THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

SCHOOL CHOICE IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

Washington, D.C.

PARTICIPANTS:

Panel 1: Why Are Schools Responding So Differently to COVID-19?

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Panel 2: The Post-Election School Choice Landscape

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. HARRIS: Hello, everyone, and welcome to this event on "School Choice in a Time of Transition." I'm Douglas Harris, chair of the Economics Department at Tulane. I'm also a nonresident senior fellow here at Brookings, the main sponsor and funder of this event, and director of the event's co-sponsor, the National Center for Research and Education Access and Choice, or REACH for short.

REACH's mission is to provide objective, rigorous, and applicable research about school choice, including programs such as charter schools, doc shares, and virtual schools, and to understand how we can better design those policies, especially to serve disadvantaged students.

I'm pleased to say that this is our first public event and that REACH is funded by the U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences — excuse me — Institute of Education Sciences. But the views expressed here are those of the authors and speakers alone.

So we've got two great panels here focused on I think two topics of great current importance. The first, why are schools responding so differently to COVID-19, and the second on the post-election school choice landscape. In both respects, I think school choice policy, but really education policy, more broadly is very much in a time of transition.

So we're going to take questions from you, the audience. Some of you have already sent in questions. It's not too late add to that. So you can submit questions at any point for the panelist by email to events@Brookings.edu, or via Twitter at #SchoolChoice.

So let's get started with the first panel. When we started thinking about what we wanted to do here, the question we kept coming back to was why are schools responding so differently, and there are a lot of different dimensions of that, you know, private schools, charter school, traditional public schools, urban versus rural, how state and local agencies are responding in different ways in helping schools still serve students in the best and safest way possible, unionized and non-unionized settings. So we wanted to represent, you know, all those different perspectives, and I think we've come up with a really excellent panel to do that.

So let me just quickly introduce our panelists, and we'll start with the first panel. So in alphabetical order, Dr. J.R. Green is superintendent of Fairfield County Schools in South Carolina, a rural district with about 2,600 students, 90% or so eligible for free or reduced price lunches. He was also

recently named South Carolina superintendent of the year. Dr. Betheny Gross is associate director at the Center for Reinventing Public Education, CRPE, where she oversees CRPE's research initiatives and where they've been doing a lot on school responses to COVID. Angélica Infante-Green has been the commissioner of education in Rhode Island since 2019 and she is a daughter of immigrants from the Dominican Republic and has served as a public school teacher in the Bronx through Teach for America before becoming superintendent. And Terrence Martin, Sr., is president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers. A native of Detroit, he began is advocacy when he was a second grade teacher at John Lynch Elementary School.

So thanks so much for everybody joining. This is really a great group and I could tell from our early conversations it was going to be a rich conversation.

What I'd like to do to start off is to give each of you a chance to just answer kind of the basic question, what happened in the fall — so let's skip past the spring, because that was its own thing, but get a little bit closer to the present here in thinking about how you responded to the fall and what decisions you made about school reopening, why you made those decisions, what factors went into that.

So let's start off with you, J.R. Tell us about what was happening Fairfield.

DR. GREEN: Well, I appreciate the opportunity to join you here today.

As with districts all across the country, we grappled with exactly what the fall would look like after abruptly have to end in person instruction in the spring of the year. Our first step was to assemble a task force of stakeholders, to include teachers, students, parents, classified staff, administration, and just all members of the community who we knew would be engaged in this conversation to really talk about what our instructional program would look like in the fall.

And so there were a couple of different things that we considered. You know, first of all we acknowledged that one of two households in Fairfield County did not have access to high speed internet. And so we recognized that we had to acknowledge that reality and come a plan that could address that very, very difficult situation. We did not realize at the time that the state department of education, with the help of the general assembly, were going to purchase mobile hotspots for any families that met a certain posited threshold. But even with the deployment of hotspots, because of the rural nature of Fairfield County, we recognized that there would be some families who could not gain access to

the internet consistently, even with the deployment of a hotspot.

And so after really discussing it and evaluating it and talking about all of our options, we came to consensus on an instructional plan that we call a modified virtual instructional model. And with that modified virtual instructional model we began by inviting specific groups of students to report for in person instruction. Those were simply groups where exceptional education, English as a second language, career technology education, gifted and talented students, and any student who could not access the internet consistently, even with the deployment of a MiFi device.

In addition to those students who were invited, we created a process called a request for special consideration, where a parent could request that their son or daughter report for in person instruction even though they did not fall into one of those categories. And we followed up that with giving parents the option of submitting an additional request every four and a half weeks. And so we have just processed our fourth window of requests for special consideration for those families who initially indicated they did not want their students to report for in person instruction, but have since changed their mind. And so we're now up to probably close to 45 to 50% of our population is reporting for in person instruction 5 days a week.

MR. HARRIS: And of the 55% who are not in person, they're volunteer opt out or is that because of the rules that they're not allowed to come in?

DR. GREEN: Yeah, that's volunteer. As I said, we have what we call a process, it's call request for special consideration where any parent who did not fall into one of those initial categories could still request that their son or daughter report.

MR. HARRIS: Very good. So a little bit more on the process here before we go on to the other panelists. So we talked a little bit beforehand about charter schools and private schools and virtual schools and so on, so what's the setting like there in Fairfield. And did those other options come into play at all in your decision making?

DR. GREEN: So we have one charter school in our community and one private school in our community. The charter school initially began with I think a hybrid model, whether they were reporting maybe two days a week for in person instruction. The private school started with a model with a predominant number of their students were reporting for five days of in person instruction. Ironically,

recently the private school had to go totally remote due to a — I guess it was a COVID crisis that they felt they need to go ahead and just eliminate any in person instruction and go totally virtual. And I think the plan is to return to in person instruction sometime in January.

MR. HARRIS: And your district is also different from some others in that you don't have collective bargaining. So how did the teachers play a role in the decision making on this?

DR. GREEN: You know, as I said, I mean we had several teachers who served on that task force. It was about 60 members, and so it was — I mean we had lots of different diverse perspectives. I think that contributed, quite honestly, to why we've had such a buy in to our instructional model. You know, several of my colleagues have experienced some push back from faculty and staff in other areas, some push back from parents, but we've not experienced that. They have been very receptive and very supporting and really bought into this whole instructional model that we decided to pursue.

MR. HARRIS: Very good. Well, all right. Well, thanks for joining us. We're just getting the conversation going here.

I want to turn to the next local representative here, Terrence Martin, from the Detroit Federal of Teachers. So, Terrence, welcome. Tell me about the decision making in Detroit. And both, you know, the initial decision, which I know went one way and then how it's evolved over the last few months.

MR. MARTIN: Well, thank you for having me. It's great to be a part of this panel and talking about such a unique and important topic.

Here in Detroit obviously there were a number of challenges coming off of the mandatory closure of last spring going into the summer and really considering what a fall return would look like to our school district. One of the things that were paramount to us, because Michigan was hit so hard by the virus early on and extended through the summer and then into the fall, our main objective was making sure that the health and safety of our safe and health and safety of students was paramount. And at that time our school district began to roll out parents over the summer an option of in person learning or of virtual learning.

And while that made sense to our community to offer that option, that same option wasn't

afforded to all of the employees. At the time only our classroom teachers were given the option to work virtually or work face to face with students. And so one of the things that we had to make sure was that that option extended to all employees. We have the unique opportunity to represent not just classroom teachers, but 50 other classifications of folks who work with students, from counselors to social workers, school psychologists, and other individuals who support learning in the classroom.

And so with that, we really fought as a local for a seat at the table to determine what our return to work would look like for all of us. And so unfortunately, you know, for us, we had to take measures to really put pressure on the school district. We actually took a safety strike vote here in the city of Detroit. And what that meant is that, you know, because of the health and safety concerns that this virus brings, that our folks would be available to service students virtually, but would not attend face to face instruction.

In the wake of that vote, we were able to really get the attention of the school district. Come to the table with school board members and school district officials, develop a plan that we thought will work for all parties, not just our employees and student, but also the community. And in that agreement we were able to secure testing, we were able to secure proper PPE, we were able to secure the things that we know would help to facilitate the best form of instruction that we could under the conditions that we all faced. And we were also able to secure a choice for all employees, whether they wanted to work face to face or they wanted to work virtually.

And Detroit is unique in that way in that we're predominantly a Black city and we know that this virus has hit the Black community more rapidly — ran through the Black community more rapidly than other. And the fear and the uncertainty for many of our community folks and from our teachers and support staff was great. And that people were very unsure about being around other individuals and obviously going into a school where we didn't know if that school was going to be safe enough for us to work.

MR. HARRIS: DO you know roughly what percentage of students and/or teachers opted out? To stay remote?

MR. MARTIN: So we had 80% — a little bit over 80% of students and staff who chose virtual learning and a little — right at around 20%, or a little less than 20% who chose face to face

instruction.

MR. HARRIS: Very good.

So I want to turn next to Angélica and the state level, but before I do that, both Terrence and J.R., could you talk a little bit about the state level in your context and what the state did or didn't do to either support or encourage any particular kind of reopening?

Terrence, why don't you go ahead and start?

MR. MARTIN: Sure. One of the things that our state government did is they instituted a mandatory closure in the spring, which made all the sense in the world when none of us knew what this virus was going to look like. But on the same token, left it up to local school districts for fall instruction. And what were able to do also in our agreement was agree to what are the benchmarks that we will look for as this virus continues to manifest itself and grow as a trigger for us to do something differently, whether that meant closing face to face instruction or extending face to face instruction. And we were able to agree to that — a percentage of contact rates that will really guide us and we agreed that the science would guide us in determining how safe it would be for our students and for our staff to be in schools.

And so really our government left it up to school districts to really determine that, but they did provide guidelines and some guidance as to what positive rates we should really be looking for to protect ourselves from the spread of this virus.

MR. HARRIS: J.R., how about South Carolina? What did the state do to support and encourage?

DR. GREEN: Yeah, similar to what Terrence alluded to, in the spring of the year the governor declared a state of emergency which shut all schools down throughout the entire state. This summer he assembled a task force called Accelerate Ed that really looked at benchmarks that would determine whether schools would be in essence to report for in person instruction, hybrid, or stay virtual. And it was tied to COVID-19 transmission rates. Unfortunately, they soon thereafter abandoned the recommendations of the Accelerate Ed task force and I'm not sure whether it was relative to some political pressure from the White House or concerns about the economy, but our governor did encourage everyone to return throughout the state for five days of in person instruction, regardless of what the

COVID-19 transmission rates were.

Obviously, that jurisdiction lied with local boards, so even though he encouraged it, it was still left up to individual districts how they were going to proceed with their instructional model.

MR. HARRIS: Very good.

So, Angélica, let's turn to you. So in Rhode Island it seems that the state level response was very aggressive, you know, both in how strongly you were encouraging districts and other schools to reopen, but also in the amount of support activities going on around that.

So can you tell us about that?

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: Sure. We took a very active role and when we're talking about the state, we're talking about the governor, but also my office. My office is the Department of Education for the State of Rhode Island. So we created, in conjunction with both unions, state unions, and as well as the different groups, charters and the councils for school — school councils. So we met and we decided on –– there were five — going to be five metrics to reopen schools, like everyone else. But we started — we did summer school in person, we did summer camps and we did early childhood starting in the summer as kind of our pilot. And we were pretty impressed by the numbers and what we saw.

So we had our metrics. The state made it very clear that if you met those metrics you had to come back in person — everyone had to come back in person. Parents were given the choice that if they wanted their students virtually we would accommodate them. But the goal was that every school district come back.

Based on the metrics, there were only two districts that came back partially. And that meant that they were at almost like 80% in person. And we're talking about big districts like Providence, some other urban, so that has been — there has only been one district and one charter school that have not opened up in person. But I think what's really interesting is that we worked very aggressively with the Department of Health, the governor's office. We created our educational operation center here at the Department of Education and we work with the National Guard to deploy, to look at buildings, to figure out what the procedure is, what was going to be put in place. And we included not just our traditional public schools, but charter schools that fall under me, and, for the first time, private and parochial schools. So it was a whole state initiative and we were rowing in the same direction.

So we put out a statewide calendar that said when we were going to have PD, when we were going to open, when we were going to close. The state bought HEPA filters for every single classroom in the entire state. We also bought the hotspots, the — you know, there's Chromebooks — so that we were all on the same page. PPE was purchased at the state level. So we really did a lot of work at the state to guarantee that we could open. We all know that in person is a better option. It's not possible for everyone, however, we wanted to make it — ensure that our kids had that opportunity and that we keep moving forward, especially for our kids that are differently abled, our multi lingual learners. But our kids in poverty — listen, this is crucial — this is crucial. We don't have that luxury. And, you know, distance learning is not the same.

MR. HARRIS: So just a couple — this is picking up on some things you had said before we had the panel. You did a statewide calendar that all the schools participated in and surveillance testing, professional development —

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: Yes.

MR. HARRIS: — that aligned with that calendar. You got to 98% connectivity, internet connectivity, and then you created your own virtual program, correct? Although it's additional (inaudible).

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: Correct.

MR. HARRIS: You've been busy. So I want to come back to this in a minute. I want to turn to Betheny next. But I want to hear about the three of you, Terrence, J.R., Angélica, how you would have worked together — because it sounds like, you know, Rhode Island handled it from a state level very differently from South Carolina and Michigan. So I want to come back to that in just a second.

Betheny, you know, you've been tracking this nationally and looking at what other districts are doing. What are — just kind of quickly — what are the things you see that are typical of what's been mentioned, and what are the things that you think are unusual relative to the nation as a whole?

DR. GROSS: Yeah, I mean I think that Terrence and J.R. describe and really presented sort of the big dichotomy that we've observed in looking nationally between rural context and urban context.

In rural context we certainly saw, you know, as of November, when we last sort of did an

accounting of a nationally representative sample of districts across the country, only about 13% of rural districts were fully remote, but at the same time there were about 54% of urban districts that were fully remote. And what you see really is for the rural districts, the digital access loomed very large. There were just vast numbers of students in rural context who do not have any access to the internet, they cannot get it. You know, the fiber just simply isn't there. About two-thirds — the FCC analysis from 2017 shows that about two-thirds of residents in rural contexts have access to broadband that's of a quality that would give you a stable Zoom call all day long. And, you know, if there's more than one kid in the family, you definitely need that.

And, you know, at the same time, the rural communities also saw the sort of community spread hit a little bit later in the cycle, given them sort of more ability and opportunity to think about a reopening plan. And, you know, we also know that the politics in rural context lean a little bit more conservative and the messaging that was more received in those contexts came from the more conservative end of the political spectrum.

On the urban context, you know, on the flip, you know, we saw community spread happy really, really quickly there. And it spiked massively. And we have evidence from surveys of parents and teachers that they became very fearful, especially parents in communities of color and high poverty communities that particularly hard hit by the virus early on and continuing through. So there was a real sense of fear and worry and just uncertainty about what safe reopening could look like.

At the same time, you have communities where digital access, even though it still needed work and there still needed to be a vast distribution of devices and distribution of hotspots, it was still possible to get tools in the hands of students. You have more persuasive and influential unions in urban contexts, you know, really sort of pushing on districts to make sure safe reopening was being planned for. And you also have a somewhat more liberal politic there. And all of those sort of winds steered a bit more towards remote openings.

I think we also saw vast differences, as everybody has pointed out, in how states handled this and the leadership states took in it. As late as sort of like the tail end of summer, we did an analysis of state guidelines across the country and found that only — I think fewer than half of states across the country had actually even issued health based guidelines for reopening. And then, among those that did

— I think we've already heard on this call that the guidelines were really varying in what metrics were used, what benchmarks and standards. So it was actually not terribly common for a state to take the kind of sort of coordinating and more sort of muscular role that Rhode Island took in terms of facilitating and supporting the opening of schools. And I think we saw a lot of differences across states in part because of that.

MR. HARRIS: Angélica, why do you think you responded so differently in Rhode Island compared to other states? At the state level.

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: I wish I had an answer for that. But I think the reality is that our first case — we had our first in February when people still didn't really know what COVID was. We had a school trip that came back from Italy — and it was private school — but we shared the bus, the statewide bus, with one of our public schools and we immediately had to quarantine and get into a place of — where we as a state had to intervene because there were many districts involved. And then we realized that this was kind of our role, where we had to really make sure that our districts were successful.

It's really hard. We also have rural districts that depended on us to try to help them figure out how they were going to get the Wi-Fi, how they were going to do things, to raise money, to figure out, okay, how can we borrow from other districts. So we did all of that. And we've also taken the approach in the last year that we were going to be more than just compliant as a state, but really support. So we've taken that approach where we're just going to lean in and make sure that our families and kids and educators get what they need.

So I think that that's been our approach. And for the first time we've worked really closely with our private schools where we're having conversations together about all kids, not just one type of kids, but this is our state and we need to support everyone.

MR. HARRIS: Tell me about the conversations with union leadership in the state and maybe in Providence on this, since, again, that is something that has come up as a factor that has predicted how these districts have responded. How did that work (inaudible)?

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: Yeah, yeah. So I think with the state it's been very different. We had our weekly Wednesday meetings leading up to opening up. And then when we go to, I think back to what Betheny said in the urban, in Providence I took over the district. So we intervened as a

state over Providence. So —

MR. HARRIS: That was just before the COVID — before COVID?

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: Oh, yes.

MR. HARRIS: Yeah.

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: Wonderful timing. (Laughing) But, yes. So part of what the challenge has been is so there has been — and it's only a small fraction, I have to say. You know, I think that like everywhere, teachers are worried, but 70 — even more so 76% of our parents wanted in person, right. So we gave teachers the option of doing distance if they qualified for the CDC guidelines, right. We made sure that we put all the protocols in place to keep everyone safe. And our numbers have shown that, which is exciting for us because it shows that schools are not the super spreaders, schools are the place where actually kids and educators are the safest. We have of the kids that are — and the teachers that are in distance learning as opposed to the kids that are in person, the percentage on distance learning that have tested positive is greater. And a lot of our families of color that are in poverty need their kids to be in school, need their kids to be learning.

MR. HARRIS: Yeah.

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: And I think that's a little different than in other places.

MR. HARRIS: Right.

So, Terrence and J.R., how do you think you would have responded or maybe other districts in your states if Angélica has been the state superintendent or your states had done all those things? Would it have been a different story do you think in your districts?

MR. MARTIN: Well, I think, you know, where I found that it works best is when all the stakeholders, all those who are impacted, and all those who are directly involved in education are brought to the table at the development process, not just at the end to roll out a plan and say, hey, this is what we've come up with, what do you think. But really getting down to providing voice, not just a face, but voice at the table of all those stakeholders that will be impacted.

And one of the things I wanted to kind of raise is that, you know, the issue with us was about connectivity and about making sure that students had access to the internet. We were fortunate enough to have some philanthropists and big business come to the table and provide laptops with

connectivity to all Detroit public schools, community district students, which was major.

And while our teachers have been doing a phenomenal job of really educating students in some of the most difficult circumstances and trying to do it virtually, we know that there is no substitute for face to face instruction. Students need a teacher in front of them and that is for many the best case scenario. Under the circumstances we can't do it that way.

And one of the problems — or one of the concerns that we have moving forward is that what does this do to student development, not just this year, but in years to come. We know that areas of color, students of color, don't fare as well as their white counterparts in many areas. And so we have — we were fearful that this virus will just continue to widen that gap that is there. And it's not just a gap of students of color not being able to perform better, it's really a gap of opportunity that our students are lacking and the people in these communities are lacking. And I think that's one of the things moving forward that it's really going to have an impact — this virus is really going to have an impact on our students, you know, which is —

MR. HARRIS: I just want to pause for a second on that because I want to come back to that question. I want to talk about like what's next and how do we address those gaps in just a second.

J.R., did you have any thought on this question of what would have happened if you'd had a different state response and different levels of state support?

DR. GREEN: Yeah, so South Carolina is kind of a unique state in that people really value local autonomy. And, you know, even the governor tried to exert some influence to get all schools to basically open up five days a week in person instruction, I'm not sure that would have been successful. Like, you know, Terrence alluded to earlier, I represent a district that's close to 90% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch, probably 88% are African American. And so there perspective on the virus is a little different than other parts of our state, particularly when they've had family members and community members who had been adversely impacted by the virus at disproportional rates. And so their trust in the decision is vitally important to whether they decide to move forward with a recommendation. And the fact that it was, you know, local teachers and me and administrators and bus drivers and cafeteria workers who really came together and said this is what we think is the most viable option moving forward elicited a certain level of trust with them versus anyone from out state capital staying this

is what you need to do in Fairfield County.

So whether that will be successful here, I'm a bit skeptical.

MR. HARRIS: Okay. Interesting. All right. So let's come back to Terrence's point. He started to go in the direction of the gaps in opportunity that have been opened up. I think it's — we don't know the numbers I don't think really well yet, but I think it's very likely that various opportunity gaps showing up in test score and so on, that's going to become more evident when students come back to school and we can really see. You know, especially for students who are out, almost completely disconnected from school for long stretches.

So let's think about this forward looking. We know we've got this problem. In all of these contexts, you know, what's the plan going forward?

Anybody want to go first and tackle that question?

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: So I can go first. I just wanted to clarify a couple of things before I move on. We are also a local control state. And I think that there — you said something that is really important, and there is a (inaudible) factor that we're trying to do the best by everyone. So there's that.

I think there's a couple of things with opportunities. One of the things that we did with our state money is that we did purchase an assessment for all districts. And what we did was that — not for accountability, not for anything other than for us to really know where we are. My job is also to advocate to the federal government to give us what we need. I need to know whether kids are going to need extra tutoring in math. What does it look like? What is this — we don't have the data, so I need to have the data to be able to say this is where we're going, right, these are the things we need.

The second piece is that mental health is a big issue right now, right. I think that we heard — especially when you're in a community of color where you have had — you've been impacted personally or you know someone who's been impacted personally, or just the fear and the anxiety. So one of the things that we did statewide is work with Yale University to be able to provide training to every educator in Rhode Island. When I say every educator, from superintendent to principal to teacher to teacher's aide, to bus driver, to anyone — security guard, anyone that works in our school system, to get training on socio-emotional development and how to work with trauma and all the things that we're going

to be faced with.

And I think the last piece is, for us moving forward, is how do we use what we've learned in this crisis to really tailor our system to the needs of kids. We have, especially in our urban system, a lot of kids that are immigrants, a lot of kids that have to work, a lot of kids that are affected disproportionately by this virus, a lot of kids that — what we had in the past wasn't working to being with, right. So how do we move further along. And this is the opportunity that we're all faced with now, or that we have all been challenged with, is this forced innovation.

MR. HARRIS: Betheny, what do you see happening nationally? What are the most interesting, you know, plans that you see districts pursuing to try to address these gaps and learning losses and mental health suffering as well?

DR. GROSS: I mean, you know, I think this is kind of one of the sobering things about it is districts are very much still in a crisis mode and they're just getting through day after day, fending off the virus in their schools, doing contact tracing. There hasn't been an opportunity for very many districts to do the kind of forward thinking that is absolutely essential. And, you know, one thing that you said, Doug, that kind of concerned me a little bit, although, you know, it's something that I think we're hearing a lot, is this notion that we won't know what's happened until next fall for many, many thousands, if not millions, of kids. And that is an incredibly worrisome concern. And you're absolutely right, right now the assessment that have been done — you know, NWEA has done their fall MAP assessments and they noticed a significant drop in the cohort of students who are taking tests, particularly lower income students and students of color. There are kids we don't know where they are, we can't find them. We have no way. And we're about to waste a second summer if we don't find these kids and bring them in.

so I don't actually think we — it's — I don't think we can take the stance that we'll just figure it out next fall, I think the time of the essence. We have kids who are in very early stages of learning who are not getting the foundational skills of reading in their primary education. We have kids who are really close to graduating that, you know, need that help and support in thinking through that transition and getting to that transition.

So I think the challenge and worry that I have is that we'll just wait until next fall —

MR. HARRIS: Right.

DR. GROSS: — and try to sort it out then.

MR. HARRIS: Yeah, I didn't mean to suggest that we should wait until next fall, I mean that we wouldn't have the data until next fall. But we know that these gaps are there and they're going to be there and we need to start planning for them.

Anything, Terrence or J.R.? Thanks that are happening in your districts to get ahead of that? At least some general thinking that's going on right now in your locations?

DR. GREEN: Yeah, so let me just speak to the suggestion that the data doesn't exist. You know, very often there is this mindset that unless we get these statewide assessments, that schools don't give a multitude of formative assessments to determine where students are all throughout the course of the year. And so, you know, we very well know where students. And, you know, this assumption that because we suspended statewide assessments and aren't giving school reports or something, that all of the sudden we need to wait until those things happen.

I was at a school earlier today and we give — we benchmark assessments, we've been doing it for years. We give a MAP assessment, we give lots of assessments to inform our instructional process. And so the information is plentiful relative to where we are, what gaps need to be made up.

One final thing I'll say is, you know, there are lots of lessons that obviously we'll take away from this crisis, but the one I readily acknowledge in my district is although we've had multiple virtual charter schools in South Carolina, we have a statewide virtual charter platform, we are going to establish a virtual charter platform in my district because we recognize that there are some parents and students who really have thrived in this new virtual environment for a multitude of reasons. And so it is going to be essential that we provide that option for them moving forward, for those who want to secure that option.

MR. HARRIS: So just to clarify, the testing thing, the point I was trying to get at is that some students have gotten totally disconnected from school and that we're not testing them. And I guess also in the NWEA data they lost half the schools or so that they had normally participated in their testing. Now, that doesn't mean the schools don't know anything, it just means I think there's still — there's less information because you've got more students who aren't taking the test and who've gotten disconnected. So it's certainly the schools have lots of information on the students who are remaining connected.

Terrence, were you going to say something too?

MR. MARTIN: You know, one of the things that I wanted to kind of lift up —— and this is to sort of expand Dr. Green —— is what this virus has done is confirmed for those who are on the front lines what we always knew, that our schools are grossly underfunded, that our students experience challenges that are directly connected to poverty. And what it's also done is it's exposed to those who are on the outside what we've been telling you all the time, is that our schools in these areas, in impoverished areas, in rural areas, in urban areas, are grossly underfunded and we have issues that extend beyond the classroom that are social issues that we have to address. And one of the things that we all know is that equitable funding is one of the things that we've all been starved from having in these school districts. And there's got to be a concerted effort to address that. We can no longer afford to politicize how we're going to fund school districts across the country. We've got to put our priorities in place in terms of securing our future. We cannot wait until the fall or years to come to really address these concerns, because these concerns have been here the entire time. This is nothing new.

And I appreciate Angélica for bringing up the mental health issue. You know, obviously we know that the direct impact of what has happened to our students, we see it each and every day. We have more students now who are unable to mourn loss of loved ones the way that we typically mourn loved ones because we can't see each other, we can't touch each other, we can't be around each other. And so the impact of that to a child's psyche is going to be long-lasting if we're not able to give them the help and assistance and the professional assistance that they need.

MR. HARRIS: Angélica, what's your thought on this question of what you're doing planning wise for the next year to try to address the ——

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: We're doing planning. I think Terrence was very correct. And, you know, this is like education's dirty secret always, right. And COVID has come and like pulled the rug out. You know, we used to sweep it under the rug sort of. I think it's all out there in the open. And what we're trying to do is address it head on, right. Like when people say well, we want this to change, and what we say in terms of policy, because this is my work, is so these are the things that do need to change, right.

So funding being one, but not just funding. Like with what we have, how do we think out

of the box, how do we think about community as opposed to this linear way of looking at education. And that's what we're doing. So what we're doing right now is reinventing what high schools will look like in the State of Rhode Island. I have the ability to say well, this is what you need for a diploma, but then this is how you open it up. Like what do we take from what kids have learned virtually, what they have — actually had positive impact, and what has not worked. And how do we create schools that actually are receptive to students.

And one of the things we did this summer is that we used our high school students to create our summer programs. And we saw 500 point gains on the SAT — 500. We have never seen gains like that. Because they helped us design (1) what was of interested to them with these professors, and then what would keep them going and how it's different than what we the adults think. We're always thinking on our level. And right now we're embarking on something that's called reimagining high school in Rhode Island because of this pandemic. What is that going to look like.

MR. HARRIS: Interesting.

Betheny, you had a thought on this question?

DR. GROSS: Yeah, I did just want to follow up on comments from the Commissioner too. We are actually hearing a lot of superintendents and principals talk about the future and say it's not going to be the same. We've learned things through this experience that we'll carry forward. And, you know, in addition to sort of some of the obvious things about — you know, we and our teacher are much more proficient with the technologies and tools of learning, but they've also sort of learned something about how students kind of thrive in different modes of learning and different opportunities for learning. And that has really sparked a lot of new thinking, especially around the high school, as you brought up.

The other area where we're seeing a lot of thinking and looking forward is around partnerships with community programming and pulling in community assets into thinking about the full continuum of learning that kids are a part of, to include school based learning, but also out of school based learning.

MR. HARRIS: Very good.

So we're going to the audience in just a minute, so let me just send a reminder to the audience that you can send questions to #SchoolChoice on Twitter or events@Brookings.edu.

So I do want to ask one question — and actually you all sort of segued into it already, which is how is this going to change schools in the long run. So, you know, Angélica mentioned reimagining high school. Betheny you also mentioned high schools. It would be useful to hear a little bit more detail on what direction that could take, but does anybody have thoughts on specific things that you expect to be different? It sounds like virtual schools — J.R., you mentioned that you're going to have a new virtual charter school there.

DR. GREEN: So, yeah, not a charter school. Like I said (inaudible).

MR. HARRIS: Right, but within your district. Sorry about that.

DR. GREEN: So let me say this. You know, this is something we have been exploring and toying with for the last year or so, really trying to embrace more of a community schooling model. And so often when we talk about school renovation, transformation — you pick the buzz word — it only involves what occurs within the schoolhouse walls and not necessarily talking about establishing the kind of partnerships that really impacts the kids' academic, social, physical, mental trajectory.

And as much as we want to evaluate how schools are going to be different post-COVID, you know, when I think about the fact that the governor and many people in those communities said that if schools are open, young people won't have a well-balanced meal every day. And so we ran buses every day to deliver lunches and breakfast to students. And so does that not cause use to take a step back and say kids have to depend on schools just to fulfill these basic needs like eating? And as much as we want to talk about how schools need to come out this and really evaluate how we're operating, I mean I think our society, our states — I mean I think our whole community really needs to reevaluate that because that is a sad testament that if schools aren't open that our young people will starve.

MR. HARRIS: Yup. Others have thoughts on this question about what's going to change in the long run?

MR. MARTIN: Yeah, really quickly, I don't think the option of having a virtual education is going anywhere. I think it's here and it's going to be a part of school districts' catalogues of what they offer to parents and what they offer to students for some time to come. You know, we haven't engaged in that here in Detroit very much, but now since obviously COVID, we're totally engaged in it and we're going to have to really develop ways to really shore it up and to make it even better than what it is now for

students and for teachers to engage.

But I think that the notion that schools have their problems and cities and municipalities have their problems, and the two shall never meet, those days are over, and that I think that more now than ever there's got to be a level of collaboration with local municipalities and schools that address the needs of the whole child. We throw that around often, but now more than ever we're seeing cities and municipalities that are able to do it and do it well, are working and doing it well now. And those who struggle, this virus has just exposed that.

MR. HARRIS: How do we think virtual is going to play out here? So, you know, so more virtual. So I think that's one direction that seems pretty clear. But is it going to be more use of on line tools for students who are primarily still attending in person, or are we talking about more students who are basically home schooled with virtual support? What do we have in mind here?

MR. MARTIN: I don't know if it's more virtual? I just think that virtual, you know, will be an option for folks in local school districts that we're going to have to look at to figure out how we manage that. Certainly not promoting, but knowing that because of the, you know, environment that we're currently in now, that it is going to have to be part of what school districts offer.

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: Yeah, I have to agree. I don't think that it's more, but it's more targeted, it's more individualized. I think that it is more intentional, right. I think we kind of went and we've been figuring it out as we go along. But it's what does that mean for Pedro who has to work until 8 a.m. in construction because he has to pay rent, but now he has to go to school at 8 a.m. and falls asleep, as opposed to offering him that algebra class virtually not all the time. Not all the time. Because what this has also taught us is that that human contact — essential — essential. I had kids that were in AP classes who are now failing because of that contact. And I think that it's really important for us to understand that.

The other piece is — and, Terrence, cover your ears — is that we've broken barriers, right. So we have multilingual learners. I am a big proponent of bilingual education, because we know that's how our multilingual learners learn best. ESL is second run. We know that, we know that. These kids learn better when they — when you're strong in your first language, you're going to be strong in your second language. So we've broken barriers about bringing in teachers that speak that language, that

know that language, even from other countries, to provide that support as kids continue to work within our system.

I think we can't keep thinking about things in this box, especially for our different populations that need that different kind of support. So it's not replacing, it's really about providing that extra support in a place where — I don't know one state where there isn't — this isn't a shortage area, right. And how do we really bring the home language — you know, we have kids who speak 150 languages. How do we really get to that culture, that community? We have that ability now that we really weren't thinking about in the same way before. So we have to push ourselves.

MR. HARRIS: A related question now coming from the audience. Doing school is different now. How is COVID reshaping educators' ideas about what kids really need to know and do, both in an academic sense and in a socio-emotional sense? Is it changing?

So a lot of the conversation has been more about how we serve students, but not less about what we serve. So any thoughts on that question? Is it changing perspectives on that?

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: So yes. So one of the things we've learned is that when we ran the summer program at a state level — we've never done that. That's not really what states do. We brought kids in from all districts and we had them design the classes for us, but also we ran this competition on having kids design kind of robotics. Like what is this machine that will be in the classroom where the kids could — you know, does this machine move around with an iPad on it, with kids that had to be home or were going to be medically fragile. It's more about solving problems and really being forward thinking as opposed to the same things that we were looking at in the past. And how do we work across district and sectors to really bring in also the community, right, the business community? How are they going to help us with this.

So I think there's an opportunity to look at what we're offering, very different moving forward.

MR. HARRIS: A couple of thing that didn't come up in the answer to this question. One that's being thrown around a lot, that I think has some promise, is tutoring. And this is more kind of medium-term. Short-term, how do we get students caught up. And summer school — summer school came up early in the conversation, but it wasn't actually in answer to the question about what do we do to

help students catch up.

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: So I'll give you an example. In Providence, we have all ninth graders are getting tutoring in algebra. That's something that we are doing, we understand. This is something that we should have done prior to COVID, right. But now we have the ability to get tutors from all over the place to help our students really — that's a focus area and it's a gate keeper to college. So how do we help our kids who really don't even have a ninth grade math really master this? So tutoring, essential.

And that's why I felt like our assessments — and when I said a state assessment, I mean that the districts are selecting the assessment. When we data up, and we would be able to make a case to the Federal Government to say, hey, you need to fund us for the gaps that we're seeing. And I think that's really why it's important to us.

MR. HARRIS: J.R., could you talk a little bit about your plans there, both — you know, you mentioned virtual. You know, say more about what you have in mind there. Is it meant to be more full-time, is it meant to be for particular courses, and so on? And also, on the tutoring summer school question, do you have thoughts and plans on what you might do with those?

DR. GREEN: Yes. So, first of all, as related to our virtual option, parents have been particularly impressed with the distance learning model that we developed. And so we have real time synchronous instruction going on, even for our students who are leveraging the instruction remotely. And so that does put quite a bit of responsibility on the teacher, but in essence what happens is teachers continue with their instruction, we have a webcam, kids log on, and they are participating in real time. And parents and students after that have said, you know, this is just like me being in class except I don't have to get up at seven o'clock in the morning and then I can follow through on any other activities.

And so, you know, the robust nature of our instructional program, which is probably different maybe than some others because it is a totally synchronous model, has caused a lot of parents to say, I like this, and a lot of students to say, I like this. And so I think —

MR. HARRIS: As a full-time model?

DR. GREEN: Pardon me?

MR. HARRIS: As a full-time model? A full —

DR. GREEN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, as a full-time model. I mean I've already had parents to inquire post-COVID will there be an option where my child could participate in an instructional model similar to what's going on right now.

Now, the challenge is, you know, right now, you know, we have teachers who are basically navigating between in person students and virtual students. And we wouldn't want to continue that, so we'd have to try and dedicate staff who would do a similar program exclusively with virtual students. And so, as I said, some students and parents have really enjoyed this option.

You know, as it relates to summer school and tutoring, you know, obviously any time you recognize that there are students who have some learning gaps, we have always been putting things in place to try and mitigate some of that loss. We are continuing to do that as we speak. I'll tell you the summer, we had a pretty robust plan to really address some literacy and math gaps, and we found that at that point time a lot of parents still were too uncomfortable with the transmission of COVID-19 to even send their young people to us. And so we'll continue to push forward there, but quite honestly, we won't really be able to see the full effect of really what that can produce until there is a greater level of comfort across the spectrum with our parents.

MR. HARRIS: Right.

So we're coming toward the end here, so I want to just give everybody, you know, once chance — 45 seconds or so — to answer one question that's along these lines. What do you think will be the biggest difference between schooling pre-COVID and schooling a year from now?

Betheny, you want to start?

DR. GROSS: Well, big question. But I think next year I think and I hope that the schooling is much more — offers much more diverse options for kids. And especially in their pathways through their learning, we're going to have kids who are kind of in different places and in different places on the progress chart in different subjects and we're going to need to build a lot of flexibility into their learning pathways going forward.

MR HARRIS: Terrence?

MR. MARTIN: Yeah, really quickly, I have a 14 year old son who's a freshman at a local Detroit public school, high school, who happens to be doing really well in the virtual setting. But he's a

student who has his needs met at home and is a student of privilege, even within the city of Detroit. But also, you know, think about those students who don't, his classmates who don't have their social and emotional needs met. And I think that what schools are going to be forced to do is really to address those needs first. I think any student will have the ability to learn, some students will have the ability to "catch up" over a year's time. But if those socio-emotional needs aren't met, then we're going to find students, and students particularly of color, who are going to continue to fall behind.

And hopefully what this pandemic has taught us and what schools will look like in the future, to Betheny's point, I do think need to be diverse in what they're offering students, but also need to be well funded and making sure that those opportunities are afforded and are long-lasting.

MR. HARRIS: Okay. Very good. Thank you.

Angélica, what's your quick answer to that question? Biggest change in a year.

MS. INFANTE-GREEN: Okay. So I think I have sort of answered that the entire time, but I agree with Betheny. I think we're going to have to be more individualized, there's going to have to be more opportunities, especially for our kids that are already coming from struggling homes, parts of the city. We just have to do this very differently. So I don't — you know, I don't know, I don't know what that will look like. It's too soon for me to be able to say that, but I know that we already have some things in the works that we are hoping to have available soon.

MR. HARRIS: Okay. Very good.

J.R.?

DR. GREEN: Yeah. So, you know, I mentioned earlier about community schooling and, you know, Terrence mentioned earlier about whole child education, you know, that is something that has been focus for my district over the past year or so. I think nationally it has forced everyone to really evaluate the relevance of whole child education. And all the focus we have put in, testing being the tail that wags the dog and accountability, we're going to really have to evaluate how we address the multitude of needs that young people have so we can effectively address their academic needs.

MR. HARRIS: Very good.

Well, thanks to all of you. This has been a really enlightening panel. And let me just express my appreciation to Terrence, J.R., and Angélica in particular for showing the leadership and

putting in what must be incredible hours to try to serve students under these really difficult conditions.

So thanks for that and also thanks participating in the panel. And I'm going to now turn it over to John Valant, who is going to moderate the second panel. Thanks, everybody.

MR. VALANT: Thanks, Doug, and thanks to that whole panel. I thought that was a really nice discussion. Let me echo to Doug's thanks, just to all of the educators on this call and who may be watching. This is for all of the work that all of you are doing in a really tough time.

I am Jon Valant. I am a senior fellow at Brookings in the Brown Center on Education Policy. And we're going to move now to a new topic and the new group of panelists. And we're having this conversation at an especially remarkable moment in what has been a really difficult tumultuous period.

It's a moment of transitions. We're transitioning from one presidential administration to another which will mean a change in party control of the executive branch. It also could mean a change of party control in the Senate, depending on what happens in Georgia in a few weeks.

We have COVID rates that are the worst they have been. But, at the same time, we are all starting to see video of vaccines and arms that, you know, maybe gives some light at the end of the tunnel for students and for parents who haven't had access to in-person schooling.

This is hopefully a moment where, you know, we see that that ends soon. And then for the sort of main topic of this conversation, we're in a moment of transition for what has been the big, sort of, the core reforms of defined education policymaking over the last few decades.

So it seems now, like, maybe some of the wind is out of the sails of some of the school choice reforms that really defined a lot of education policymaking, whether that's charter schools or something else.

But, at the same time, we have parents and educators who are experimenting with different types of schooling, as we heard in the last panel. And we don't really know what's to come when it comes to school choice and I think a whole lot else.

So we're going to talk about these transitions. We'll look back at the last four years and then look ahead of what's to come. We'll talk about school choice reforms, but also, more generally, on the state of education policy and politics in this moment.

And I am very happy to have with me a group of panelists with rich, and I think, varied perspectives on this. We have -- looking around my camera -- we have Jennifer Berkshire. Jennifer is a freelance journalist, who hosts a terrific education podcast, "Have you Heard?" She is also the author of a new book, "A Wolf at the Schoolhouse Door."

Jim Blew is the assistant secretary for planning, evaluation and policy development at the U.S. Department of Education. Prior to joining the department in 2018, he advocated for school choice policies and other education reforms from a variety of positions outside of government.

Preston Green is the John and Maria Neag professor of urban education at the Neag School of Education, at the University of Connecticut. He has a background in law, as well as in education leadership, and has written extensively on issues related to charter schools.

And Rick Hess is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and the director of Education Policy Studies at AEI. He has a background in political science and has written on all kinds of issues related to education politics and policy.

So we'll open with a discussion with this group, and then in about 40 minutes, I'll draw in some questions that audience members are sending in. To those of you who have already sent questions, thank you, we have those.

And if you haven't, you can submit questions via email to events@brookings.edu; that's events@brookings.edu.; or via twitter using #SchoolChoice. We, unfortunately, don't have a chat box. So there is no way of submitting questions by chat.

Okay. So, with that, let's get started. And, Jim, I'll begin with you, if that's okay. So, as I's sure you know, a lot of people have had very strong reactions to these last four years and your administration.

And I know this question is a little bit premature because you're still in office. And I suspect you haven't had a lot of time to think back on, sort of, legacy and impact. But I'm curious about how, about what you think about that, about what you think will be the DeVos administration's lasting effects on American schools, in general, and then on school choice reforms in particular?

MR. BLEW: Sure. Can I just check my mike? Can everybody hear? Okay?

MR. VALANT: Sure.

MR. BLEW: Terrific. Yes, we have to acknowledge that there was some controversy around this administration. I suspect that if I didn't know that was the name of your book, that are we the wolves at the door, should I ask?

Anyway, look, there is a lot being written right now about the impact of this administration. I would say, we will really know how impactful we have been in a couple of years. It's no secret that the secretary decided to come in and push very hard on expanding school choice for families across the country, particularly, in lower income communities.

And you might be tempted to just judge her on whether or not the laws got passed or such. And I don't think that's actually the right way to look at it. What we focused much more on was getting a conversation going in this country about both the need for families being able to choose a school that fit their families' needs, but also to question if the current system was working well.

You probably noticed that all of the prior secretaries -- and we could debate whether any of them have had any lasting impact as well -- I think not, by the way, because 90% of education policy, education money is coming from state and local government.

So that's really where the game is. But, you know, we all focused, as well, on the federal space. But our answer to that question is, the current system is just not working well. And I don't know why we can't be more honest about that. We have lots of data that shows that there is about a quarter of our students that are simply not getting educated.

You know, we have the National Assessment for Educational Progress; 15-year-olds are tested in reading, and a full quarter of them fall below basic. Most people don't know 15-year-olds who are essentially illiterate but they are out there in our country.

And, you know, if you start talking to students, they'll tell you high school is extraordinarily boring, yet, incredibly stressful. Right? So the system is just now performing in a way that is creating people who are ready to go into careers, the workforce, and to higher ed.

I believe that conversation will continue. There will be an element -- this will be my last point. Sorry to talk so long. Doug brought into his last panel, a member from the labor union that represents teachers. And they sort of predictably said, the whole problem is that we're egregiously underfunded. And our point is that maybe that's not it.

Maybe if we move toward a system of choice and competition, the way the rest of the economy works, we might start seeing better results.

MR. VALANT: Thanks, Jim. And, Jennifer, so I'm curious about your thoughts on this, sort of, same question, the question of, what we should make of these last four years? So how do you see the long-term impacts and the legacy of the DeVos administration?

MS. BERKSHIRE: Well, there, actually, you know, a number of things that Jim just said that I agree with his take. And it's kind of amazing when you go back now and look at just how long that bipartisan consensus around things like, competition and accountability, how long it lasted and had really, you know, had already been running out of steam.

And I think what DeVos's main legacy is going to be is she really did just sort of come in and blow that up. And part of what she did was exactly what Jim was just saying; that she pointed out, by putting so much emphasis on individual choice, how narrow the debate around choice had gotten; and that, you know, we really, like, sort of settled on kind of, like, a portfolio-ish model where the ideal was that we would open and close schools on the basis of test scores.

And, you know, that model it's unpopular with parents. They find school closures agonizing. The Obama administration really ramped up the discourse around testing in a way that I think that people find really alienating.

And so, even though DeVos said and did a lot of things that I didn't particularly like, that part of it was actually kind of refreshing. So I think she is going to end up leaving quite a legacy. And it's a real mistake to just focus on what she was unable to accomplish at the federal level.

We're going to see in pretty short order what happens in states where Republicans made big gains in 2020. And expanding school choice and the kind of individualized school choice that DeVos is such a fan of is right up there at the top of the agenda.

And then, of course, there are these, you know, sort of forces swirling all around that she is part of but it's not just her. And I'm thinking about, you know, like the days when the Supreme Court look descants at government funding for, you know, religious education.

Those seem to be in the rearview mirror, right, that we are now moving on to a whole 'nother set of cases where institutions want to be able to access government funds but continue to

discriminate as well.

So I think that, just as Jim said, we're going to be watching this legacy play out for a while. But she did change the way that we debate schools and what they do.

MR. VALANT: And, Jim, I'm curious about your thoughts on anything that Jennifer just said, but also specifically on the politics of school choice. So Jennifer sort of raised this question of where the parties are.

And the politics of charter schools, especially, have always been interesting where there historically has been at least some bipartisan support for charters. And, surely, some of that is still there but it looks different now. And I'm curious how you think about the importance of preserving those bipartisan coalitions.

Is this the kind of thing that you're sort of willing -- that you think can just go on as a Republican-supported initiative?

MR. BLEW: It's a really great question. And, in fact, we sort of have to remember that it was Democrats that really got the charter school movement up and running and Republicans came alongside them, including Bill Clinton. President Obama was also a big supporter.

I have learned something working in Washington, D.C. And that is that this city is far more partisan than the rest of the country. And what may be confusing to people is that that Labor Union that represents teaches has always been against charter schools and has always done everything possible to snuff them out, sometimes more creatively than an upfront battle.

But what you see in Washington is that as people have gone through the Democratic party -- and remember the teacher union's strategy has been to own the Democratic party's policymaking machinery around education.

That's how they have a veto over anything they don't like. And, as a Democrat, as you get elected, you move up. By the time you get to Washington, D.C., if you were opposing anything that the teacher unions wanted, which means you might be favorable towards school choice, or greater accountability or transparency, you basically were already primaried out along the way.

So by the time we get to Washington, we have a much more partisan environment. And that's been the case for a while. We can explain why Obama did not fall into that. He had not been

endorsed by the unions. He came elected in spite of the unions.

But when Betsy DeVos gets here and has a very clear message about this Department will no longer be controlled by the labor unions, I'm going to be standing up for students and taxpayers. It really, it created such partisan activity that we have seen, like, some of the most vitriolic attacks on a Secretary, really, in history, right, the kinds of things we saw.

So that's all sort of the context. It's become much more partisan. And I feel it's going to become -- look, I have spent my whole career building up the charter school sector. So I am very disappointed to see Joe Biden announce publicly that, you know, the teacher union's position is my position on charter schools.

I think that bodes very badly for the charter school movement. You know, they're responding accordingly; they're trying to come alongside the Democrats and show that they're actually a better way to go than some of the other options out there. But they have got a really hard struggle because the labor unions decided they were going to get rid of them.

MR. VALANT: Okay. So, Rick, let me bring you in, and feel free to weigh in on anything there. But I'm also, like, speaking of Washington, I'm curious about your thoughts on the federal role in education and what you see as the appropriate role for the federal government in education and on school choice in particular; and then what it's good at doing and what it's not good at doing.

MR. HESS: Sure, you know, what a federal government is good at doing in a country partly depends on how the education system is configured. In France, you know, Bill Bennett used to tell the story about sitting down with his French counterpart and they were talking about what students would read.

And the French Minister looked at his watch and said, "It's 10:45; they're reading Moliere." Because the government gets to pick the book, and that's obviously not the way the American system is configured.

So, one, I am skeptical of the idea that those of us hanging out in Washington should be calling the shots for how we educate 20-odd-million kids in 14,000 districts, in 100,000 schools. I don't think we're that smart.

But it's also, just practically speaking, by the time you work through the engine of

federalism, it's like a really unfortunate game of telephone. We think in Washington we're giving folks useful directives about how to handle school discipline.

By the time it comes out, the State education agency, then the local education agency, then the school administrator, and then the classroom teacher, they wind up being paralyzed in indecision.

So, by general rule of thumb, as I want Washington's role in education to be as small as possible. That said, I think there is about three or four things that Washington is particularly well-suited to do:

One is issues of transparency and research. There is, you know, there is a collective action problem around something like funding research that if you fund it as a school system or a state, everybody else gets to benefit. So everybody tends to underinvest; it's the classic free rider problem, so Washington has a natural role to play there.

On data transparency, there is a reason that Congress, back in the Constitution, is assigned authority for weights and measures; that if a foot is 14 inches in North Carolina and 10 inches in South Carolina, you're going to have real problems when trains start to cross state lines. So when we think about how do we collect and report information, there enormous value there for comparability.

There is a trust-busting role, in kind of the old Teddy Roosevelt model, that over generations school systems and routines get entrenched and they get deeply wedded into the way that we do business whether they make sense or not.

And there is a role for policymakers in Washington to upend those when they are no longer effective, particularly, when they have an (audio skip) first place. So I think there a number of specific roles that Washington should do.

And I think for me one of the frustrations is how often this becomes a stylized conversation where it's: Washington should do nothing, or it's, well, let's do it in Washington because they have got money and they're smart. And I think we benefit enormously when the conversation is about who is io a position to do something competently and well.

MR. VALANT: Can you talk more about the trust-busting role? Like, what specifically do you have in mind there?

MR. HESS: Sure. I mean, for me, you know, the most famous example is I have long argued that the Civil Rights Act, that the provisions relating to employment have been mishandled; that the Supreme Court, back in the early '70s, in Griggs ruled that under the Civil Rights Act language that in order to use hiring tests, they have to be job -- they have to relate to discreet employment tests and they have to -- you know, they have to be the least -- you cannot create disparate impact on protected groups.

This is all well and good, except Chief Justice Rehnquist wrote in the 9-0 decision, this should not give a free pass to academic credentials that this needs to be applied to all hiring tests.

Well, one of the things that's happened over the past 50 years, including being written in the language later by Congress in the early '90s, is that you have created a massive thumb on the scale for college degrees in hiring; that when you were looking at other kinds of hiring tests, other kinds of employment criteria that are much less expensive, much less intrusive, employers find themselves highly vulnerable to class action suits, to legal travails, to adverse rulings from the EOC, if you simply require a college degree, even though college degrees are frequently not related to the tasks at-hand and has a massive disparate impact, which has been documented time and again, nobody ever actually gets in trouble for that.

So what you have found is that employers require college degrees as a screening device for all kinds of jobs for which those college degrees are not appropriate. This was created by Washington. It is a consequence of the way language is written in federal legislation 60 years ago to address a problem.

The way that language has been interpreted over time is no longer necessarily addressed to the point it has helped create other massive issues around student debt loads, around college non-completion, around restricting opportunity for people who are not, kind of, on the college fast track. That's the kind of thing I mean when I want Congress to go in and bust the trusts that it ha`s helped create.

MR. VALANT: And, Preston, how about you? How do you see the federal government's role, both in education, in general, and then in school choice reforms in particular?

MR. GREEN: When I see the federal government's role, the federal government plays a very important role in providing equal access, providing equal access and equal educational opportunity

in the form of various federal statutes.

I mean, there is Title 6, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race and national origin; there is Title 9, for sex discrimination; there is the Equal Education Opportunities Act; and there is important education statutes such as, IDEA.

And so, I mean, without -- I can tell you this -- I mean, I can tell you this from personal experience and family experience -- the federal government has played a really important role through these statutes and through these roles to enable various groups that have been excluded from education, from actually, you know, giving them a chance to have a part in it and able to access that.

So that's a really, really important role. And even the courts play an important role in this. I mean, historically, we have all heard of Brown v. Board of Education; that is the case that has held out as the way that people have been able to access education of vulnerable groups.

Now, I do think that the last three presidential administrations have shown some of the dangers with respect to school choice. I mean, certainly, we have seen that there has been this -- I mean, the Obama administration, the Bush administration, and now the Trump administration have all have pushed various ideas of school choice.

And they have had some, you know, in my opinion, some negative implications. Certainly, with Bush, we have seen with the testing and No Child Left Behind, there have been some major concerns about, you know, federalism and how it has impacted states and their ability to a wide education.

Obama, in value-added testing, has provided some issues as well, and it remains to be seen what happens with movement towards school choice. But I have to say that I am worried with the possibilities that it may have, when it plays out in the states, that you may see decisions that are made that could impact the ability of communities of color.

Black and Latinx school communities, specifically, it may have a negative impact on their public school systems. I mean, in my research, we recently found with Bruce Baker, for instance, we recently found a Latinx communities have really ingrained funding disparities.

Now, if you put that on top, when you get a school choice program on top of that, that could actually exacerbate those disparities as money gets moved away from traditional public school

systems to the school choice systems. And so, we need to be I think thinking very, very carefully as we go forward with some of these choice programs.

MR. VALANT: And can you say more about that? So you have written quite a bit on charter school accountability and regulation and funding. And I'm curious what it is that you hope to see from the Biden administration, and then maybe also from states and local government when it comes to sort of whether it's reducing the harm, or maybe creating some kind of positive impact on kids in traditional public schools.

MR. GREEN: I think that, in terms of accountability, I think that, I mean, one area that I have focused a great deal on is this idea -- is the practice of related party transactions.

And these are, like, close associations, or where you have, like, a charter school operator, who runs a non-profit entity may have connections with for-profit entities. And what we have seen in the research is that -- and in practice is that this money has been, you know, kind of been weighed in terms of a shell game.

And so, we see this play out in terms of real estate transactions where a number of charter schools end up paying up to 40, maybe 50% of their operating budget to facilities which can be a very, very big concern for schools that have large populations of communities of color, who may need more resources.

And, in addition, we see this -- I mean, there have been some major, major cases in virtual schools where there is epic charter schools and there is A3, and those two combined have used related party transactions engaged in $60 million of fraud.

And so, what we have been calling for is for -- and for the Biden administration around this going forward is greater attention to these types of practices. So, for instance, there could be greater training for charter school boards about the sorts of engagements or sorts of practices that can lead to this fraud.

And I will also continue -- just you have asked me about my concerns that school choice may have for communities of color. A big issue that I have talked about, especially, in case of the charter schools, I mean, everyone talks about a federal statute such as Title 6.

But there is little attention paid to student rights, in terms of constitutional protection. And

so, I spent a lot of time talking about the importance for charter school statutes to be sure to provide constitutional protections for suspensions and expulsions that are not necessarily guaranteed.

So there are certain steps that can be taken to ensure that maybe, as we go forward with school choice, that there is greater fiscal accountability and greater protections to communities of color.

MR. VALANT: Yep. And so, this is maybe a question for Rick, but I'm curious if anyone has thoughts on it. So, about what you see as coming out over the next two to four years of federal education policymaking?

So what are you expecting? And then how much does that depend on who wins these Senate races in Georgia? And then who is chosen and confirmed as the next secretary of education?

MR. HESS: Sure. So, honestly, I think it probably matters more on Georgia on the secretary of ed, if you've got to rank them. If the Democrats win both seats in the Georgia runoff, the Senate will be 50/50, which means Vice President-elect Harris will be tiebreaker.

If that's the case, the Democrats will have a hair's breadth majority in the House. It looks like it's going to be about 222 to 213, give or take. You need 218 to have a majority. So that means the Democrats have about five seats to spare. This will be the narrowest House majority in about 20 years, which means Speaker Pelosi will have to be very adept at keeping all of her members onboard.

In the Senate, if it's 50/50, the Democrats win. The way to bet is not that the Democrats will win. If you look, for instance, at the online markets, right now it's priced in that the likelihood of the Republican will win at least one of the two seats is about a 75 to 80% chance.

But polling has been highly unreliable this Fall, so I wouldn't -- you know, I wouldn't put too much faith on what polls predict; we'll see what happens. If the Democrats win both, what they'll need in order for Vice President-elect Harris to be able to break the ties, they're going to need 50 Senators to all walk together.

The 50 at the line will probably be Senator Joe Manchin from West Virginia, a state that Trump won by 35 points last month. Manchin, a former governor, has made clear that he sees himself very much as a traditional moderate Democrat.

What this means is that even if the Democrats wind up with both Houses, what they'll focus on is things where they can hold together the majority in both Houses that's certainly going to be s

pending. I think it's easy to hold the Democratic caucus together in the House and keep Manchin onboard when you're talking about a lot of dollars for schools, for state and local government.

You're going to be able to keep them aboard when you're talking, I think, some of the kinds of stuff Preston was just talking about, things where you're simply saying, look, let's make sure taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly, where you're going to have trouble, where you lose Manchin, or you probably lose five Democrats or more, is when you start to do stuff that's more ambitious, more of the AOC Sanders, structural change, which is a lot of the higher ed agenda and is some of the bolder attacks on charter schooling.

What that means is then the action would really shift to what the Department of Education does. For instance, folks may remember that during the Obama years, Attorney General Holder launched a pretty aggressive push against Louisiana school voucher program that court's eventually, you know, the Department of Justice was lost on that one. The court said, there is not a problem here.

But you can certainly create a lot of pressure on charter schools from either the Department of Justice or the Department of Education through various filings and lawsuits and investigations. And I think you're going to see a lot of that regardless, frankly, of who gets named secretary of ed.

MR. VALANT: And, Jennifer, so, on this question, really, on the politics, more generally, where do you see the party -- where are the parties right now, both the Republican party and the Democratic party? And talk about that in the context of what we might expect going forward.

MS. BERKSHIRE: Yeah, I mean, that's what makes all of this so fascinating and unpredictable that we're in the midst of a literal transition, but then both of the parties are undergoing transitions. And I think it has profound -- it really is going to impact education policy.

So let's start with the Democrats. So we know that there is this pretty severe split within the Democratic party, where you have the unions versus charter school advocates; you have parents of color, who are strong proponents of charter schools.

And, as Rick just alluded to, like, that is also a political divided, right, that this is a generational split and a political split within Democratic party between people who favor a much more aggressive, sort of, redistributionist agenda, the AOCs, the Bernie Sanders versus what I think of as the

educationists, you know, the Democrats who really since Clinton have put forward education as their economic policy.

So we have got that going on. But that's not the only divide that the Democrats have to worry about. They got smacked again in this last election. You know, half of the country feels condescended to by the Democrats. And so, this really puts the Democrats in a bind. Because, really, the only thing they know how to talk about is college. Right?

So how do you, you know, whether you are talking about the way that urban school districts fail, you know, everyone needs to be on a path to college, how do you talk about that without making people who are over 30, people who don't have degrees, how do you talk about that all of the time without making them feel condescended to? The Democrats do not have an answer to that.

On the Republican side, you know, this transition towards populism is going to have profound implications for education as well. So if you go back and you look at that extraordinary consensus over the years, it's amazing to hear how in lockstep they were about the goal being, you know, to get kids to college in order to compete internationally.

But that's going to change if the Republicans are also running really hard against college. Right? If the argument is that these institutions are centers of liberal indoctrination, this has been the argument about college now for quite a while, now you start to see it spilling over into K-12 as well.

That, you know, it's much harder. The argument in favor of choice and competition on both parties was about, you know, was really aiming towards college and global competition. So I'm not sure how that is going to end up at all, but I think we're in for a really, like, fascinating time but a pretty wild ride.

MR. VALANT: And let me ask a question that you just posed. So how do Democrats talk about that in a way that isn't condescending?

MS. BERKSHIRE: Well, I would really like to see -- I think they have really missed the boat as far as their inability to talk to rural voters. So, you know, one of my advantages as a writer is that I get to travel around -- at least pre-pandemic I did.

And so, my favorite thing to do was to go to the reddish counties and talk to people about their schools. And they could not wait to show off their school. And so, I was astonished, like, how was it

that they were voting people into office who were aggressively intent on expanding school choice and undercutting their public schools?

But somehow the Democrats couldn't connect with them at all. So whatever that divide is over education, it's not so present at the K-12 level. We talked about, I think, bot Jim and I agreed, that Betsy DeVos was really effective at the bully pulpit level.

Whoever Joe Biden selects for his secretary of education, that's going to be an extraordinarily important role, right, to tell that story, especially if things go off of a cliff budget-wise post-pandemic. We're going to be looking at school closures in urban and rural areas.

What if a Democrat secretary of education could tell that story in a way that really spoke to rural voters? I think part of it is broadening our explanation of what it is schools are supposed to do; that if we were able to broaden that and have it be about more than just raising math and English test scores in route to college that would be a way to talk about education so that people who are on the receiving end of that don't feel like they failed. Right? Even though this is a subject I'm obsessed with, I don't hear a lot of Democrats grappling with this.

MR. VALANT: And on that, so on the ed secretary question, I'd be curious if anybody has thoughts, whether it's specifically about who should be Secretary, but also more generally about what type of person might be a good choice?

I mean, if you happen to have thoughts on a particular person, that's great; or if you happen to know who the person will be, that's even better. But how are you all thinking about that selection?

MR. BLEW: I think the best option for President-elect Biden would be to find somebody who really understands the higher education space and all of the problems that it fits. And by higher education, I mean post-high school, where you should be going into the military, developing a career, or getting a college degree.

The reason I believe that -- and this is always sort of surprising to people -- but, you know, of the 3,000 people we have working here more than half work on higher ed. And much more importantly, when you start looking at the money, it's -- of just our discretionary money, more than half is going toward higher ed.

And that doesn't include the $100 billion -- that used to be a big number here in Washington -- that goes into the student loan portfolio every year. And since the student loans were essentially nationalized and all now handled by the federal government that has become a growing problem; it's very politicized.

There is one group that would simply like to say just forgive all of those loans. That's a problem for the two-thirds of people who didn't get to go to college. And because they didn't get to go to college, they don't make as much money. It also is a problem for people who took out those loans and paid them.

So there is serious issues there and it would allow him to avoid choosing one of the former heads of the teacher union which -- you know, when people talk K-12 it looks like it's going to be somebody like Lily Garcia. And I have to say personally I do hope they choose Lily, we'll have a lot of fun with that. But I think a more likely approach will be for him to choose somebody from higher ed.

MR. VALANT: Other thoughts on that?

MS. BERKSHIRE: I know I am supposed to be as the one person on this panel who worked for a union. I know I am supposed to be really excited and root for Lily. But I feel like, you know, one of Betsy DeVos's legacies is that that there really is no going back; and that either, you know, whether it's Lily or an urban superintendent, you know, that sort of takes us back to where we spend all of our time arguing about urban charter schools. And I think that would be a big mistake.

I don't know. I would like see, you know, maybe somebody from a community college, somebody who has the potential to bridge that really toxic urban/rural divide. But no one as of yet asked me to weigh-in.

MR. HESS: You know, one point that, you know, Jennifer alluded to before is you have this coalitional split in the Democrats with which we are familiar, which kind of the college-educated urban white Democrats have become very, you know, progressively ambitious and woke.

And you have this base of Black and Latino Democrats, who actually like school choice, who tend to be much more likely church-going and people of faith and they're looking for practical solutions.

And part of the problem is that somebody like Lily winds up very much exacerbating

these tensions in the Democratic coalition. So one of the advantages of what Jim mentioned of going to somebody, say, out of higher ed is not only is that where the center of gravity was in the Biden campaign, but it also potentially lets them sidestep.

You know, one other point, Jon, that's real interesting here is the Republicans obviously have their own splits over this. It tends to get lost because the media tends not to be real enamored of understanding the dynamics of the Republican coalition. We're all just a bunch of bad people which is an easier narrative to get one's mind around.

But one of the really interesting is in a lot of states, school choice proposals have been carried by Republic legislators, whose constituents don't actually want them. They don't even like them.

You have got lots of Republican households traditionally who that, you know, they live in comfortable suburbs. They bought their house because they liked their school. They don't like school choice when it threatens to disrupt, kind of, their routines and their arrangements in their neighborhoods.

But they send these Republic suburban legislators to the state capitol, who both have kind of been persuaded, theoretically, about school choice and who see it as a do-good vote. Right?

On the left, it's this evil conspiracy to tear down schools. On the right, it's, well, you know what, it doesn't help my constituents. But it's the right thing to do and I'm going to do that. What's really interesting right now is the pandemic is absolutely started to shift sentiment among a lot of these Republican suburban parents.

When you look at the numbers on support of school choice, things like education savings accounts, the numbers over the last 10 months have kind of done this. Because, suddenly, these parents are frustrated with their schools. In a way they have not been, suddenly, they're interested and open to some of these arguments.

So one of the possibilities here for a Biden administration is that reshuffling that Jennifer has talked about is opening the door to all kinds of new coalitions. And one possibility if, you know, if I'm in the Biden camp is I want to think about, wait a minute, we have been doing great with educated suburban voters.

In 2018, this election, they were the difference makers. How do we, kind of, address this over the next four years in a way that really makes them feel at home in our coalition? How that will

shake out, I have no idea. But it will be interesting to watch.

MR. VALANT: Yeah. So I want to keep on that line. So, in just a minute, we'll go to audience questions. And just as a reminder, those can be emailed at events@brookings.edu or sent via twitter at #SchoolChoice.

But on this question of COVID and school choice and what might be the long-term implications, do others have thoughts on what we could expect there?

MR. GREEN: Well, I do think one question that's going to come up, I think, you know, as we clear out of -- you know, as we get to the other side, we have to start thinking about what's going to happen. We looked at what happened with the previous financial crash, you know, states lost a great deal of money in public schools. Right?

But now you have this, with this possible movement and increase in school choice, and so you're going to have this tension now, I think, between, you know, people who are, like, public schools who are concerned about funding to their school districts with this movement towards school choice.

And so, there will be, I think, some conflicts now and concern about what this may -- you know, about the possible greater tensions and greater impact that this may have on public schools. So that's certainly something that I think we'll be paying a great deal of attention to going forward.

MS. BERKSHIRE: I wanted to just follow up on what Rick was talking about, the possibility of the shuffling of the coalition. So there has been so much attention paid to the political divide over school reopening; but not, you know, in the fact that so many of the places where schools have reopened are in counties that Trump won.

You know, there hasn't been as much attention paid to the fact that, you know, those parents haven't been in the streets demanding ESAs. They have been demanding the physical return into these schools and making really full-throated cases about what it is that a school does.

I wrote several pieces over the last two years about how part of what was driving the suburban losses in the GOP was exactly what Rick was saying that the rub on suburban voters is that they, you know, they vote with their feet; they go buy a house somewhere; they exercise choice in a way that low-income people can't.

And then why would an agenda that argues for disinvesting from their schools or putting

their schools into competition, why would that appeal to them? And the answer was that it didn't. And you started to see Republican voters splitting off over that issue in states like Michigan and Arizona.

Now, I made very bold predictions about 2020, almost all of them were wrong. So I feel like I will just talking now.

MR. VALANT: Jim, any thoughts on that, on kind of where the Republic party is right now?

MR. BLEW: Yeah. I'm glad you raised this whole question of how the pandemic has really changed things. You know, Betsy DeVos began a conversation, the pandemic brought it home for a lot of people.

And what we should be paying attention to, I think, is two things: (1) You know, we have a very inequitable education system, particularly, when you think about the choices that people have. And affluent people tend to have a lot more choices than low-income communities. That's why Secretary DeVos and I have focused on those communities.

And so, the pandemic brought home for a lot of suburban voters that they actually didn't have a lot of choice. When somebody decided to close their schools they had no choice but to deal with it; many have been very creative.

We've got these pandemic pods now where people are getting together and basically homeschooling their children collectively. That has really changed the mindset out there. And for those of us in the Washington, D.C. area, Fairfax County is like the ultimate experience at this, like, they have been so bad about how they have responded to the pandemic that a lot more people are literally organizing; we've got to find out how to have more options.

By the way, the private schools in that county are overwhelmed because there are all of these affluent people who can afford it. That contrast with what happened lower income communities, working class communities where private schools are closing forever.

They will never open again because people couldn't afford it anymore. So they didn't have that option and their public schools closed. So the pandemic has brought homeschool choice in a really powerful way.

Because we have always focused on low-income communities, we're actually a little

anxious about how this plays out; that it actually ends up being -- well, Jennifer talks about the rural/urban divided. I think there is more of a suburban/urban divide I this country and that it's going to come to the fore.

MR. VALANT: So we have gotten a few questions on the question of school choice reforms inequity and what school choice reforms have meant for equity in our education system; and then what schools of choice and school choice policy should do to better serve the most vulnerable student populations; so students with disabilities, students of color, students in poverty, English learners.

Anyone, thoughts on that question?

MR. BLEW: I think the question is: Does school choice help vulnerable children? Is that the question?

MR. VALANT: Yeah. And what more could be done?

MR. BLEW: Well, I think you have to be thoughtful about how you design these programs. And a lot of states, when they begin their school choice journeys, start with students with disabilities. Because, you know, that is one of the parts of the system that is just not operating very well, very few students make a year's gain in a year's time.

And so, lots of governors have taken leadership starting with those students. And, you know, it wasn't even hard. All you have to do is to say, you need to have an IEP to get one of the scholarships to attend another school. You can do that for every vulnerable population.

MR. GREEN: I think that we also have to be sure with some of these, like, certainly for the private school choice programs that we ensure that vulnerable students are protected via statute.

Suzanne Atkinson colleagues that knew of voucher statutes and found that while they all, almost all of them included protections for, you know, against racial discrimination, none of them included protections for English learners, for instance; none of them included protections against sex discrimination; none of them -- and even though there are statutes that focus in on students with disabilities, other statutes were completely quiet on that issue.

And so, I think that going forward we have to -- I think that states and, well, certainly, can just make it clear, make it explicit that those students are protected and can access school choice programs.

MR. VALANT: We have a couple of questions, too, along these lines. So, here, I'm going to read one of them. Some of the best and worst schools are charters. How can we support those schools that need it? And how do we identify schools earlier rather than wait for them to fail to address schools that are struggling?

MR. BLEW: Look, some of the best and worst schools are private; some of the best and worst schools are traditional public schools. The charter school laws have a mechanism to address that and sometimes it doesn't happen quickly enough for people.

But I think we have to be cognizant that the parents who have invested in a school, they made a decision to go there for good reasons and they did it out of free choice. And so, you don't want to just close them down overnight because they happen to get a low test score one year.

I think you have to be more thoughtful about that. But, indeed, the charter schools that laws tend to give you five years of operations and then you come back to the authorizer to see if you can continue operating for another five years continuing to get public funding. I think it's a good model that maybe the traditional district could benefit.

MR. HESS: I mean part of this it gets us to the larger conversation about, how do we do school accountability in a way that actually serves its purpose? You know, I thought Jennifer did a nice job of hitting on some of the frustration and blowback against, kind of, the Bush, Obama, NCLB model.

And, look, you know, I have been on the board of directors of the National Charter Authorizers for like 11 years now. And, I mean, it has always seemed to me that one of the promises of charter schooling was partly the opportunity to help us think more nimbly and creatively about accountability.

I mean, I think we saw, especially in 2008, 2010, when NCLB was really kicking in on steroids, how crazily off-the-rails it can go when you try to judge schools based just on a couple of metrics.

But, look, these test scores tell us something, to use them as yellow -- you know, it's kind of yellow caution lights, yellow warning lights that something needs to be looked at, and then thinking about how do we actually make sure that we're looking more, you know, constructively at what's under the hood.

You know, we have talking off and on for years about the British inspectorate model as one way to go about this. There is obviously other ways to attack (phonetic) maybe by "The Wisdom of Crowds," in terms of soliciting information from parents and students.

There is a lot of tools that we could be thinking about using and we shouldn't just use them for what we think of as school choice. That same toolkit ought to be applied to traditional district schools. And we ought to make it easier for families for whom those schools aren't working to make sure they get the chance to find schools that do work for their kids.

MR. GREEN: I have to comment on this as well. When I lived in Pennsylvania, I was on a State Charter Appeal Board for four years. And so, part of our responsibility was actually to close down schools that did not work, and we closed down a few.

And I have to say though that, you know, in a few of those times, you know, you can really, like, see the pain in the parents who have lost their schools. And so, I think that when we think about accountability, we also have to think about, like, the impact that these closures can have on parents.

And so, while we are, you know, while I can see that these test scores and rubrics are important, I think we do need to spend some time as well at the beginning having, I think, more rigorous policies for determining who it opens and who closes so that we don't have these experiences that occur later.

And they also, as have experienced and have looked at my own research, they also have really terrible impacts on the school district as a whole. When these schools close, the school district then has to pick up the slack and then pick them up.

And so, many of these school districts have then had to almost have like a charter school float in terms of their planning because of schools that may close. So I think that when as we go forward, we need to be more deliberative in terms of how these schools open and how they close.

MS. BERKSHIRE: The superintendent from Fairfield, South Carolina, who was on the last panel, he was fantastic. You should go back and watch that, if you didn't see it already. But they asked him a question about, you know, what are you thinking in terms of school transformation post-pandemic?

And his response was, you know, we realize that kids are -- when the schools closed the kids didn't have anywhere to eat. To us, that signals that a broader transformation is necessary than the structure of the school. And I feel the same way about the accountability conversation.

Jim said that, you know, Betsy DeVos started a conversation about choice and the pandemic brought it home. There was a big debate about accountability before the pandemic.

But it just seems like that question felt so small to me, you know, this -- here you have a school that's falling short in a metric. How can we intervene to keep from having to shut it down too soon? And it's like, you know, we need a much bigger debate about what schools do and how to measure that.

MR. VALANT: And so, and how about on the way that accountability and choice interact? So, you know, one vision of charter schools is that charters should be going and doing the things that families want them to do.

But we sort of layered on top of that vision in a test-based accountability system that's very particular about what kinds of outcomes schools should get which can constrain what types of things they do in order to get those outcomes.

So if we are in a moment where we are backing off a little bit from test-based accountability, does that change the problem going forward for charters and choice?

MR. HESS: You know, just to build on what Jennifer was just saying in answer to that question, I would actually say that when folks think about starting with accountability they have got it backwards. The issue here is the whole reason we had the accountability conversation back in the '90s, was we were worried that schools weren't doing what families' needs of them.

Well, part of what we, you know, part of what we have seen on the pandemic, partly what we are hearing from parents is families want, have very specific needs, there are some families that don't want to send their kids back to school in the Spring whether or not doors are open.

There are families that aren't going to want to send their kids back in the Fall because it's not like COVID will have been utterly stamped out. There are kids who haven't seen a day of instruction, millions of kids who haven't had a day of instruction since March.

What these different children and families' need is very different and very different

households and different communities. So to ask how do we fit the answers to these kids and families within an accountability system is totally not the question.

The question is: How do we make sure we're building and delivering to these kids and these families what they need? And that can look in lots of different ways over the next 12, 24 months, an d way beyond, And then what we need is accountability. How do we make sure that public dollars, like Preston was saying, are spent for the purposes for which they're intended?

How do we make sure families have some insight as to whether the choices they might make are actually good for their kids? How do we make sure that publicly-run systems are generating results that we think are acceptable?

Like, what we need to do is start from the premise that we have got to solve lots of different problems for lots of kids and families and then have the accountability conversation out of that. If we start by talking about how to fix accountability, we're just putting ourselves on the wrong, you know, in the wrong size shoes.

MR. BLEW: And, Rick, if you don't mind me adding to that, I think it's particularly poignant right now because the pandemic has created all of this inequity. I mean there are, as you say, millions of students who haven't had a day of instruction, so their learning loss is huge; and then we have kids in pandemics pods who are right on track.

And the system has pretty much been created around an average and we have to evolve to a system where there is all kinds of different models where different people are figuring out how to meet the needs of a niche that has roughly the same needs. And some of the education technology is trying to do this.

You know, this is going to be a very different world three, five years from now, as people are recovering from a pandemic that has just devasted part of our population and while the half -- well, those are not the right fractions, but you get the sense.

I mean, the continuum of impact of this will have to be addressed, and the system to-date has never been able to remediate at-scale. And so, we just need something completely different to do that.

MR. VALANT: We have to wrap up in just a second. But Preston or Jennifer, any last

thoughts on this one?

MS. BERKSHIRE: I would say that, you know, like, if you pay attention to sort of what are the demands emerging out of the pandemic landscape, you know, it's not like the wind is not in the sails of the portfolio movement right now, right, that I actually -- I feel like Jim has a better sense that you're going to see -- particularly in states where the GOP made big gains -- you're going to see this real push to make education individual.

And that, like, if you think the equity issues are bad at a system level, wait till that's how we operate it. So I'm going to be keeping a close eye on that. We don't really, you know, we don't know what that's going to look like, but I think he's right.

MR. GREEN: And, as for me, I think that, yeah, you're going to see, again, and a lot of my research and focus is right ow is on vulnerable communities in Black and Latinx communities in particular.

And I think that we you are going to see is building it up on -- Jennifer has said this -- this conflict between individual, like, individuals seeking choices versus the collective, like, what will happen to these school districts where other kids are located?

And what's going to be the balance between getting that individual choice while making sure that that community resource is still viable? And so, that's going to be something that I'll be looking at as well.

MR. VALANT: Great. Thanks Preston, and thanks to all five of you; and then, thanks also to the panel that was with us before, as well as everyone who is watching at home. I have learned a lot, so I appreciate all of you.

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