:30 p.m. So, let's see, so we have three right now. So, Larry, I'm sorry, please say your name too when you give your question. This woman with her hand up here and then in back of Larry, there's somebody with a black jacket on -- and a young lady with a black jacket on, so.

MR. LANGER: I'm Reverend Michael Langer. I grew up in what was once Sac and Fox territory. I also have an ACE's score of eight. So, my question to you both is, do you see -- or how much benefit would be gained if we took specific teachers and trained them in addressing children

and educating children with high ACE's scores? Where some much of their brain is working against their learning, and gave them specific training for the environments that they would be in rather than just graduating out people with teaching certificates and throwing them into trauma, crisis teaching where nothing is going to work or very little is going to work?

MS. BUSETTE: Okay. Thank you.

SPEAKER: Oh, hello. My name is Tina (inaudible). I want to say first thank you. I'm a former Anacostia High School teacher, so I appreciate everything you said about your neighborhood. But I'm from a town in Arkansas with less than 1,000 people so I appreciate the rural piece too. I'm an Ed. Policy PhD student at Penn and I study Black male teachers, so of course I'm a huge Rodney Robinson fan.

My question, is of course, a policy question regarding teachers of color. They're a lot of barriers teachers of color face getting into the classroom, teacher certification exams, hiring discrimination. And I would love to know what you all believe our best next steps for overcoming some of those barriers. They seem to be getting worse than getting better despite the national calls for more teachers of color. So, I would love to hear what you all are hearing as you travel, from policy makers on that issue.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you, Tina. Yeah, just speak up. (Laughter) Use this one.

SPEAKER: Hello? Oh, that's great, okay. (Laughter) I'm from Flint, Michigan and I am a junior at MSU, Michigan State University. I think everyone knows that but like, okay, different state. So, I did AmeriCorps at the last high school left in Flint, and before that I was already in student education but I'm more interested in education of public health policy. So, what advice would you give someone interested -- who's just in their junior year on the way to grad school, eventually, who wants to pursue education, who wants to be an educator. Making a change in education policy, that is what you're saying, intersectional, intercultural. That bypasses what we think is different and they are scared of it. So yeah.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you. Okay, so, our three questions are around specific training for teachers who are immersed in very difficult environments and so that's it's much more than

your general training. That the first one. The second one is around policies for overcoming the rather low numbers of teachers of color in the classroom. And the third one is career advice for somebody who wants to enter the education field, particularly interested in intersectionality.

MS. RIHA: I'll take the ACE's one, how about that.

MR. ROBINSON: I'll take that --

MS. RIHA: Okay, so for ACE's, trauma informed schools are, man they are right on with teach -- with training teachers. I think there's nothing more important, especially because getting that trauma informed training, you also get to learn about secondhand trauma. Which is real for educators. You take home those problems and they become a part of you and so I think that all schools should have it. And --

MS. BUSETTE: Do you think that that should be part of a --

MS. RIHA: Of the general program? Absolutely.

MS. BUSETTE: Mm-hmm.

MS. RIHA: I think that and heading into your question in the back. I do think that teachers need to be taught that there is going to be a lot of trauma because, I mean, I honestly -- I don't think that a lot of people realize that when they're getting into the education field and that's one of the main reasons that teachers get out of education. And as a young person, going into the teaching field, don't just go in to teach kids, go in to be an advocate for kids and teach kids to be advocates for themselves. Don't give up that passion because it sounds like you have a lot of it.

MR. ROBINSON: Yeah. I'll try to answer quick. To the policy one, get in the classroom. Get in the classroom and put student voice first. You know, one thing I've discovered, adults loving telling adults no, it's a little harder to tell children no. So, if you empower students and empower student voice with your policy and your work, then you'll be successful.

The teachers of color one, that's really right up my alley because I've literally been around the country speaking on that and you have to have honest conversations. You know, and one thing I've been trying to do as I go around the county is have honest conversations about teachers of color and it's not well received everywhere. I've had places where people have gotten up and walked out of my speeches because they feel threatened by the things I'm saying.

So, it starts with honest conversation. It starts with consistent policy, you know. For example, 50 percent of all teachers of color, you know, Black teachers, come from HBCU's yet were not investing in HBCU's. You know, so that immediately is something we can do to solve the problem, is start investing in HBCU's who are the number one producers of teachers of color. As far as getting - keeping teachers of color in the classroom, we have to support them, you know. We have to constantly support them; we can't rely on them as the disciplinarian. We can't rely on them as the coach. We have view them as masses of pedagogy and allow them to build that. And so often we put teachers of color in this little box and say this is what you're supposed to do, and we don't value them for their knowledge as a whole. And so, it's important that we put the supports in place so that they aren't being burnt out.

But the key is just having these honest conversations. A lot of people don't want to have that and look at the states that are doing it well. For example, this may shock everybody, but Mississippi is doing a lot of work with getting teachers of color. They're using state dollars to have conferences for men of color and women of color in education. You know, so we need to start having these types of conferences so that our teachers of color don't feel isolated in their classroom or isolated in their district or in their position.

And then we need to -- we need to look at some of the names of these schools. You know I was talking to a teacher last week and she was saying, you know, we're having a problem keeping African American teachers in the school and we were having about a five to ten-minute conversation. I asked her the name of her school and it's named after a confederate general. I was like wait a minute. I'm not going to teach at a school named after a confederate. And so those little conversations -- not little conversations but those little things make a big, big difference if you want to talk about keep teachers of color in the classroom or in specific schools.

We just need to look at the issue as a whole and just start being honest, stop denying that oh everything's okay, it's not okay. Fifty percent of our students are students of color and 80 percent of our teachers are White. That is a major, major issue with a student, like myself, who grew up in those type of district looking for a teacher whom I can talk to about identity issues and things that I'm experiencing. So, it's really important that we have these honest conversations to put support

systems in place and invest in HBCU's and the universities that we know are producing high numbers of teachers of color.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you very much. We'll take three other questions. So, this young lady with her -- with the white blouse on, please, first. Thank you. And then some other hands, I saw somebody else, okay, with the grey sweater. Anybody else? Any other questions for right now? And this young lady, Jessica, we'll come to you after, this young lady with the trench coat on.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Bisma. I work for an international education organization and my question's for Danielle. So, I'm sure I misunderstood but I recall you mentioned something about hearing family stories about being treated as the other, because of not speaking English and likening it to kind of feeling -- that you can relate to your native students who speak their native languages. Because I'm sure we all agree that, you know, being a non-native English speaker who's White is a completely different experience than being a person of color. So, my question for you is, as a White woman of privilege, what do you feel your role is in helping your students? Particularly when dismantling systematic racism?

MS. BUSETTE: Okay. Great. So, we have a young lady here, grey, right here, it's the grey. Do -- sorry --

SPEAKER: Yeah.

MS. BUSETTE: Do you have --

SPEAKER: I do, yeah, I'm good.

MS. BUSETTE: Great.

SPEAKER: Hi, my name is Ms. Lisa. Thank you both for coming. I was a special education teacher in Chicago, actually and just moved out here this year. So, I appreciate you shouting out Chicago. My question is for both of you. How do you see the intersections of special education play out with your students who are facing all these toxic narratives and what do you think we can do specifically to uplift and support those students?

MS. BUSETTE: Okay. Great. Thank you. And then we have a young lady here in the beige coat, peacoat.

SPEAKER: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Laura Vinseca I'm an Assistant Principal with FCPS in Fairfax County. My question to the panel is in regards to the support that we could provide to our parents and families of color. In particular, any community resources that we can, you know, use here on a local level but also on a national level that we may not be already implementing?

MS. BUSETTE: Great.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you very much. So, there's a question, obviously, on supporting parents of color. A question about how do White teachers who are in these environments support their students?

MR. ROBINSON: I think that's her question.

MS. RIHA: That's my question.

MS. BUSETTE: Yup. Uh-huh. (Laughter) And, a --

MS. RIHA: Yup. You think?

MS. BUSETTE: That's right. And a third question is around supporting kids in special ed and what you've seen that works there. So.

MS. RIHA: Okay. I'm going to address your question first, and so I've got an actual funny story about the whole language thing. So, my mom is Sicilian and North African, and she was not allowed to speak her language. And I was telling my students that story when we were learning about the boarding schools and the boarding school epidemic. When kids were not allowed to speak their language and they were beaten and traumatized for that.

And one of my students said, Ms. Riha, I wish I could talk to your mom and I said why? You could talk to my mom anytime you want. And she said well, I want to tell her how lucky she is because she comes from Sicily and if she really wants to learn her language she can go there and learn it. Where I come from, there's five speakers left in my language and if it dies, there's nowhere else I can go to learn my language.

And that was so profound to me, so I think being a White -- a White looking teacher, a White teacher, I think that is so important to really know and really listen to the stories and the real history that's not in the history book and teach that to your students. So, they can realize how

important their language learning is, how important it is to keep those languages alive and how important it is to tell their stories and tell their people's stories. Does that answer your question? Or not really? Yes? Okay cool.

SPEAKER: Thank you.

MS. RIHA: Wanted to make sure I got you.

MR. ROBINSON: Well, I'm not a White woman so I can't answer that question.

(Laughter) But as far as the SpEd one, number one is, all teachers need to view themselves as SpEd teachers. You know, in that, you know, our government should -- kind of put some stipends so that teachers, all teachers should become exceptional Ed certified. And college prep programs should include more exceptional education courses for those who aren't pursuing that route. Because all students are different, all students have different needs and we need to make sure that as a teacher in front of a classroom, I can address those specific needs of every single learner in my classroom.

But in detention that's a real big issue because 90 percent of our students are exceptional ed and so at our school we're -- everybody in the building is not only trained in their subject but we're also exceptional ed certified. And so that's really a big thing but then to hop back on another issue I had was the teachers of color. We're throwing kids in special education because we don't recognize their cultural differences.

MS. RIHA: Yup.

MR. ROBINSON: And so, we're quick to get an IEP and a Child Study and throw them in exceptional ed. But if we had teachers of color who understood those kids, who understood their culture, we wouldn't necessarily have those high numbers in exceptional ed and we could deal with those behavioral problems from a cultural standpoint.

MS. RIHA: And also, that problem makes kids feel less.

MR. ROBINSON: Yes.

MS. RIHA: And so, they're already battling so many challenges and then on top of that to be told that they're not a good learner or they've got a learning deficiency, it just wipes them out.

MR. ROBINSON: Yeah.

MS. RIHA: Yeah.

MS. BUSETTE: Yeah.

MS. RIHA: I agree with you on the special education for all teachers too. Because -- and we do have a lot on our plate so --

MR. ROBINSON: Yeah.

MS. RIHA: -- I mean we have a lot on our plate and so a lot of teachers say well that's a special education's teachers' job to provide me with what I need. No. That is a kid in your classroom, and you are responsible for their success --

MR. ROBINSON: Yes.

MS. RIHA: -- In learning, period.

MR. ROBINSON: Yeah.

MS. RIHA: Period. So.

MR. ROBINSON: And as far as supporting parents, it varies from community to community and so it's hard for me to say what specifically works for a specific community. But I do know one thing that works is actually going to see the parents. Not just having a night and invite all parents to the school, because let's be honest, school is a scene of trauma for a lot of parents.

MS. RIHA: Parents. Yeah.

MR. ROBINSON: So, they don't feel comfortable. They get nervous and agitated walking through those school doors. So, is your school going to the local community, you know, out there, whether it be the boys and girls club? Or if your students are in public housing, are you having meetings in the public housing complex? You need to go meet the parents where they are.

So often in school we tell all the parents, hey come here. Well, in today's economy most parents are working several jobs and it's just not convenient for them to come to the school. We need to make it as accessible to parents as possible and that means meeting them wherever they are. If it's no more than going to the local bank and setting up outside the bank and saying hey this is what we have going on in our school.

Just go out into the community and engage the parents in the community, because every parent has to go grocery shopping. Why not set up at the local grocery store in your

community? You know, you can't put the ownness on parents to come to the school. I think schools have to go that extra step to meet parents where they are.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you both very much. We're going to take one more round of questions. So, Jessica, up here, in the front. Yup. Anybody else? Well Jessica you may be closing us out.

MR. ROBINSON: I think there's --

MS. BUSETTE: Oh, and there's a gentleman back there, can you raise your hand again? Great. Perfect.

SPEAKER: So first I just want to thank you both for your service. I know -- my mother is a teacher, she's been teaching for 35 years in Greenville, South Carolina. Over 70 percent of her students are Latino. Many of them are first generation English speakers. So, I have watched firsthand her grapple with a lot of the issues that you guys have been talking about and I'm up here getting a little emotional just thinking about it.

Because I've seen her try to be everything to all people and to live up to, not only delivering a quality education to these kids but also the pressure that teachers are under with standardized testing. With now these shooter -- active shooter drills, there's just obstacle after obstacle for teachers and so you -- you've each have mentioned a little bit about self-care, but I wondered if you could speak to some strategies you use to handle the emotional toll of what it's like to be a teacher in America today?

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you. We have another one other there and I think that's going to be it. Yup.

SPEAKER: Hi. If you can hear me, I'm Dave Keivita (phonetic). I'm a product of D.C. product schools, I've got two African American children in D.C. public schools now. And Ms. Riha, you spoke a moment ago about, I think, trying to align your teaching to the standards that you were expected to teach to. And I think this probably applies to both of you and we do live sort of in this standards based culture around education and I think there's a lot of logic to that but you all are trying to work at something that fundamentally underlies students abilities to access the standards. And so, I wonder how you kind of meld the ground between those two things. You know, the expectation being

that you're going to teach these standards because students need to show proficiency in them in order to graduate. And yet, you've got to do all this work that really underlies that.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you very much. Let's do the self-care question first.

MR. ROBINSON: Number one, therapy. Two, doing things, little things that make you happy. I know a couple weeks ago I had a big family dinner, you know, with all my cousins all my -- my mother, my brother, sisters, nieces, and nephews. But that was just something I hadn't done in a long time and I remember those growing up and so I just put on a family dinner. And it just made me feel good to see all of my family in one room. And so it's nothing major, just make sure you deal with your mental health issues, but just do those little things that make you happy, that keep you going and understanding why you're in this -- why you're in the business.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you.

MS. RIHA: Yeah. Self-care, too, I know this might sound silly because it still deals with school. But when I get -- if I get invited to anything by a parent or community member or -- I go. I mean, if it's a funeral, if it's a catechism, whatever it is, I go. I go.

MR. ROBINSON: What's a catechism?

MS. RIHA: Huh?

MR. ROBINSON: What's a catechism?

MS. RIHA: Like -- part of the Catholic Church. (Laughter)

MR. ROBINSON: Okay. I'm sorry. I'm Baptist.

MS. RIHA: I go, because you know what? Being connected -- more connected to my families does make me feel good and it does help my self-care. Because it helps me see that my students are being fortified with cool cultural events as well. Steaming -- steam bathing, we don't have that in Anchorage, but I've got two families that have a steam bath in their home. I'm getting ready to buy my own home and they're going to build me a steam bath because -- and they're going to come to my house and steam. So, going outside of your comfort zone and actually enjoying some of those activities with your community -- your school community. I think that makes me feel good.

MS. BUSETTE: So the question about standards versus, you know, culturally competent kind of curriculum that really speaks to students.

MR. ROBINSON: Well, I have issue with testing. Plain and simple testing needs to go. I don't have an issue with standards but give me the standards and get out of my way, you know. Don't tell me how or when to teach or what stories to teach. The whole purpose of this is to learn skills I can use stories and people and things that my kids relate to, right, to learn the skill rather than studying Shakespeare and these things that my kids and I'm not interested in. So, the whole thing is, I don't mind standards but just give me the standards and get out of my way. Allow me to be the professional that I am and do what's best for my students.

MS. RIHA: Yeah. Don't make me follow a timeline --

MR. ROBINSON: Yes. Exactly.

MR. ROBINSON: -- And teach exactly the same story to exactly every kid, every year. One real good example that I have is mean, median, and mode. How many times have you been taught that growing up? Okay, but how many of you confuse which is which? Well, so did my students until we got some clay and made three different types of boats because their people make three different types of watercrafts. One goes fast, one carries a heavy load and one is almost impossible to tip. They make three boats out of the same amount of clay and then they test those in the water. They have one variable so they're learning the scientific method and they do mean, median, and mode on their tests and they remember what mean, median and mode is every single time on their standardized tests. So, they got the standard down but it's something that relates to them and then I make their literature pertain to it also. And the cool thing about that is, is that it doesn't matter what ethnic group you come from, all civilizations are built around water and all civilizations have boats.

MR. ROBINSON: And just as a parent, if you see a teacher teaching out of a textbook just pull your kid out of that class. (Laughter) I'm serious, just pull your kid out of the class. They're not doing anything by teaching out of a textbook unless they're looking at a primary document.

MS. BUSETTE: Well, thank you both very much. I want you to join me in thanking these two exceptional educators. (Applause) Thanks very much.

MS. RIHA: Thank you.

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