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WEBINAR

BEYOND THE SCHOOL WALLS: HOW COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS STRENGTHEN LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS

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MORRIS: Welcome across time zones and continents. I am Emily Markovich Morris, a fellow at the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, and I'm really thrilled to bring to you a vivid conversation today on Beyond the School Walls, and how community partnerships strengthen learning ecosystems.

Community and family engagement has been foundational to public education for centuries. In the early 19th century in North America, for example, families and communities were heavily involved in decisionmaking and leadership in schools, and the role of community partnerships has shifted as education systems have become more professionalized and more focused on accountability.

Yet community and family engagement is still so critical to ensuring that our children are learning and thriving both inside and outside of school. There are different models of community partnerships. There's what happens inside the school walls, the way that schools and school districts serve as a hub and a connector for bringing community partnerships together to support reading and STEM and math to arts and sports programming, to medical health needs.

And you'll hear from two experts today talking about these community partnerships in early childhood education and in K12 primary and secondary education spaces. There's also the community engagement outside of the school walls in the larger ecosystem, where community organizations and other intermediary groups serve as critical connectors for young people and families, the work of connecting parks and museum, cultural spaces, local businesses to families and to students.

Children need these different models and forms of engagement to thrive. They help ensure children are gaining and translating academic learning into practice. They help connect our children to civic and workforce lear- learning, and they help build creativity, cultural connections, and the important aspects of our lives that make us human For the fa- past five years, we have been documenting the different forms of community engagement and partnerships at the Center for Universal Education.

We've been unpacking who community is, how to build alliances in our communities, and how do we work across education systems to not just strengthen education systems, but also build our learning ecosystems. Our six continent research, you'll hear a little bit about this today, and you'll learn from community partnerships across districts in the US and globally who have been studying and learning and doing all of these partnerships in practice.

Here's a few things that we have found. First, much of the research and literature on community engagement and partnerships really centers on examples from urban areas, and particularly those in the global north, where access to museums and libraries and higher education institution and businesses looks differently than it does in rural areas.

But community engagement is just as vibrant in our rural areas, and we need to think about the assets and the possibilities and how to see that, and we've been creating a more inclusive model, one that really looks at rural communities in Bangladesh to Mississippi to Colombia, and we've laid out these different community partners in a more accessible and nomenclature that my colleague Richaa Hoysala will be sharing in just a minute.

Second, we have found that community engagement can be the difference between a young person continuing their learning, finishing school, or being pushed out of the system. As I've

found in two decades of research in Tanzania, community partnerships can help a child experiencing the death of a parent, economic hardship, or a mental health crisis stay engaged in learning.

As we've been studying in rural Pennsylvania, a community partnership with district education leaders can help redefine a punitive system from one that is penalizing students for, and families for chronic absenteeism to one that sees the root causes such as pressure to work, caregiving for a sick parent, and works with young people and their families to address these root causes in the system and elevating and im- and raising the importance of them furthering their learning Third, although public trust in education has been waning for the last few decades alongside government institutions in places like the United States and globally, we know that elementary and primary school teachers are still among the most trusted civil servants.

Community engagement partnerships help us build and maintain trust in people. And in order to ensure we're protecting learning and well-being of our children in this current landscape where technology is changing partnerships and the nature of partnerships, we know that community and partnerships is not just a nice to have, but it's a fundamental important part of our learning ecosystems.

So we have to believe in these learning ecosystems to steward and invest in them and make sure that we are creating these partnerships and learning how to build these partnerships going forward. Fourth, we have found that so much innovation is taking place from rural community schools in the deep South of the United States to the legal Amazon of Brazil to high density urban communities in South Africa.

Over 500 people registered for this webinar and showing us that there's an appetate-- appetite to share, to learn, and to lean into lessons on these spaces. So building community partnerships is so key to maintaining trust and cohesion in our communities, and I'm excited to introduce this panel today where our colleagues will share a little bit about the magic of what they're doing to create and fostering community partnerships.

I'm gonna hand now to my colleague, Richaa Hoysala, a research associate with the Center for Universal Education, who is going to share a little bit about the language and the models that we have been documenting. Richaa, please join me in, in sharing your presentation

HOYSALA: Thank you, Emily. Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. My name is Richaa Hoysala, and in the next ten minutes, I'm going to share some new ideas and models on community engagement that we've been working on at the Center for Universal Education. Think back to when you were growing up. Maybe you had a part-time job at a local shop where you learned how to handle money and talk to strangers.

Maybe a neighbor taught you how to play the piano, or a coach stayed late after practice. Each of those experiences gave us more than a skill. They gave us mentors, friendships, and a sense of belonging, and a glimpse into who we might become. This is community engagement. Community engagement strengthens what happens inside the school walls.

They support academic and social and emotional learning, provide nutrition, and open doors to cutting-edge skills. They also support students beyond the school walls by promoting mental and physical health, building civic leadership, fostering positive relationships, and cultivating creativity, exploration, and skills for work.

So who do we mean by community? Community partners include nonprofit, for-profit, and government organizations, anyone who promotes the learning, health, and safety of our children. To make this more concrete, we group them into eight broad categories that capture the people and places supporting a young person's educational journey.

Community also includes the digital network of mass and social media, everything from public broadcasting to generative AI companies that broadly influence the nature and culture of how community partners engage with each other and with schools Community engagement is a term we hear constantly, but it is rarely defined.

So we developed a model to describe how it actually works across grade levels and boundaries. We see three main models distinguished by who acts as the connector or intermediary. In the first, a school, a single school is a hub. In the second, a zone of schools such as a district or a charter private school network plays this role.

And finally, in the third, a local organization or group of people serve as a community hub. The first two models build on the early childhood hubs and zones developed through the education center's first 10 initiatives, which describe them as critical units of change that build collective capacity to meet the needs of children and family.

The community hub model draws on Remake Learning, a network in Pittsburgh. You will hear more about these in the panel. Across all three, an intermediary that facilitates relationship is critical to ensure lasting partnerships. Yet connections and relationship among partners are also just as critical to work towards a shared goal.

In the school hub model, leaders within a school community champion the work of bringing partners in. The best known example is the community schools approach. Here, a school or early childhood center leaders bu- build collaboration among educators, families, students, and institutions in the wider community.

So the school becomes a place where families can access a range of supports, not just instruction. In the school zone model, the intermediary may be a public school district or a network of private or charter schools. Sometimes an intermediary organization stewards this work across schools and district.

The Community Schools Learning Exchange, for example, works with US districts and schools to identify coordinators who can best connect the dots between key actors such as health and social services providers. And finally, in the community hub model, the connector is typically a community organization or groups that convene different partners around a shared educational goal.

Remake Learning in Pittsburgh is an example. It facilitates a network of educators and innovators working to create more engaging, relevant, and equitable learning opportunities across the city's learning ecosystems. Schools are a part of the network, but they don't have to carry it alone And finally, any conversation about learning ecosystems today has to include technology.

Social media, phones, and AI are already a part of a young person's world, whether or not schools formally engage with them. Their influences is often indirect. They shape how students learn, who they're connected to, how, how they access information. The pu- and

the public debates around cell phones, social media, and AI can affect the trust between families and school.

There is also a direct influence. Schools and districts are setting policies on AI, social media, and phone use. Technology companies are partnering with schools to support attendance, learning, and family school communication. And community partners are also stepping in to provide AI literacy to students, educators, and family.

So the big question is: How can schools and communities be intentional about engagement to maximize the benefits and mitigate the harms? We often talk about schools and communities as if they are two separate things that need to be connected, but schools don't sit apart from their communities. They are a part of them and often sit at their heart.

When we treat schools as a part of the larger learning ecosystems, engagement stops being an add-on and becomes how learning ecosystem works. Thank you. I'm now inviting Emily back to the virtual stage to kick off our panel discussion

MORRIS: Thank you, Richaa, and I'm excited to introduce our four panelists today. We have Cecilia de la Paz, who started her career as a teacher. She specializes in communications, edu-education technology, and finally found her mission as a social entrepreneur. Her-- She is from Uruguay, and her path took a turn when she was working on a video shoot for UNICEF, and she met a talented young man who, under different circumstances, might have had a brilliant future, and this ex- this experience led her to establish Fundación EducAid Uruguay that works with young people and building learning ecosystems across the country.

And this journey has also influ-influenced her in her work of thinking about how to design learning ecosystems to foster well-being. We have David Jacobson, who is the director of Education Development Center, EDC's First 10 Initiative, which is a national network of school early childhood community partnerships.

And David brings deep experience in early childhood education, school improvement, and applied research and strategic planning. David is the author of a number of documents and commentaries about how to build these strong, thriving communities, and we thank David for his work on really advancing school hubs and school zones and the power of these to drive change.

So thank you, David, for joining us. And we have Hayin Kimner, who is a practitioner, researcher, policy advocate with a focus on the whole child and community school ecosystems and partnership that support healthy development of youth in their communities. Hayin has led the development of a district and citywide community school partnership strategies in San Francisco Unified and Emery Unified School Districts, and in addition to serving as a managing director, di-director for the CA-- California Community Schools Learning Exchange, or CSLx, Hayin is a senior policy and research fellow for the Policy Analysis for California Education.

And we have Tyler Samstag, and Tyler is currently the executive director of Remake Learning!, that transforms education as an initiative at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. Interested in applications of human-centered design in education and nonprofit sectors, Tyler has facilitated an array of interactive workshops and design thinking and rapid prototyping, and leads the Remake Learning efforts that you'll hear a lot about today in our conversation.

So welcome to the panel, and let's get started. Let's get started with talking about the work that you're doing. So all of you are leading community engagement and partnership efforts in different ways in your communities, from Pittsburgh to across the US, to California to Uruguay. So tell us how you're engaging your communities in your context.

So I'm going to start with David, and I know you're working in the space of early childhood and development, and you-- your work on school hubs and school zones that mode- that Richaa referred to in the presentation, can you tell us a little bit more what these models look like in your context?

JACOBSON: Sure. Thank you, Emily, and thanks to you and Richaa for organizing today's session.

It's such an important conversation. So to respond to your question, I'll draw on our experience with First 10, which is an approach to school early childhood zones and hubs in the United States. First 10 focuses on improving outcomes for children during the first decade of life. And as Richaa suggested, a First 10 Zone brings together multiple elementary schools, the early childhood programs that feed into them, and relevant community providers within a defined geography, such as a small district or a neighborhood in a larger city.

A hub organizes similar work around a single elementary school and its early childhood and community partners, extending the community school model to include nearby young children and families. I think of zones and hubs as critical infrastructure that supports coordination, new strategies, and shared learning.

These are close to the ground implementation partnerships led by school and district leaders, early childhood and elementary or primary teachers, and community partners. And together, these teams identify needs and implement practical strategies often focused on the transition to kindergarten, alignment across classrooms, relationships with families, and shared professional learning.

And a key idea here is that partners can have greater impact working together than any one program could on its own. So I'll share one example from our early childhood work, but I think the underlying ideas apply across the ages. So over several years, a First 10 Hub in Sanford, Maine has strengthened the transition to kindergarten through play and learn groups, school visits, family events, and collaboration between preschool and elementary or primary educators.

Preschool children visited the school, practiced riding the bus, educators got to know one another, and families felt welcome before the school year began. And I, I spoke with a veteran preschool director whose center participated in these activities, and she told me that this work has really changed the felt experience of the transition.

Families recognized what their preschool and school had done together. They appreciated that their children felt comfortable and looked forward to kindergarten. And, and this matters actually even more than you might think because research shows that when kindergarten gets off to a good start, children learn more by the end of the year, setting them up for success in first grade and beyond.

So this is an example of the kind of coordinated practical support that zones and hubs make possible

MORRIS: Thank you, David, and just elevating the working together to, to reinforce the collective impact, building these relationships. Hayin, I'm gonna move to you, and we're gonna talk a little bit in the context that you're working in, K to 12 community school spaces at CSLx with the Community Schools Learning Exchange.

How do community schools engage with community partners? Can you tell us how it works?

KIMNER: Yes. David, I'm so glad you went first because i- it ... absolutely endorse everything that you said. And then when you sort of apply that to a formal K12 or pre-K12 system as, as a lot of school districts in California are serving our earliest learners all the way through post-secondary.

Traditionally, the way that schools have engaged with community partners has been largely transactional and dictated by whether or not the formal school system allows it. So formal school educators and staff are in charge, and everyone else is sort of extra nice-to-haves. But in a community school strategy, we're really talking about a fundamental difference in the premise.

Young people are learning all the time Parents and families are first educators and the ones that are with young people all year round. And community partners are not just external assets but an expansive array of of peers and caring adults that, that can be used much more strategically and intentionally.

And so the difference here is that you're moving from random acts of program or random acts of partner or random acts of an amazing principal or a leader or a superintendent. And what we've- we often see is a funding grant program that dictates a way that a, a community school operates in terms of, of program.

Rather it's moving away from those random acts to informing how school is done to borrow from a book that was written about the district initiative in Oakland Unified School District. So that includes the learning priorities, right? Academic and social emotional learning priorities. But also things like governance and shared decision-making, which are also you know, pretty difficult things to think about.

How do you expand sort of what is on the table for, for schools to be thinking about? And also being very, very strategic, intentional and open to two-way partnership to support learning. So yes, there is specialized expertise that exists within our communities and our community partners. You know, oftentimes we think about mental and behavioral health partners, but also thinking through the specialized expertise that it, that exists within so many of our other partners, whether they're public sector, private sector or in our community-based organizations.

I also want to say that when we talk about community partners, it's, it's sort of a vague and broad term, especially when we're thinking about a formal education system. In a rural context, that looks very different than it might in as you were saying earlier, Emily, a very densely populated urban setting.

So when we think about community partners, that too is sort of a concept that requires a different mental model around who, who are we referring to as our educators? So in a community school strategy, it really is thinking about our educators as being a much more inclusive set of caring adults that are working very intentionally, communicating and coordinating their efforts so that young people can thrive.

MORRIS: Love that point of moving from the random, the notion of the random acts of kind of partnerships to the more intentional and thinking about who is educators and all of the different learning that young people do all the time everywhere, as you said. And I'm gonna hand to Tyler, who has been leading a lot of this m- work of bringing together all of these community partners and reinforcing that, this idea of learning everywhere and every in every space.

So Tyler, your work on community organizations for the last 20 years, Remake Learning has been doing this work of bringing neighborhood partners across rural and urban and suburban geographies together. Can you describe a little bit about how this works in your context?

SAMSTAG: Sure. Thank you. Really grateful to be here today.

Emily, tuning in from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Remake Learning started in 2007, and it was the year that the iPhone hit the market. It was a period of rapid transition, rapid development of technology, and educators were really wrestling with what does this mean for teaching and learning. And so for the first 10 years of Remake Learning, we focused on building an ecosystem, an ecosystem of schools, libraries, museums, also artists, technologists, and learning scientists.

But along the way, we realized we were missing one of the most important educators in a child's life, and that is their parents and caregivers. For many people, it is their first teacher. And so that realization helped inspire us to create something called Remake Learning Days, which launched in 2016 in Southwestern Pennsylvania, and over the last 10 years have, have expanded globally.

Remake Learning Days, which is a festival of innovative hands-on learning that takes place every year in spring. Rather than simply telling parents about the future of learning, we invite them to experience it alongside their children. So imagine a whole city becomes a festival of hands-on learning.

Families might code video games together. They might make art in the park, experiment with robotics, or explore something entirely new. The goal is to make learning visible, accessible, and joyful And so some festival locations are obvious, as I shared schools, libraries, museums. Others are less conventional, though.

They might include grocery stores, coffee shops, parks, and ne- neighborhood businesses. It's because learning doesn't just happen in places we traditionally think of as educational. It happens everywhere. And so that's really how we think about community engagement. We're not necessarily trying to bring something into a community.

Rather, oftentimes we're shining a light on the incredible people, places, and learning opportunities that already exist. Other times, we're helping places that don't necessarily see

themselves as educational recognize that with a small shift, they might be. And so for us, community engagement isn't just about inviting people into our work.

It's about recognizing that we're stepping into theirs.

MORRIS: Love that. And I love that image, Tyler, about the shining the light on what already exists. And I want Cecilia to speak a little bit about the work that you're doing in Uruguay. You're working in rural communities, you work in urban communities, and you're shining the light on different resources in the community and, and, and helping serve as a connector to what Tyler has been talking about with this visible, accessible and joyful, making that accessible to, to communities across.

Can you tell us a little bit about the work that you're doing?

DE LA PAZ: Yes. Thank you very much. Thanks for the invitation. Uruguay is a... So to put a little bit of context, it's a 3 million country in the south of South America. And we work especially with rural schools, but actually our partnership with Remake Learning came from the understanding that the need to reconnect with learning and the reconnection between communities and schools should go beyond the context.

And, and actually the work we have been doing with Remake shows that this kind of work travels. Travel context, travel realities and, and travels because there is a genuine interest of living ecosystems that it is, it is we believe the zoom out of learning ecosystems. So, so to put you a little bit in context, the, this NGO was found in 2009, and we, we work so that geographic isolation does not represent intellectual isolation, professional isolation or emotional isolation.

So we work in school hubs of 10 schools in 12 provinces of the 19 provinces here in Uruguay, supporting so far more than 600 schools and we do that through scalable, replicable and sustainable projects that are in literacy, in technology, in biology, in STEM that actually are pieces of a bigger puzzle that what we want is to transform from a specific relationship from te- of teaching and learning to a mindset of a, a continuous improvement through that.

So- These projects, they, they serve as walking the talk and experiencing the talk of what could this look like by seeing firsthand from the very start of your engagement in this project of what can be lived through learning and teaching if we do it in a different way. So that is what we work in three lines.

We design, we implement, and we research, and we have this reciprocal continuum of work around, around that improvement. So that is what, that is what we do every day here in Uruguay for more than 600 schools.

MORRIS: Thank you so much, Cecilia. And one of the examples you shared with me earlier to elevate is you not just do all this connecting, but you also see where there's a need for further connection.

So for example, in your rural schools efforts where there is a lack of libraries, creating these mobile li- libraries with books and backpacks, and creating a mass force of community mobilizers to help get books in, into the hands of families and communities. So thank you for

sharing those examples. We're gonna move on and talk a little bit about the impact of these community partnerships on why we're doing this work, the young people, so their learning and their wellbeing.

And we know that learning happens in schools and outside of schools, as you've each pointed out in your conversations. But from your context and experiences, can you share why is community engagement and partnerships, why are they so important to our learning ecosystems and to our children? And I'm gonna ask David and Han to talk a little bit about this connection and the impact that it has on young people.

So David, I'll start with you.

JACOBSON: Sure. So there are two foundational principles that I think explain why community engagement is so important in the early childhood and the elementary or primary years, and both are supported by a substantial research base, which I briefly summarize in a recent paper that we can share.

And the first is the developmental principle of continuity of experience. Children benefit when their exper- when their experiences are safe, stable, and connected across the day, across settings, and across years. What children experience in the morning should connect with what they learn in an afterschool program, and what they learn in kindergarten should build on what they've learned in pre-K.

When experiences are connected, children feel more secure, learning is reinforced, and families encounter a system that makes sense. The second principle is that communities are critical units of change. Community conditions shape children's outcomes independent of the socioeconomic status of families.

Research shows that communities characterized by greater trust, social cohesion, and connection do better across a wide range of outcomes, including child health, safety, and civic engagement. In short, the social capital of a community matters. So taken together, these two principles make a strong case for coordinated action among schools, early childhood programs, health and social services, libraries, and families, coordinating children's experiences, implementing joint strategies, and learning across programs.

And York, Pennsylvania offers one good example that I'll highlight. So the city created a First 10 zone across the entire city, along with five First 10 community school hubs, and that structure created a foundation for cross-sector collaboration across the transition to kindergarten, joint professional learning, play and learn groups, et cetera.

Building on that foundation, the school district and early childhood programs ta- came together around a citywide early mathematics initiative called Young Mathematicians, supported by the Heising-Simons Foundation. So the initiative includes more than 55 high-quality games, and these games promote positive face-to-face interactions between children and caregivers and between children and teachers.

So they promote fun, joyful, face-to-face experiences. The games are supported by guides and videos for educators and families in multiple languages. So educators from Head Start, community-based programs, district pre-K, kindergarten, libraries, Play and Learns, families all received shared professional learning on how to use and promote the games.

And then a community-wide parenting campaign, including a texting service and public signage reinforced the effort. So as a result, children and families encounter the same approach from multiple trusted adults and institutions rather than receiving disconnected messages from sep- separate programs. So we see in this example both foundational principles at work.

We see continuity as children play increasingly advanced versions of the games at home, in early childhood classrooms, and in kindergarten. And we see organizations across the city aligning around a common initiative focused on young children and families, and in doing so, they strengthen the partnership and set the stage for the next cycle of collaboration

MORRIS: Thank you.

And just elevating again what you said about the importance of connecting, connecting with learning, reinforcing what lear- what learning is happening inside, outside, around a child, and working with these partnerships to work together to, to re- to build these connections and learning. Hayin, and I'm gonna turn to you.

You've been thinking about digging into the science of learning and how community partnerships impact young people. Tell us what you've been finding and thinking about.

KIMNER: Yes. So as, as most good research, it oftentimes is sort of the end note to the rest of how we've been living our lives anyway. And now just is corroborated by some sort of empirical evidence.

... And what the science of learning and development has really done within sort of the, the TK or pre-K12 learning s- conversations actually started oftentimes with this idea of trauma-informed practice. And that was looking into the research of what does stress and trauma do and how does that impact learning for children?

So if you ask a lot of educators, "Do you know about trauma-informed practice?" They'll tell you, "Yes, the, the cortisol actually impacts the ability of a student to learn." And it sort of becomes a little bit of a, another diagnostic to say, "Well, because this child has a high adverse childhood experiences score or ACEs score, then we need to do X, Y, Z."

I think what has been pretty shortsighted about this is that that's only one side of what we know about what the brain does and, and the conditions and sort of the, the neurobiological behavior of what is happening within, within the brain. And that is that learning for all humans the, the young, the young folks that David was talking about, as well as our adult educators and parents, is that learning happens within a context of safety and love.

Linda Darling-Hammond, I, I love when she said, "This is not just about cortisol, this is about oxytocin, the love hormone," right? So learning happens when there is trust when there are feelings of care and support. And so when we think about sort of the neuroplasticity and the resilience of the brain, particularly as it's developing, we need to be thinking about those relationships, but we also need to be thinking about relevance and rigor, right?

So when we're talking about, what young people are learning in schools, that there is, there are skills and capacities and content that young people are learning. Without really thinking

about curiosity, play, joy, relevance, it's very, very difficult to think about, when you think about the brain, how is this actually being effective for, for this young person?

There's a lot of organizations that have maybe started within the project-based learning space and, and talking about this as deeper learning. Our friends and partners at High Tech High who are based in California, have been doing a lot of work just around how do you think about community as text, not just as a place to go and do a field trip or an extended study, but really thinking about community as text in terms of the relationships, the relevance and the rigor.

There was also a study done by the Center for Trust and Transformation around thinking about these relationships with adults within the community that surround young people. It's not enough for young people to have those relationships if they are not coordinated in a, in a particular way, and there isn't the consistency, as David also explained.

So when we think about the neuroscience and the way that all of us are wired in, in certainly also some various ways that, you know, when we're talk- thinking about neurodiversity, there is a baseline around thinking about the importance of relationships. So these are not just nice to haves for our earliest learners, but also are true developmentally across the continuum as our, as our young people are growing and thriving.

MORRIS: Thank you, Hayin. And I love that point about balancing the, the learning and the love.

KIMNER: Mm-hmm.

MORRIS: And how important it is to the brain, to children, to their children's development, but also to us as, as adults in their lives to see that connection, to build that connection, to feel that connection. So thank you for elevating that.

Both of you repeatedly mentioned trust as a through line of in order to get to the learning and in order to build this joy and to build this intention, we need to have trust in our communities, within schools, within children's lives, but within our community partnerships. So I'm gonna ask Tyler to jump in a little bit and talk about trust.

How does trust fit into all of this? How do you build trust? Remake Learning has been a trusted partner for the last two decades. You have been building these trusted partnerships. What have you been learning and how do you do it?

SAMSTAG: Yeah. Thank you for this question. Yesterday I heard my colleague during a presentation on Parents as Allies, which Brookings has been a, a great partner on used the phrase, "Relationships move at the speed of trust."

And it resonated because at its core, that's what Remake Learning has dedicated 20 years to doing, cultivating relationships. And so we're not primarily a program provider. We see ourselves more as an ecosystem steward, and ecosystems are fundamentally built on relationships Trust obviously doesn't emerge from a single meeting, a successful event, or even just one grant opportunity.

It's built by showing up repeatedly, following through, and demonstrated, and demonstrating that you're invested in a relationship beyond any immediate opportunity or outcome. Some of our most meaningful partnerships have taken years to develop. And notably, our job isn't just to build trust in Remake Learning, it's to build trust between one another.

And this is an important distinction for us. Our greatest value isn't necessarily the relationships people have with us as an organization with Remake Learning, it's the relationships that they develop and support or are supported by us. And so we bring people together who might not otherwise cross paths on a daily basis.

A third grade teacher, a roboticist from CMU, a radio DJ invested in youth voice. And so a successful ecosystem is one where relationships thrive even when we're not in the room. And so trust makes experimentation possible for us. This is perhaps the most important reason trust matters in the work of Remake Learning.

We're asking them to do that, to remake learning, to try new things, sometimes to challenge deeply established practices. That requires vulnerability, it requires people to take risks, and without trust, people protect what they know. But when they have that trust, they're more willing to explore what is possible, what it could be.

And so after 20 years, I think one of the most important things that we've learned, that our job isn't to be at the center of relationsh- every relationship, it's to build this ecosystem of relationships strong enough to persist even when we're not in the room

MORRIS: Love that. And I just wanna elevate a couple of the points that you mentioned.

We at Brookings have been working on studying trust, what are the elements that go into that, and, and you mentioned a number of them in hand, and David also mentioned, and Cecilia will talk a little bit in a moment, of the importance of respect and care, of course, in the community, respecting each other's different roles and assets.

But I think you also elevate this need for positive interactions, maybe interactions that are outside of the box that give us opportunities to experiment, do co-design. But it's also about what you're saying of this integrity of following through and being a trusted partner and showing up, as you said, over and over.

And we also know, and Cecilia mentioned this, this ability to see and, and elevate, shine a light on these different capabilities that we bring as families, as educators, as community partners to this. So thank you for, for elevating those important components of trust. And ultimately, each of you have, have talked about a shared vision that you've created in your, in your work of what it is that, that you're centering this and why around the young person and this whole experience in the ecosystem.

Cecilia, I'm gonna jump into you. What are you learning on trust? You have been leaning into this with the communities that you're working with across Uruguay. Tell us about what you've learned on trust.

DE LA PAZ: Well, first of all, my role I think at the last is weaving a little bit what have been said also before.

We at Uruguay EducAid Uruguay, we work with the public sector. So we work with public schools that are in the rural areas. To give you a number, 42% of our schools here in Uruguay are rural. 84% of our children go to public education. But the ratio of amount of children per rural school is 12 children.

So just to address a little bit more the relevance of togetherness in these hubs to make it to, to, to generate even real audiences for your learning. About trust, it, it's our most important and also fragile asset. There is this word in Dakota people that's called kinship, that it's trust, reciprocity, and consent.

And I think when we are building an ecosystem also I would add time, as Tyler would say. Time that allow us to have a history together, that allow us to battle some challenges together and to see who are each one of us, like, in front of a challenge, not only in ch- in, in front of an opportunity.

So I think there are four components that for us are important. One is our role as designers to go from mindstorm to mindset, and that clarity also taps into the relevance that David was s- speaking about. Nobody's waiting for you. Even if people are struggling, they're not waiting for you to arrive.

They're not waiting for your fantastic idea to solve anything. You, you are an uninvited guest to a story that it's al- already unrolling, and that it will keep unrolling even if you don't show up. So the first one is to acknowledge that there is a history there, and try to be a third eye to try to understand, and humbly start showing with relevant actions that help lift or uplift that you are coming from an honest intention, that you are coming with a maybe needed talent and maybe with an awareness of something that has been skipped and that maybe it's a very interesting ingredient to move forward.

So from an uninvited guest to a, a welcome part of the community, there is a process, and that is where your talent and your honesty and your ethic, professional ethic jumps into place. You can disguise it at the beginning, but people know. So if you sustain in time that honest relationship, then amazing things will start to happen.

So one is relevance, the other one is history. I would add coherence, and then start weaving a model that could sustain cycles of implementation. And I think that is when you start being really valuable and trustworthy, when you don't just come, but you stay. You stay as an observant. You stay as as as, as someone that can bring creativity, but to the problems and starting points where the people are, not the ones that you would like them to be, but where the people really are.

And that is where, Emily, as you, as, as you brought, and this is part also the work that we have been doing with Tyler, our starting point is not the same as Remake Learning's starting point in Pittsburgh. Our schools, a lot of them don't have books. The children do not have books, but that is our starting point, even if you deny it or not.

So you start scaffolding from where you are to where you're gonna be with the resources, but also with the relations, as Haley was saying, that actually build one another. You don't ask things that you cannot help to surpass. You're, you do not demand things that people are not ready or they don't have the resources to do.

So just part of your job is to make sure that you're asking things that are feasible, attainable, and that can be gained in a specific period of time that can be gratifying instead of frustrating. So that is how we build trust in this, taking care of these different dynamics and possibilities and, and leverage change through triggers, but also through scaffolding possibilities as time goes by

MORRIS: I really appreciate that you elevated this idea of seeing and understanding and acknowledging the histories of communities.

I think that is so important, and we often don't talk and, talk and study that enough. But I think that's a critical part of the work that all of you do, is how, how to do that and how to honor those histories. I just also wanted to say, to ele- elevate something you said that connects to what Hea Inn said about an adult and a learner is gonna bring their own experience with learning, whether it be in school, whether it be out of school.

Sometimes it's joyful, so it's reinforcing that through these learning opportunities. Sometimes it's, to Hea Inn's point, that there's a trauma involved in that, and it's, it's reshaping and seeing a different way through that. And so how does that inform the work, I think, is so important to what you've all been talking about.

So thank you for touching on these important points of connecting it to the learning science, the why we're doing this, how does it help a young person's life and their learning, and also, too, the, an importance of trust. So thank you for that. I'm gonna move into some audience questions. We have col- collected a few already that you've shared with us, but feel free to also share your questions as, as they emerge.

I'm gonna start with a question from Leslie Burns of Impact Programs at Sesame Workshop, who asked, "Can you share some examples of how use of technology has helped to foster a meaningful home-school connection?" And I'm gonna start with Hea Inn and then go to David. Talk to us a little bit about how use of technology has, has played into this.

KIMNER: Sure. And huge shout-out to Sesame Workshop. I have a nine-year-old who was three in 2020, and I know that there were many parents and working parents that relied very heavily on the learning scaffolding, let's say, of Sesame Workshop. But I, I, I w- wanna also start there because I do think that technology programming especially when it's intentional around young people's learning, has been a very useful shared text.

And that shared text has been helpful not only as young people and children are sitting with parents learning together, but also as that bridge and that connection to school. And so, you know, certainly starting during the pandemic around schools having more one-to-one devices having some of those shared learning tools, whether it's been apps through a, a particular, iPad to be able to use that shared learning tool.

But also the ways that technology has been used to support communication and really two-way communication. Oftentimes, the broadcast, what maybe started off as a letter in a backpack when, when I was growing up in Chicago has now turned into a much more fluid opportunity for two-way communication.

Whether it is through announcements or, "Hey, my kid's gonna be late because, you know, they slept in." Being able to have that additional sort of asynchronous opportunity to connect,

to build that relationship, and to create more regular opportunities for that communication has been, has been something that I know that parents and educators have really cherished.

At the same time, I think we also have to acknowledge that technology is not going to take the place of a face-to-face relationship or even a voice-to-voice relationship where you are able to make those connections. And I think that as there's been a lot more research and interest and wonderings about the use of artificial intelligence, I know that Emily, your colleague Rebecca Winthrop, has been really one of the strongest thought leaders in thinking about how is AI really affecting the learning and development of, of young people and what can parents do about it.

I think that it is something that we need to really think about with intention.

MORRIS: Thank you. So technology, to the, to Anne's point, helping support learning at home, helping build two-way communication, but also we need to think about it intentionally as the partnerships that, and how the role that technology plays in these different partnerships.

David, I'm gonna hand to you to say anything to add to that. Just a brief comment on, on how technology plays into it, particularly in the early childhood space that you're working in.

JACOBSON: Sure, Emily, and Hayin, I'm gonna build on y- your thoughts and your focus on the relationships and the two-way communication. So I, I'm gonna zoom in on the meaningful home-school connection aspect of the question. And so, and f- and I'm gonna focus on hybrid cases where the technology is supporting face-to-face in- in- interaction.

And so in many of our communities use an approach to supporting parenting called the basics. These are five evidence-based messages that you saturate the community with. Maximize love, manage stress, talk, sing and point, count, group and compare, explore through movement and play, and read and discuss stories.

And so here it's the trusted messengers throughout the community that are supporting this messages, these messages, but then they're reinforced through texting service, through videos, flyers, posters in multiple languages, et cetera. So there's that idea that the technology there is reinforcing all those good face-to-face interactions, just as I said with the young mathematicians examples with those games, where the teachers are the trusted messengers, and the technology is then supporting that and supporting the use of the games in helpful ways, the videos the, the tip sheets, the flyers, and the directions.

And so the playing the game at home is then more meaningful because we're playing it in all the community settings. So-

MORRIS: Thank

you

JACOBSON: ... yeah.

MORRIS: Thanks so much. So key point that it's reinforcing, not replacing those human interactions that I gathered from that. Okay, we're gonna jump now and talk about children

with disabilities, and Scott George from Special Olympics North America wrote in a question about, in what ways are you seeing or do you envision community partnerships being used to support youth that come from vulnerable populations, such of, as young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

And Tyler, I'm gonna jump into you. You're a s- trained special education teacher for a long time. Can you give us some, some thoughts on, on Scott's question?

SAMSTAG: Sure. I, I think I wanna highlight kind of three frameworks that inform pretty much everything we do, and then key partners who have supported us.

And so I'd say first one is human-centered design. Very early on, we were informed by people like the LUMA Institute based out of Pittsburgh and incredible partners at IDEO. And really from that is always designing with people at the center. And so that's really informed everything from the creation of programs and events to grant opportunities.

The second kind of framing that informs our work continuously is universal design. Designing for people at the margins simply is good design. And so we've worked closely with people like CAST, who've been incredible partners. And lastly, we love our friends at KnowledgeWork specifically for their contributions to Strategic Foresight.

And so they've helped us really understand that when we think about the future, the future isn't fixed. There're gonna be multiple futures, and there are things that we can do today. There are things that we can design and try today that will catalyze movement towards what we call our preferred future of learning.

So I would say everything we do, and we have many examples, are informed by human-centered design, universal design, and strategic foresight.

MORRIS: So applying universal design as a key design in all that, all the work that happens with community partnerships. Love that. I'm gonna move to our kind of ... We have a few more minutes left, but I wanna move to kind of combine two questions that we got from Kim Oliver from TNTP and from Krishna Kumari from EducAid Trust.

And so these two questions I'm gonna combine a little bit about one part of the question is: Who's the best intermediary or champion to steward these partnerships from your perspective? And then second: What do you know about scaling and taking may- perhaps from one community, I know all of you have thought about scaling, and what is, what is the magic behind scaling?

And I'm gonna give you each about a minute to kind of put your thoughts to these questions as well as anything else you, you wanna share with us that you think is critical for our audience to walk away with. So I'm gonna start with you, Cecilia, and then I'll, I'll move to David, then Hayin, and Tyler

DE LA PAZ: Okay.

So, first to acknowledge I worked for the One Laptop per Child implementation here in Uruguay. It's called Plan Ceibal. When we were dreaming about distributing, and actually

Uruguay did, and it's one of the most success- successful projects here, One Computer per Child, and we were hoping that that would bring equitable education for all.

What we learned, first and foremost, that the scale changes the phenomenon. So it all depends on at what scale you wanna do it. If it's a one-on-one in your family, if it's, if it's one school, if it is two schools, if it is a whole community, just be aware that, aware that the scale changes the phenomenon.

The second one is the format changes the experience. So talking about also technology and today that we are using it, and we are trusting so much again on this new wave with artificial intelligence, just be aware that the format changes the, the experience. For example, in us, that we tried technology to bring books to all of our children because it was super cheaper to do it digitally.

The, the kids show us four to one that they wanna read tangible books other than digital books, even in places where they had none. So just be aware also that the driver also from where we want that change to happen also have an influence on the outcome. And, and talking about also technology from that p- point of view, I've been thinking that to be very careful that abstract concepts just as technology, community artificial intelligence are not treated as tangible realities.

So to also always be bridging between what we envision and what we observe in real life, and to try to understand what are the components, the essences of that dynamics. And again, bring back the awareness of, of the starting point when we are presenting technology or, or whatever we are presenting.

This is an experience I had. We were on a conference presenting AI for youth and blah, blah, blah, and we, we, we brought some teenagers from the rural areas, and as we were at the coffee break, they were playing around with the elevator, and what we found out that, that they have never went into one before.

So always be aware of the starting point, not of your starting point as a designer, but as the people you are trying to help out.

MORRIS: Great. Thank you. We are running short, but we have important points from David, Hayan, and Tyler, so I'm handing to David briefly to say, say your m- your secret sauce to all of this.

JACOBSON: Sure. So in response to the question about stewarding an ecosystem, I would just quickly distinguish between two types of partnerships. So we have a broader policy or coordination, higher level, maybe regional partnerships, and then more low to the ground implementation partnerships, like the zones and hubs that we're talking about.

And for those partnerships, I think it's really helpful then when they're defined by school related boundaries, so districts and, and and, and school zones or maybe an, a cluster of schools. So I think that is really helpful for those low to ground implementation partnerships. And on the scaling question, I would just quickly flag the role of networks and community practices, bringing communities together that share common approaches and can share across communities.

MORRIS: Thank you so much, David. I'm going to hand to Hayin back to say what is your secret sauce and what are your, your thoughts for those questions?

KIMNER: Yeah. I it's a, it's a great question because ultimately this is about not, again, just random acts or one other person's job who happens to have the word coordinator in, in their title.

In order for this work to happen well in a community school strategy, it has to be a system-wide approach, and it has to be dedicated and intentional. So this is not just the technical pieces, especially, you know, when it comes to data or privacy or accountability, but also the adaptive leadership pieces.

This is about staffing. This is about systems. The Community Schools Forward Essentials framework, which I think we can find somewhere on the Brookings website really talks about that there, there are sort of infrastructure and staffing practices that go into a strong community school strategy

MORRIS: Great.

Thanks so much, Hayin. And handing to you, Tyler, share with us your, your final thoughts.

SAMSTAG: Thank you, Emily. Our partners at Hunter just a couple of weeks ago put out a report that looked at ecosystems across the world and really addressed differences in scale and where it lives. And so I'll end with just kind of two key things for our work as it as it relates to scale and where it lives.

I think the first one, in order to scale our recommendations are always lean into your region's legacies. For us in southwestern Pennsylvania, we kind of have dual legacies that constantly drive our work. We are the Steel City, and that comes with a lot, and we're also Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. And so I invite, always invite folks, what is the legacy that you're gonna lean into with ecosystem work?

And then as, as it pertains to where it lives, I think it's less important where ecosystem work lives versus who is leading that work. And so for us, over 20 years, we have honestly found our ecosystem has moved homes over those past two decades. And ultimately, what we have found is that the strongest ecosystems are the ones where many people, many organizations feel ownership of that work.

Thank you.

MORRIS: Love it. To summarize to leave you today from our, the brilliant comments from our colleagues, that it's leaning into the legacy. It's spotlighting and shining a light on what is already happening, the many different forms of partnerships. It's the intentional, not these random acts, and making these more systemic.

It's seeing and building trust at the speed of trust. It's balancing the learning and the love and the joy. It's bringing people in from all different experiences of learning, and it's really bringing all of these, these pieces together and, and leaning into how do we build the science, how do we build the practice, how do we build these networks and partnerships to keep this in this vital moment.

So thank you so much to everyone for joining this important conversation. Stay tuned. We love hearing about the work that you're doing, so please reach out to us and share. The video will be posted in YouTube, so please also share that if, with your colleagues that were not able to join. And we will be having a conversation with other global partners in November, building on this, this conversation on how to build community partnerships to strengthen the learning ecosystem.

So thank you so much for joining, and we wish you a good rest of your day.