

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

CAN FAMILY ENGAGEMENT BE A GAMECHANGER  
FOR EDUCATION POST-COVID?  
SURVEY FINDINGS FROM THE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION NETWORK

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PARTICIPANTS:

**Welcome and Introduction:**

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**Panel Discussion:**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. CHANG: Hello everyone. My name is Yu-Ling Cheng. I'm with Kidsburgh. It's exciting to be here today. I'm excited to introduce you to two parents. So first I would like to introduce Dorie Taylor.

MS. TAYLOR: Hi Yu-Ling. Thanks for having me. My name is Dorie Taylor and family is of utmost importance to me. So I'm a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a sister, a sister-in-law, cousin, auntie, and here at home I am a wife and mother of two. I have two children ages 12 and 9; and I am in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

MS. CHANG: Awesome. Thank you, so much. And I would love to introduce Adam. So Adam, tell us a little bit about yourself.

MR. FISCHER: Hi Yu-Ling. I am an attorney who lives and works in Pittsburgh. I'm married to a healthcare consultant and we have three little kids ages 9, 7, and 3. Fourth grade, first grade, and then should be in preschool, but is not because of the pandemic.

MS. CHANG: And speaking of the pandemic, I know we've all been experiencing some version of remote learning. How is that remote learning going?

MR. FISCHER: It's going better than it was a year ago at this time when we were first thrust into it. But throughout the 12 months it's been challenging, to say the least. You know, all kinds of stressful, and new, and different experiences throughout the time.

MS. CHANG: Fair enough. And Dorie, I know you've been experiencing full-time remote learning as well.

MS. TAYLOR: Certainly. It was a rough start, I would say last March, early on. And when my husband and I were each too busy to help out, it was interesting to see each child be able to reach out to grandparents who are retired to get help; or they were able to reach out to their answer uncles to ask questions when mom and dad just were not available.

MS. CHANG: What would you say to a school administrator, like here is the one thing you should do to keep me engaged moving forward?

MS. TAYLOR: It's simple. Weekly communication, that weekly email blasts on Monday or on a Friday is something that, trust me, goes the extra mile and it means a lot. When you hear from

the administration, the fam, the teachers, we feel heard and seen and it goes a long way. So I would not diminish that. You know, once a week, at least, communication is key to make parents feel good and feel like they are part of the community.

MR. FISCHER: You know, whether it's something simple like, "We're looking for more tape, or Kleenex, or Clorox wipes in our classroom," to "This is long-term what the school district needs and this is how the community can help in those ways, to gap fill or otherwise." Not every parent, but a lot of parents through this pandemic will now recognize that they can be helpers. So take advantage of that. And as we return to what's normal, get parents more involved to the extent that they can.

MS. CHANG: This process has probably expanded the tools in our toolkit, whether it's learning or the parent engagement or the ways that parents and educators can meet. And the question is, what tools will remain or be expanded on post pandemic?

MS. TAYLOR: You know, we've done the teacher parent conferences over Zoom and I don't know that we do need to step into the school building to do those teacher parent conferences in the future. So perhaps after the pandemic there is this – there will be an opportunity for teacher parent engagement that is choose your own adventure. Come into the school, do virtual, so that's kind of exposing ways of being in contact and what's comfortable for the teacher and comfortable for the parent.

MS. CHANG: Before COVID, what did you view as the most important purpose of education?

MR. FISCHER: I think it was pretty much just to teach basic concepts to our kids, reading, writing, arithmetic, science, social studies, art, music. Just to build academic and study skills so that in time they are able to do their homework. They learn how to write an essay. They learn how to research a topic in the library or online, how to think critically. Basically just to give them better intellectual capabilities and a broader knowledge base, right; a broader and deeper knowledge base. That's the way I just viewed traditional school pre-COVID.

What this is really driven home to me is the importance of the social aspect of school. Social development on one hand, particularly with young kids, learning how to deal with their peers, learning how to listen attentively, learning how to respect their classmates and put, but also kind of social growth and understanding of your community, of the people in the community, of the differences in the

people in the community. We just aren't able to take them out in the community as frequently or teach them about things through immersive opportunities that we normally would be able to do.

MS. CHANG: Well thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and opening up about your personal stories with education. We are very grateful. Thank you.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you.

MS. TAYLOR: Thank you.

MS. WINTHROP: Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening everybody. Thank you all for joining. I'm Rebecca Winthrop from the Center for Universal Education where I'm a senior fellow and with my colleague Emiliana Vegas, I am the co-director. Please, as we dive into the – this conversation, submit your questions at #FamilyEngagement.

A huge thanks for kicking us off to our partner in our parent engagement project Kidsburgh who – and to Adam and Dorie who are in Western Pennsylvania and shared their very specific experiences and thoughts and reflections of being a parent amid COVID and education.

And today's topic is everybody knows is thinking about parent engagement and how important it is. And from our perspective we are very focused on making sure that this increased spotlight on family school partnerships, parent-teacher partnerships doesn't fade after COVID happens. Much the way Adam says a lot of parents has realized they can be real helpers and allies in their children's education. How can we leverage that?

So from our end, we believe and know from the literature that parent engagement has always been important well before COVID and will remain to be important well after COVID. There's lots of research to show that if educators and parents can really form very close partnerships and move parent engagement from just asking parents to involve -- be involved here or there episodically in the school community, but a real partnership, children benefit and particularly children who are the most marginalized; children who perhaps don't have, like Dorie and Adam have, two working parents at home and who are struggling with either job loss or a range of things. And we know that type of partnership between educators and parents if done well can boost children's academic and socio-emotional outcomes.

But we also then the parent engagement is really very important because parents voices

deserve to be at the table for shaping what education looks like. We know education and society plays an important role. It's one of the few institutions that both reflect social norms, but also shape social norms. So what schools privilege as what is taught, but more importantly how it's taught, what success looks like, what the main purpose of education can be can really shape our society, can shape how we think about learning to live together, and what our aspirations are individually and collectively.

So for us, parent engagement is an essential component of navigating education change, which COVID obviously showed, although we started our project on parent engagement before COVID. And that – a part of that education change is system transformation. And we think a lot about system transformation here at the Center for Universal Education.

I'm showing you a slide that is rather detailed. I'm not going to talk through all the little details, but the main message is that there – you can think about system transformation and kind of three stages, practical, structural, and cultural. This is from Donella Meadows' "Leverage Points." She is a big thinker on system transformation theory and many thanks to our colleagues at Populace for providing a simplified graphic of her theory.

A lot of time is spent on – in education change in system transformation and reform on the practical, changing measurable things, etc. But really when you want to have a big influence on an education system, you need to tackle the structural and the cultural. Structural being thinking a new about power dynamics and relationships for us, parents having a real seat at the table includes creating new feedback loops and is a part of structural change they could help transform systems. And certainly the cultural, the cultural is really around what is the goal of this education system. What's the purpose? What is the public mindset? Parents and families and communities have to be engaged in that type of conversation.

Our work for many years at the Center across many different portfolios has been very focused thinking about the ultimate purpose of education and the fact that most education systems, not all, but must around the world are set up to be deeply unequal and are providing some kids, a few kids with the strong academics and 21st-century skills they really need to thrive in this world, and many kids without those. And we are really focused on closing the equity gap so all kids have the full suite of competencies and skills they need to thrive.

So that's why we started this work initially around parent engagement, parent voice, community participation. We have – are very fortunate to have been exploring together this question of navigating education change and the role of parent engagement in it with our family engagement and education network members. These members are from many places around the world, 14 jurisdictions. And we have over 41 project collaborators. So multiple in each jurisdiction.

The vast majority our government leaders, but we also have civil society leaders and two private school networks who are engaged. You can see the suite here. We newly have colleagues in Brazil coming to join the network, but they have not yet participated in the survey findings that we're going to share with you. So they are not highlighted here yet.

Together we have conducted a survey of over 25,000 parents. These were parents who had children in formal schooling from preschool through to end of secondary school. It was more or less evenly distributed across the age ranges. In each jurisdiction, whether we work nationally, or within a state, or within the district, the survey was representative at least within 5% margin of error. And we did the survey in 15 languages. And if anybody would like a copy of the survey to use it for your purposes, please do contact us later. I will leave you an email at the end of my presentation to do that. We would be happy to share.

So what we are doing today sharing just topline messages from the survey. This is the first of various installments. We are doing a survey of teachers. We are doing focus groups with parents and teachers. And in the fall in September we're going to be sharing a culmination of our findings in a big report and a playbook.

So one of the things I want to do is just walk you through our top three key takeaways from our survey findings. And the first key take away is around parent aspirations. We see that sort of more or less across all the jurisdictions, parents surveyed – and the parents from across the jurisdiction survey, most parents are desiring a new that's what we call a new type of education, end quotes. What we mean by that is that they – when they asked about sort of the education outcomes, they wish – they want a mix of both traditional academic outcomes that they are looking for, but also socioemotional outcomes. When asked about sort of the types of teaching and learning approaches they are interested in, they are very interested in a much more interactive in age teaching and learning approaches versus

just sort of information passage or direct instruction models.

And for some, not all, for some of the parents in the communities we surveyed, when they – the indicators they look at when they judge if a school is of the quality and good with their child are a variety including, is my kid performing well academically, but also a range of socioemotional development outcomes around socialization with friends and enjoying school, etc. So that's what we mean by parents desiring a new kind of education.

A second takeaway is around parent influences. We as parents what really shapes their thinking about their children's education and we were thinking postsecondary education preparation and university scores, sort of admittance would be very, very high on the list. And actually, and perhaps not surprisingly for anyone who is a parent or works in schools, by far and away the vast – strongest influences are their own children and their children's teachers.

We also asked about – it was clear from the survey that parents really desire stronger alignment and relationships with their teachers. So it really means that this sort of parent-teacher-child relationship is ripe for strengthening if we think about an important leader for navigating change and improving children's outcomes in education.

Our third take away, which is a little bit met up is about the distinctiveness of communities. And although there were these two big, broad trends, across the data you will see as I turn in a minute to show you some more detailed graphics of the data, that communities are quite distinct and that really what our take away is that you have to, if you're an education leader, and educator, administrative education, etc., really make sure that the education community takes the time to get to know the parents in your community because they do have different sort of sets of beliefs, aspirations, etc. And getting to know your parents is really the first step to building a trusting relationship and building that type of parent educator, true partnership or school family partnership that is so crucial for successful parent engagement.

So I'm going to turn to some graphics in a minute. And I just wanted to note that when we talk about parents, we are talking about family members, primary caregivers. We use that word interchangeably. So it's not just a biological parent.

So first let's turn to the purpose of education. We asked parents – this is teeny tiny. You

won't see it. But I'm going to walk you through it. These are all the 14 jurisdictions. We asked parents based on sort of academic outcomes, economic outcomes, civic outcomes, or socioemotional outcomes of school, what was the most important purpose of school for parents. And at the very top in the blue you will see the each – and there is sort of a leaf shape for each of the jurisdictions, which you see are actually quite distinct. The very top in the blue is parents who said they really felt the socioemotional outcome was the most important.

On the right is the orange. It's the academic outcome, the purpose of school. On the bottom in gray is the economics. Sort of preparation for skills, for work in the job market. And on the left, the yellow is specific outcomes. So helping – schools helping to create good citizens.

And the couple of things I want you to take away from this chart, which of course you can examine in-depth on the website in our report, is that the vast majority of jurisdictions really did privilege the socioemotional outcome alongside the academic outcome. Those are in the blue box.

And then you also see that there is some – three jurisdictions, two districts in the U.S. and South Africa who really privilege their academic outcome. And then two jurisdictions in the yellow box, which were both in India, really privileged the sort of civics purpose of school.

And the other big take away is that the shapes of each jurisdiction are different. They are not all the same. And you can see there is one at the very bottom, which is Colombia the blue box, which is almost a perfect diamond, which means almost a quarter of each parents, there is a little more care about social economic outcomes, but care about each purpose of school. And again, the take away here is that it's really important to know your parents and to think about doing this type of mapping of parent aspirations when you start – when you educate people in the education community start thinking about engaging parents.

One of the things that's very interesting also is when we asked parents how closely did they think their aspirations for the purpose of school for their children aligned to the aspirations of their children's teachers. So the beliefs that their children's teachers have. And then you will see in this next chart, which is again also hard to see, but where the lines are not exactly the same it means that they were very – parents say they want one purpose, but they believe teachers desire totally different purpose.

You will see that particularly on the last row at the bottom; Botswana, U.K., places in the

U.S. And where some jurisdictions are almost one for one. That means they feel they are in lockstep. Their perception is that they are in lockstep with their children's teachers. So again, that's another dimension, this alignment and perception of how parents feel, how aligned they feel is an important input into knowing your parents.

Another reason, not just the purpose and outcomes of school, another reason we see parents wanting this new type of education is in pedagogy. This -- we asked all the jurisdictions, but this happens to be a question in our national representatives samples from Ghana, South Africa, Columbia where we asked parents their preference around more interactive pedagogy versus more traditional direct instruction. And by far and away parents really privileged and preferred the interactive pedagogy. And we see that also in other jurisdictions when we ask similar questions.

A third thing that we wanted to highlight was parents influence of -- not parents influence. The influences parents listen to when they shape how they think about their children's education. Is it good quality? Is it not? Etc. You can see all the different options we gave parents. By far and away the opinion of my child, my children's educators were very much the top. And interestingly you see on the sort of second row, which were much less mentioned, opinion of other parents. Parents are not looking to other parents as -- which to us says they don't really see sort of the collective power that communities and parents might have in engaging in discussions around education.

And so taken together, again, just to repeat our main take away, is that it is incredibly important when navigating education change as COVID has shown, but we hope that this lesson will not be wasted as we think about educational change and system transformation moving into the future to know the parents in your community if you are an education leader, if you are educators, and to really build a strong trusting relationship with them. So to finish, before we kick off a discussion I just wanted to let everyone know that if they want access to the survey or want to get involved in our project in any way, please email [leapfrogging@Brookings.edu](mailto:leapfrogging@Brookings.edu).

And now what I'm really pleased to do is to turn with that sort of rapid fire, turn to our panelists who I would invite all to join us on the screen. We have Paul Lorette, who is the assistant superintendent of Sea to Sky School District from the British Columbia. We have Moitshepi Matsheng who is co-founder and country director of Young 1ove, a nonprofit working in Botswana. She is also the

chairperson of the Botswana National Youth Council.

We also have Kerry-Jane Packman, who is executive director of programs for Parentkind in the U.K., which is the national parent union. And we have Samar Bajaj, program manager of India Programs from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation. All of them are part of our Family Engagement Education Network members. And welcome everybody. We are so very pleased to have you.

So we have been talking in our network member meetings as the surveys have – the survey has been going on going and we are doing focus groups just about parent engagement, how you are all dealing with it. And just to start, I'm wondering Kerry-Jane if I can turn to you first. And then for all of you just quickly, what are you hearing from the parents in your jurisdiction.

We heard from Adam and Dorie and they were kind to share their experiences. And of course there is very diverse experiences of parents including those who are out of work and really suffering. So we would love to hear how parents faring, what are the barriers to engagement? Kerry-Jane, let's start with you and will go on a quick round robin.

MS. PACKMAN: So I think for me the barriers to engagement continue to be the same barriers before COVID, it's just that they have broken down a little bit more. We've been tracking this for the last six years, the barriers to parental engagement. And that is around – it's always been fear. If you've had a bad experience at school and you've got to go through those school gates again or to talk to a teacher, there is the element of fear around it. And typically within the U.K., if you are contacted by teacher it's because something's going wrong.

There is also the element of parents not being asked to be engaged. And it seems so simple when you say it out loud. And I think the bit that has changed considerably on the barriers for us is that they used to be, I don't have time. But that was always an element I don't have time to go into the school building. And now parents have the time because there is virtual options that have been put forward. So I'd say those are the main barriers that we are experiencing at the moment.

MS. WINTHROP: Great, thanks. Samar, let's go to India. What are you hearing from your parents? What are they facing?

MS. BAJAJ: So I think a lot of parents are very anxious for schools to be open and they want their kids back. I think there has been a renewed understanding of how difficult the education

process is, the burdens that teachers take on. And I think there is sort of mutual respect on both sides that has really built up over the last year.

MS. WINTHROP: That bodes very well and talks a little bit – both of you talked a little bit about what Dori talked about at the beginning about choose your own adventure, new approaches to being able to stay engaged. Tepi, let's go to you in Botswana. What are you hearing from the parents you work with?

MS. MATSHENG: Great. Thank you so much for that, Rebecca. I would say that typically parents haven't been engaged actively in child's learning. So in Botswana they have been engaged through Parent-Teacher Association, conferences, or even at the end of the term when they go into work to collect their report card.

But now we are seeing that it is possible for parents to be engaged whilst working very much hand-in-hand with their children. I would say even before, parents didn't really know the abilities or the learning levels of their children and this was also one barrier that was just to say this can just be left with teachers because parents expect teachers to do their job. But I think now what we're learning and seeing is that there is a possible way to engage parents and bring them much closer to their children's education, which is really, really important.

MS. WINTHROP: Great. And Paul, what about you?

MR. LORETTE: Yeah. So like we've heard from others, we've had a lot of engagement with our parents. Actually in our area, we have a wide range of engagement in terms of we have parents who are very engaged all the time and we have parents who we really have to work to engage with them and is challenging. So during this time, the use of technology has really helped us to be able to reach out more to different groups of parents.

And actually, in some ways I would say COVID has increasing the level of engagement with many of our communities just in terms of how parents have been concerned about what learning at home looked like when we were in that stage last year. This year all of our students are full-time in class. So that's different. But also during that time, I would say again parent engagement levels have increased just due to everyone wanting things to improve and get better for the student learning.

MS. WINTHROP: Great, thank you. I wanted to dig in a little bit more on how you all

have been working with parents in the past, present, how you were thinking about doing it moving forward. Samar, can we start with you? Can we start with India? You represent a philanthropic organization. You partner very closely with the Department of Education of in Himachal Pradesh state in India.

And I'm just curious if you can tell us a little bit about why has NSDF partnered with HP, but more importantly why has parent engagement become a topic that you've been working on. Tell us a little bit about your work and if there were any surprises over sort of the last year or so. And I don't mean the surprise of a global pandemic, but in sort of the parent engagement work.

And there was a question that came in. Actually, two similar questions. One from Jasmine and one from Sabine, really asking – and I'm wondering if you can try to answer this. Asking about how can we sustain this type of parent engagement even as the pandemic subsides? I know that was something that Adam brought up at the beginning and it's something that you have been thinking about because the Department of Ed has done all sorts of creative things and rather than going back to normal, they are thinking about sustaining it. So tell us a little bit about your work.

MS. BAJAJ: Great. Thanks, Rebecca. So maybe I'll just give a little bit of an introduction to the jurisdiction itself and our work. So the state of Himachal Pradesh is a relatively small state in the north of India, but I think in context of many school systems, it's a large system. So as about 800,000 students and 15,000 schools that the state actually looks at.

It's a little bit of a remote area. It's a pretty hilly, mountainous region. Lots of schools are very far-flung. Many of them are cut off in the winter months and actually don't have good connectivity.

And I would say that our work has been – we've been in the state for the last five years. We've worked on multiple topics, largely in the realm of systems transformation that you set us up with in the beginning of this conversation. And most of our work has been on either strengthening the academic inputs that are coming into the classroom or sort of adding more efficiency to the administrative side so that the system can actually create that space for teaching and learning to happen.

Our eventual focus in the state and what we are working towards is actually just improving the quality of learning outcomes in the state. We did have some surprises as we went along. So I would say very similar to what Tepi was saying. I don't think that parent engagement has really been

at the top of our agenda. We've looked at – the large part of the work has been saying teachers are the most important. How can we really equip them? Very tangible things in terms of just adding more teachers in schools because a lot of schools don't have enough teachers, creating materials that they can follow easily, question banks and lots of – and skills to just make sure that they are fully equipped.

We looked at a bunch of changes in terms of putting in more technology in the schools like building the administration of schools as well as in the classroom. And parents and the community were really just thought about as a way that – like how can we just help them to ask a few tight questions and hold the system accountable. And that's really how we had talked about their role. But the last 12 months have changed a lot.

So I would say the biggest surprise for us has been just the level of interest and ownership that parents have taken when it comes to the children's education. When we've shifted to remote learning, you've suddenly got the parent really been at the center stage of this. Like they have to anchor the remote learning schedule. Many of them have two, three, four kids. They have to make sure that all of the kids are logged in for their classes, they receive the material, they are actually doing their homework, sending things back.

And what we saw in India, given that we are a very under resourced market, we actually had the parent – typically there is only one device in the whole household belonging to the father, which is actually being shared by all the children in the household. So starting from there and then we had a very simple way of providing information. A lot of the content was being sent as video links over WhatsApp. Worksheets were also being sent over WhatsApp. Kids were actually doing their homework, taking pictures, sending them back to teachers, and then receiving feedback on what they had done.

So I would say very quick, frugal innovation. We have a good Indian word for it. It's called jugaad. And I think it really came to life in the pandemic. So that's really been, I would say, the big surprise for us.

About four or five months into the pandemic, the state actually did its first virtual EPTA. And I think 80% of parents in the state actually participated.

MS. WINTHROP:.. And Samar, EPTA meaning a PTA meeting electronically through a cell phone, right?

MS. BAJAJ: Yes. And it wasn't just one format. I think Dorie picked this up, like choose your own adventure. The teachers tried everything possible. They were making phone calls to parents. They were doing Zoom calls, like video calls, but there were multiple parents and you could interact. There were WhatsApp message is being sent. There was SMS being sent. And then in some cases where the situation, like the COVID situation wasn't so bad, parents were also meeting teachers one on one or coming to schools in sort of limited hours in slots.

So it was very like, I think on all fronts, just trying to open up every single channel of communication that was possible. And adding all of those of together, they were actually able to reach out 80% of parents, which is over 700,000 parents in the state. So I think just the level of involvement has – the way that the system has really come together with very limited resources to try and just make sure that we can do the best for our kids has been very encouraging. And I think the big one has been obviously that technology, it can take as many years to get used to it. But then an external event happens and suddenly it's just the new normal. So that's really where we are today.

I will maybe just take a couple of minutes on the sustainability viewpoint and how we are thinking of this going forward. Then I will hand it back to you in case you have any follow-up questions.

MS. WINTHROP:.. Yeah. Yeah. And you're going to – I think that would be great to sort of answer Jasmine and Sabine's question. That's what you're going to do, right? About --

MS. BAJAJ: Yeah.

MS. WINTHROP:.. And then we will have to move to the next person. Thank you.

MS. BAJAJ:.. Great. So I think our theory really is that why we've see in such high levels of engagement is because the state now has like a backbone to really create that engagement. I would say five years ago we didn't even have names and contact numbers of all parents digitized in the manner that you could set these communications channels up. And teachers and even officials were not really well-trained or didn't – like they weren't that fast. Things were still being done on pen and paper; official letters being sent out.

So now I think with the system in place we definitely want to continue using technology for the parent-teacher interactions. From less than 20% participation, we saw 80% during the pandemic and hopefully we can now stick to that as we start to reopen.

MS. WINTHROP:.. Great.

MS. BAJAJ:.. The other big one in the state I think that we been working on, is again, how do we use technology to just disseminate more information. Dorie again picked up the topic of the weekly email blast. And what we've seen even in the survey results is that parents in India actually are very happy to get daily communication on whether the child has come to school or they been playing truant, what homework they been allocated for the day, what are the exams coming up, what are the things they need to prep for, so that they can really support that journey home.

So what we've done in the state is that we have built a teacher to parent communication platform which will allow teachers to send this regular messaging out. And a lot of it will be (inaudible). The teacher will not have to do all of it. The for example, like daily record attendance in class and if the kids were not there, parents will get a message saying they are not there.

MS. WINTHROP:.. Thank you, Samar.

MS. BAJAJ:.. Same for homework.

MS. WINTHROP:.. It's fascinating. And I'm sorry I have to move on to the –

MS. BAJAJ: No, no. Thank you.

MS. WINTHROP:.. So I want to move from Samar's great example of all of this creative choose your own adventure, massive new forms of key medication. Paul, I want to move you. You are a head of leading district, a school district. And you have pre-COVID done a lot to really do deep engagement with family members and really try to build that close, trusting relationship. And you've talked about how that is so important in the transformation agenda that the state has. I was wondering if you could share with us a little bit about what that transformation agenda is, what the motivations are in the role of parent engagement in that.

And also, there was a question that came in. We have lots – so many great questions. We won't be able to get to them all. But Tina asked: how do you engage parents in rural or low income communities? And I know that something you've been doing for a long time. So it would be great to speak to that a little bit too.

Thanks Paul. Unmute.

MR. LORETTE:.. Oh, I win the prize for being the first to forget to hit that button. Well,

thanks very much. It is a pleasure to be here.

And yeah, in our school district we have about 5,000 students roughly, maybe at 13 schools, 14 schools. Our provincial government, about maybe six or seven years ago, embarked on quite an ambitious redesign of our curriculum. About 10 years before that, our school district did something very similar with our education plan. So we were recognizing that our approach just wasn't modern. It wasn't serving our students well. And that was about the time with her was a real global move towards big change in education. It was a really exciting time and still is.

So one of the big challenges for us, and just for everyone's understanding, in our school district we have approximately 12% of our student enrollment are Indigenous students. They are of First Nations Indigenous ancestry. And so back about 10 years ago we were very concerned about our data and our school completion rates. Our Indigenous students were graduating somewhere in the 40 to 50% range. What that means is that, for this cohort of students starting in grade eight, about 45% would graduate and a six year time period. For all students including everyone, including Indigenous learners, it was somewhere around 76%. So really unacceptable.

So we embarked on a very ambitious transformation, modernization plan. So in a nutshell what happened was we engaged with our community. We used a digital platform called Thought Stream to start – we use the backward design approach. We asked our community what are the skills and knowledge and competencies that you feel your students need to be successful in the future. And this one out to parents, community, to our First Nations elders.

We took all this information back, thousands of pieces of feedback from the community, worked over the course of five or six full days with a large representative team of teachers, parents, again, Indigenous elders, board members, and we crafted an education plan.

And over the last 10 years – I do want to just make a nod to the visual that Rebecca used earlier on system transformation because I would say that it's very true. Culturally, as our education plan became part of our district culture, it was really our strongest leverage point. So there were a lot of specific things that we did that I won't get into.

But to make a long story short, it is a success story for us and that we look at our completion rates now, 10 years later, and this has been a gradual change. Our Indigenous students are

now graduating at approximately 95%. When we look at all students, it's likely even 98%. So not a big difference. Virtually all of our students are graduating and that is huge.

It also gets back to this notion that what we do to support our most vulnerable students is good for all students. And all students benefit from that. And we've seen proof of that over time.

So I would say that initial parent engagement and the engagement along those 10 years has been really critical in our success. We've been working very closely with our Indigenous communities to ensure that we are just – that we are on track. And I would just add that beyond the graduation rates, now we certainly are uncovering some issues around systemic racism. We still have issues where many of our most vulnerable learners and indigenous learners graduate with not quite as many options as other students in some cases. So we are working really hard to address that. And as you can well imagine, it's bringing out a lot of engagement in our community, which is an excellent thing.

So how do we engage with our difficult to reach communities? It just takes a lot of work. We reach out. We go into community. We have people who work directly in community. We've opened up some small schools and some of our remote communities where we used to bus students two hours one way. It's a long story to tell. I know we are short on time.

MS. WINTHROP: Right.

MR. LORETTE: But yeah, thank you. That gives you a sense.

MS. WINTHROP: That certainly does. Thank you. And that idea backward design is really interesting. So it's sort of an education jurisdiction doing a co-creation exercise. And the fact that you are going to them, creating small schools, like really structurally trying to make sure that engagement is there and is not just one off, it's fantastic.

Kerry-Jane, I want to go to you next. We've gone from Samar, from new forms of communications of Paul, which is really round sort of how can a district reach out and co-create. And you represent parents across the U.K. and it's more sort of Parentkind – a sort of parents driving change. And that I think is a really interesting sort of case study for all of us.

So can you tell us a little bit about Parentkind and what you do? And tell us a little bit about how you work to represent the parents voice in national education policymaking. And I know you have a blueprint for family-friendly schools which is a big part of what you've been doing this sort of push

this agenda along.

And I was also wondering if you could speak – there is a question that's come in from Kinsey, who is talking about what type of training do we need to give to educators, or school leaders, or people in the education system to support their ability to engage parents? So over to you, Kerry -Jane.

MS. PACKMAN: Thank you, Rebecca. So I think it's important to say that we are not education specialist. We are not teachers. We represent parents in their child's education. We do that first and foremost with being the largest network of parent-teacher associations across the U.K. and we provide them with specialist, amazing support. And it's all driven by parents around funding schools and putting more into schools.

But our journey started 65 years ago, we've been working on parental engagement. And it was through a group of parents that pioneered that actually parents should be listened to, not just on a local level, but a regional level and the national level. And we been continuing that as we go through. So what we do is we gather parent voice on different issues within education and we represent them to policymakers.

But what we did a few years – it was a good couple of years ago now, was that we had a lot of – a wealth of data that was there from parents on how they wanted parental engagement to work. So what we did was we produced a blueprint for parent friendly schools, which wasn't driven from a teacher's perspective. It's been very much driven from a parent perspective on how they would like their schools to engage with them more.

And I think this was way before the pandemic. And then suddenly the pandemic hit and we've been thrown into the biggest parental engagement pilot ever. And where we've been tracking parental view throughout and parents are saying, yes, they want to be more involved with their child's education, but they don't know how. Now they are suddenly thrown into this environment where – our schools mainly just opened as of last week. So we are still fresh on the other side of this. They are now thrown into where they have to have more information.

We found that over the past year – what I find most exciting around this is that parents confidence has increased considerably over the past year with supporting their child's learning. And our blueprint is designed for school leaders, but it comes from the parent perspective, as I said. And is based

on five key drivers. They don't work individually. So it comes very much from a whole school approach. Everybody needs to be involved in parental engagement. That's from the receptionist to the cleaner to the – to your volunteers. Everybody needs to have that view of it.

So it comes from a leadership perspective. And there has to be that leadership, that ethos, and the resources that support that. And that comes down to just it's as simple as a welcoming environment for parents, signage, making sure that they can get to the right places.

It's also around effective two-way communication. I think parents have experienced this more than ever. Schools are now realizing that actually they need to communicate differently with different groups of parents and have a range of parents. But it's not just about broadcasting. They have to bring parents more on board with what they are doing.

So we've seen some great examples around from schools. Really heartfelt letters going out to parents saying, look, we are in the same boat. Let's work in partnership around this. Also one of the other positives that we've had. And it's so simple, but it is that – using technology. It's that virtual parent event. It's been able to communicate in different ways with parents. And I think it comes back to one of the things that Dori was saying, the engagement with parents no longer has to happen inside the school building.

The third element is around supporting learning at home. So parents are more aware than ever of what their children are now learning. I think there is a fear element every time the numbers spike here that we're going to go into lockdown again and they're not going to know what the child is learning. So I don't think this is going to go backwards.

But they are also, from a U.K. perspective, requesting more resources than ever. So they want more online lessons. They want more resources that supports them as parents to understand what their child is learning so that they had this confidence to support them.

Involvement in school life is kind of, I would say slowed down a little bit on the fourth one because it actually does involve physically being in the school building. But parents and schools are finding other ways to engage groups of parents. So parent councils, parent forums, looking at the decision-making, having reading with parents but on Zoom. They are finding all those other ways. And obviously a PTA is a key part of that, but it's a bit restricted at the moment but it's a bit restricted at the

moment in some ways, but we are finding other ways of doing that.

And then there is the community engagement. I think this links to what Paul is saying as well, and a number of other people. There will be some parents that just won't engage. As much as you try, they just won't. And you're going to have to go out and find them. And the pandemic has proved that even more where we've had teachers knocking on doors; are you okay. Do you need anything? And we've also found within that that what was previously set was around discovering that they're sharing devices. And that's why children haven't been so engaged.

MS. WINTHROP: Kerry-Jane, that's great --

MS. PACKMAN: Just a touch on the training side a bit.

MS. WINTHROP: Yeah.

MS. PACKMAN: Our blueprint is all supported by training. So it is worth going and having a look. It's all available on our website and you can see the training that is available. It's all delivered online. So you can take part wherever you are.

MS. WINTHROP: Perfect. And it's training on the five pillars of the blueprint, I guess.

MS. PACKMAN: Yeah.

MS. WINTHROP: That's fantastic.

MS. PACKMAN: Yeah, definitely.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you. Thank you so much, Kerry-Jane. And Tepi, I'm going to turn to you to round out our final perspective in the journey of parent engagement and to finish us off here.

You work at a nonprofit and one of the things I found so fascinating is Young 1ove's journey of really an education, sort of national education leader saying they wanted to partner with families and communities to try to drive demand more interactive pedagogical differentiated instruction, which is teaching at the right level, which you guys have scaled.

And it was – could you tell us a little bit about your journey from sort of that type of parent as allies in communities, as allies too through COVID where you've really pivoted and actually helped parents themselves step into supporting teaching and learning? And where you think you're going. Thank you.

MS. MATSHENG: That sounds good. So just a really brief background on Young 1ove. So we are one of the largest organizations in the country and very much closely work with government to implement high-impact health and education programming. So prior to the pandemic and schools are shutting down, we were actively in schools, over 20% of all primary schools in the country.

So we really were working very much at school level as our delivery model. And three days before we heard that schools were going to be shut down, we quickly collected 10,000 phone numbers from parents and students from that we work with. And the real motivation was to say, how do we still remain connected to students, especially because schools are going to shut down.

So currently right now, we are grateful that schools are back up, but they are also using a different system called the double shift system where half of the students attend in the morning and then the other half later in the afternoon. So already then there is some learning lost as it is not the typical school program. So what we did was collected 10,000 phone numbers.

We also ran a rapid trial bringing in some of the – our first experimental evidence on minimizing learning lost during a pandemic together with our colleagues at Columbia University. What we have found is that there was an initial take-up rate of parents wanting to receive the interventions that we were delivering at 70%. This is not at 100. It was an increased take-up rate where parents really seemed wanting to be engaged and involved in remote learning services.

We implemented two – using two interventions. The first one was just sending bulk messages, weekly bulk text messages including problem of the day questions, which are really simple and very straightforward questions tailored to the students abilities.

And then the second intervention with a combination of the SMSs as well as a phone call as a follow-up method to the parents to be able to see the students were understanding the questions or if they had any questions that they had to the facilitators. One of the things that we had learned early on was for us to really use low-tech, low technology as a way to increase accessibility, but also ideas in a way so that it is a very much simple and straightforward method of delivery of information.

So many of the solutions that we have found were specifically that – were designed by the government who were looking at e-learning services, which required one to have a gadget or access to internet. But however, in Botswana the rates are really, really low. No one really has internet. But

there is someone at a household level that has access to just a simple phone. So that is really why we started with the idea of low-tech as one way to deliver messaging to students during school closures, but even post when schools were open.

So that said, we have really learned quite a lot just from this experience. We are sharing the results we government as well as other policymakers to think more about innovative and cost-effective ways to boost learning during a pandemic and even beyond. The first lessons that we learned, we were able to increase learning levels specifically with the phone and SMS; we were able to really boost our learning and also just really increase understanding of where students levels are as well as just communicating to the parents.

We also have found that during these interventions we had a high engagement rate of over 80 to 85% of parents. So what we mean by that, is that parents were now sitting with their child together, showing them the estimate that was delivered on the phone. And also when we did the phone calls, parents were actually there engaging in these materials, but also even asking and demanding for more. Then at the end of our trial we asked questions, if – we as parents if they would like to still receive these kinds of services, where 99% of parents said yes. And that is really encouraging feedback from the parents, but also does a lot of lessons learned on how to do this well over the phone.

So as a just a wrap up and a last message, when we look at the take-up rate, which our colleagues here have also mentioned, it's a very important in thinking about engaging parents and remote learning services. There is hope. There is hope for parents to actually be involved, not just passively, but directly be involved in the child's learning, but also just really seen how they could continuously use technology that they have to actually make it possible. So as I've mentioned, even if the mom or the dad didn't have access to a phone, the cousin next door had it. So it is actually possible. And that would be my last parting words.

MS. WINTHROP: Thank you. That's inspiring. And we will look to see what Young Love does moving forward post pandemic, if there is a whole new approach to complementing teaching and learning in the classroom with parents. You guys are really on the cutting edge.

So I just want to wrap up and say, Tepi, and Paul, and Kerry-Jane, and Samar, thank you all for being part of our family engagement education network, along with all of the other members.

Thank you for taking the time this morning, afternoon, evening, depending on your time zone, for sharing with us your story and your journey. And we wish everybody a good rest of your day. Thank you, everybody. Take care.

MS. MATSHENG: Thank you.

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