

# **Weber Shandwick**

**Kellogg Conference**

**Session C**

**“Removing Racial Barriers in Education”**

**Moderator:**

**Rehema Ellis,  
Education Correspondent,  
NBC News**

**Panelists:**

**Amy Wilkins,  
Vice President of Government Affairs and Communications,  
Education Trust;**

**Lisa Delpit,  
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**Edward Fergus,  
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REHEMA ELLIS: Good morning everybody. My name is Rehema Ellis. I'm the education correspondent for NBC News. And I'm based out of New York. And unless you're shy, you really should come closer.

And I suspect you don't get to where you folks are by being shy. And I wish you would come closer because that way we could all feel a little cozy about being together. So I'll give you a minute; don't feel shy. You know, I haven't called you out in a classroom.

We are, I hope, about to engage in some lively conversation. You're going to hear some presentation from our panelists about the work that they're doing in an effort to remove the racial barriers in education.

We don't have a lot of time. So I'm not going to spend a lot of time up here – and I've touched something I probably shouldn't have. And I don't know what to do. That's always a problem, you know, when you put the keyboard right where I need to put something.

Anyway, as I say, we don't have a lot of time. But I want to say welcome to this discussion that we're about to have. I'm glad that you're all here. I think that you have probably been thinking a lot about racial barriers in education over the last few days, if not all of your life. And one of the things that I just wanted to say very quickly as we think about this and framing this, I've been looking at some things in the past about education.

And there was a quote that came from a study and I suspect all of you are probably familiar with it. But it goes like this. It says, "If an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." You know what I'm talking about. It was "The Nation at Risk," written some 30 years ago.

And I think we haven't come so far from that. Today, America's schools are still in trouble, especially some of our schools that are in communities where the children are mostly children of color. And it's a fascinating and complexing and disturbing truth to me, considering that there was an effort to change this and that was even longer ago than the statement written by the Commission on Education some 30 years ago.

Sixty-plus years ago, there was a little decision by the Supreme Court and it was called *Brown v. Board of Education*. And it basically declared that schools were – that were separate were not equal. And it set the groundwork for what was supposed to be an integration of opportunities, I suspect, for children of color and white children – but essentially America's children having equal access to opportunities in education.

And yet, here we are today, in Louisiana, in a conference room and talking about how do we get around the racial barriers in education. That's what our panelists here are going to help us try to navigate. And I hope that at the end of this 90 minutes, as I've been saying to some of these wonderful folks that we had a moment to talk prior to this, I hope that there is a takeaway and it's not just, oh, woe is us, but what can we do.

And I hope you hear some things from them about what you can do when you go back to your schools, to your streets, to your neighborhoods, to your community centers to say, I heard something that sparked an idea in me that we might want to try. Because the truth of the matter, folks, is that the racial barriers exist.

So I'm not so sure that we have to go through a long, hard discussion about are there really racial barriers. There are. I think this discussion needs to be about how do we get over them, how do we get through them, how do we get around them. Because the truth of the matter also is some schools are – some of our children are achieving. Some teachers are actually able to do the job that they signed on to do, as are some principals and some superintendents and school boards.

And I want to crack that code. That's what I want to do. These folks here have been doing a lot of work about how to crack that code. And I hope we get to hear some of that.

So I'm going to introduce you to our panelists. Amy Wilkins is vice president of government affairs and communications at the Education Trust. And she has a lot of experience in this area, in political and community organizing and also with talking to the media, media communications.

I think that this is a vital area – I'm in media so I would think it's vital. But I think it's pretty important that we get the word out somehow or another. And I'm going to say this before we get into that is that let me tell you what happens with people who hear something on the air that they don't like. They call. They write. They tweet. They blog. One phone call is almost equivalent to 1,200 voices. Imagine what you can do.

If you think you have no power, I'm telling you here think again. You have power. One phone call; 1,200 voices. The same is true of a tweet. If you take time to write it down, that's even more powerful. Managers of communication operations, listen. The voices they have been hearing from are the voices that say something contrary to what you are saying.

Your voices need to be heard. Amy can talk a lot about that. She has been an advocate over the years in the Children's Defense Fund, the National Democratic Committee and the Peace Corps – and the Peace Corps – and the White House Office of Media Affairs – Amy Wilkins.

Lisa Delpit is next to her; Felton G. Clark professor of education at Southern University in Baton Rouge. Lisa is the former executive director, emirate scholar of – imminent scholar of the Center for Urban Education and Innovation at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. She has been working tirelessly in this arena to make a change for children.

We talked a moment ago, and I'm going to share something, Lisa. And sometimes Lisa says she gets a little – feels a little bad about the work that she's engaged in because it is enormous. Pushing this boulder up the hill is hard work. But this lady is not giving up. It doesn't mean that her back doesn't hurt. It doesn't mean that her knees don't ache. They do. But she's not giving up and I appreciate you very much for that.

Edward Fergus is deputy director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, New York University. Dr. Fergus is deputy director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University and a former high school teacher. He has and continues to provide technical assistance and analysis on education policy and research to school districts.

We're talking about people who – Mr. Fergus, who has said, I've been in the classroom. I've seen what you see in the classroom and I see what you're up against. Not only that, but he's also on the school board in the community where he lives, where his children are in school. And he's an engaged – not only citizen, but parent and educator himself, and has so much to contribute of this conversation of how do we turn this around, how do we jump this hurdle.

You know, the Olympics are coming up. They're coming up and hurdles are going to be part of what people are going to be watching athletes do. You are athletes in this field of academic excellence. You are training every day and it is hard work. I know it. I visit schools all across this country and I see the battle that you are in, that teachers are in in this effort to educate our children.

And one of the things that I hope that we all do is that we get like athletes, and we decide we are not going to give up. And if we work hard, maybe we can get that Olympic gold, too.

Lisa is going to start us off in terms of –

We're going to hear from our panelists. And then we're going to have some questions and open it up for all of you. So again, there will be a takeaway here of something that you can take back to your communities and your organizations to help us win this academic Olympics. Lisa?

AMY WILKINS: Amy.

MS. ELLIS: I'm sorry. Amy?

MS. WILKINS: Hi. Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

MS. WILKINS: Thank you for coming this morning. I'm Amy Wilkins and I work at the Education Trust. And when ReHEMA was talking, I was reminded of something. This is a long fight that we are in for our kids, a very long fight. And it is not the work of a lifetime. It is a work of generations. And I just want to say that during *Brown v. Board*, my dad was an intern – was a law student for Thurgood Marshall.

And you know, they thought – he thought before I was born that it was won and the schools that I went to would be very different because of the work that daddy and Thurgood – daddy, the law student, and Thurgood, the lawyer – did. You know, and I am standing up here

now because the work is not done. And I have a 10-year-old son and I hope the work is done for him. But we can't get tired because this is a long, long road.

I know that Rehema doesn't want us to belabor the problem, but I am going to belabor the problem just a little bit because I think if we're going to have a discussion it's important to have a common fact base. So I am going to real quick run you through some data about what achievement for African-American and Latino kids looks like in this country so that we are talking from a common basis of fact.

I am going to go really fast through these slides. Eddie is teasing me because I have 72 slides to do in 10 minutes. But I can do this. I've done this before. But don't take notes. If you want, I can send you the deck when this is over. So just come up when this is over and give me your card because if you take notes, you'll just frustrate yourself. So don't even try, OK. Let's start with some good news.

After more than a decade – most of the data I'm going to show you here is from NAEP, the National Assessment of Education Progress. It is the only tool that we have to look at achievement across the country.

So we've seen some real important progress for kids of color. We've seen the gap between African-American and Latinos close at the fourth grade level. This is looking at 9-year-olds. It is the smallest gap we've ever had. And we've also gotten that at the same time we're getting record performance out of all groups.

One of the things you hear a lot is that to help close the achievement gap, to help low income kids and kids of color catch up, that we are somehow sacrificing the interests of white kids and more affluent kids. This slide makes it absolutely clear that we can lift everybody up at the same time. So don't buy that garbage.

Next, unfortunately, we don't see the same kind of improvement at the eighth grade level. We've seen some improvement at the eighth grade level in mathematics but not nearly as much as the fourth grade level. We are doing much better with our younger children than we are doing with our older children. But the big depressing problem comes at the high school level where you see the gap has not moved since the '70s, really – since the '80s – on mathematics achievement.

And what you look at, what we see by the end of high school is that African-American and Latino twelfth graders have about the same math and reading skills as white eighth graders. So our kids, our African-American and Latino kids who are launching themselves into adulthood are doing academic skills at the same level as white middle-schoolers.

That is an enormous problem. These gaps exist before kids even get to school. We all know that. The problem, though, is instead of organizing our schools to close gaps, we have organized our schools to widen gaps. And we do that by giving the kids who come to school with the least the least we have to offer in school. And then what we do is we turn around and we blame their families and we blame their communities.

Now, let me talk about some of the lessees that we do. Some of the lessees are the result of choices that policymakers make. You can see that we spend far less money on the education of kids of color than we do on white kids and far less on the education of poor students than we do on the education of more affluent students. If we really wanted to close the gap, we would turn this on its head and give the kids who need the most the most; but we don't.

The other thing we do is we enroll kids of color at much lower rates than we enroll white kids in rigorous courses. Your brain is like a muscle. You remember we were talking about the – Rehema did the athlete analogy. Your brain is like a muscle. When you take it to the gym, meaning when you take it to tough classes, you do better.

But what we do is we give our kids, kids of color, anemic curriculum. And we say, you know, their life circumstances are so difficult, she really can't be expected to do algebra because her mother's poor, he really can't be expected to write an essay because his dad is in jail. We – you know, out of this sort of compassion – my Latino friends call it the “poor racito (ph) syndrome” – we cannot challenge these kids because their life is too challenging.

We absolutely have to challenge these kids.

The other thing we see very frequently is even when at the fifth grade level you have African-American and Latino kids scoring at the same level as white kids, they are much less likely to be placed in algebra by the time they're in eighth grade. And that is the kind of low expectation that is killing for our kids, and we see that time and time again.

The other – and I would say this is the biggest killer of our kids – we give our kids the least able teachers. African-American kids and Latino kids are taught far more frequently – and poor kids are taught far more frequently than our white kids by teachers who they – themselves didn't study the subject area – and somehow this slide flipped but this is also good. We're also taught more frequently by rookie teachers.

And there's nothing wrong with a rookie teacher. But you know, I'm a better advocate now than when I first started. Doctors are better doctors than in their first years. Lawyers are better lawyers. But what happens in our schools is teachers come in, very young teachers come in – they perfect their craft, they make their mistakes on our kids, the kids who can least afford mistakes to be made.

And so – we need rookie teachers; we've got to constantly replenish the profession. But we can't concentrate those in our schools.

I'm going fast now. Now, I'm at higher ed. Higher ed has not gotten enough attention. I think we really need to talk about higher ed a little bit. I left a handout in your chair about the cost of higher education. We see that higher – that college going rates are up for all groups. But we see that African-Americans and Latinos have still not caught up to white kids in terms of college-going.

But access isn't the only issue. And I want you to – if you don't listen to anything else I say here today, I really want you to pay attention to this. It's not just access; it's access to what. And we have to look at where our kids are going to college. Twenty-one percent of African-American kids and 18 percent of Latino kids start their college careers at for-profit institutions. Only 9 percent of whites start there.

Then I want you to look over at the red bars. Forty-two percent of our kids are Pell recipients. Let me get – oh, I can't get the red bars to come up. OK. We start disproportionately at for-profit colleges but we also start disproportionately at two-year colleges, OK. This is important in terms of eventual success; keep following me. And remember those high percentages that start at two-year colleges.

Back to four years for a second – I mean, back to for-profits for a second. For-profits only represent 13 percent of all enrollment in higher ed. They consume 24 percent of all Pell grants and their student loan default rate is 48 percent, in part because their graduation rates are so anemic. These companies are preying on our kids in the same way that predatory lenders preyed on black and Latino families in the subprime crisis. And this is something our communities have to wake up to and have to steer our kids away from in very serious ways.

When you look at graduation rates, we are graduating at far lower rates than whites. This is 6-year graduation rates at 4-year colleges. You look at community colleges – remember I showed you what high percentages of African-Americans start at community colleges.

So only 15 percent of kids who start at a community college have some kind of credential at the end of three years. And this is the most devastating. Only 12 percent of the kids who start at community college eventually get a B.A. So people are saying – you hear a lot of this in the public policy world, that community colleges are appropriate places for low-income kids to start, for kids of color to start. It kind of gives them a chance to get their feet wet. It is not the route to a B.A.

And we have to push our kids and push our policy to start our kids in what research tells us is the very best way to start college – the September after your senior year in high school. Full-time, full-year, 4-year residential college. That's the way white kids get through. That's the way our kids have to get through. And the sort of start at community college stuff is a dead end for our kids.

So you add it all up. By age 29, you see that whites are two to three times more likely to have B.A.s than African-Americans and you look at it by income and it is even worse. A poor kid is 10 times less likely than the most affluent kids in our country to have a B.A. by the time they're 24. And the separation only gets worse and worse over time. So here, I'm going to be really cheerful now, Rehema. I'm cheering people up. This is the good news.

Our organization, because we can't – we know we can't just tell gloom and doom stories – works very hard to identify high achieving, high poverty schools and schools that serve high concentration of kids of color. This is a school in Mobile, Alabama. It's a hundred percent

black and 99 percent low income. Four years ago, it was the lowest performing school in the state. It was reconstituted and re-staffed and I want you to look at this school now.

That is the schools – excuse me, level four is the highest level. It's not just proficient. These kids are advanced. So 96 percent of the school's – of the kids in this school are scoring at the advanced level. Compare that to white kids in their district; compare that to white kids statewide. These kids are kicking ass. And they are poor and they are black and they can because their school decided that they could.

Next year's reading. Same school – again at the advanced level, 61 percent. These kids, these are the white kids in the school district. These are the white kids in the state. This school is doing tremendous things with these kids – again, because they believe in them and took the trouble to do it.

This is Elmont Junior/Senior High School on Long Island. It's right across the street from Belmont Racetrack for you racing fans. It is mostly African-American. It's 25 percent low income. I want you to see how Elmont compares to New York State.

Again, these kids are doing better than the statewide average because their school decided they could – more trends from Elmont, more trends from Elmont. Those are two books. Now, I want to talk to you real briefly about higher ed. We hear excuses from higher ed very much like the excuses from K-12. You have to consider our student body. You have to consider the kind of kids we educate. We just can't do any better with the kind of kids that come to our school.

We've built a database that puts the lie to that. I want you to look at Florida State University and Arizona. When you look at kind of these campuses, they are very similar campuses. The SAT scores of the kids are about the same. The campus size is about the same, the enrollment. URM, it's a horrible term; it means "underrepresented minority." It was the only way – it's the only term we had to get the Asian kids out of the numbers.

So this is African-Americans, Latinos and Native Americans. But I want you to look – these schools look pretty similar as you look across. But then you look at their overall graduation rates, they are very different. You look at their graduation rates for kids of color and they are hugely different. So it is not just about the kids you enroll. It's what you do with the kids you have.

The same is true on HBIs. Check out Elizabeth City, which has a 50.7 graduation rate, versus Coppin State, which has an 18.9 percent graduation rate – very similar institutions, but graduating kids at very different rates. There are some campuses around the country that are making very, very, very big changes very rapidly and I just wanted to brag on some of these success stories.

You know, Michigan Technical University increased its grad rate for kids of color by 19 percent over five years. You can do this. So this is just a list of institutions that are doing well by their kids of color that are making big gains.

More big gainers. Eastern Kentucky, SUNY Westbury – so I will send you all of this stuff. I wanted to get to the sort of leverage points. In K-12, it is teachers, teachers, teachers. We have to ensure that our kids get the same caliber of teachers as other kids do.

Data – we have to look at the data. I don't know what's wrong with education. We, like, sort of operate on a wing and a prayer. I went to a workshop. I heard this interesting idea or I kind of have this feeling in my gut that this would work.

Other professions, other industries are looking at their data relentlessly and figuring out how to make course corrections and we in education somehow think data is bad. We have to – data is the best friend the kids of color – kids of color have and we have to get really serious about using the data and responding to the data. In higher ed, we have to make our – get our student aid policies correct.

One of the things that we look at a lot – you know, people pay a lot of attention to Pell grants. And you know, that's the big federal money to help poor kids go to college. Institutions themselves control as much money – the institutional aid money in this country that is held by institutions of higher ed is more than what is held in Pell. And how those institutions use their money is very important. And what we see is institutions all over this country turning away from low-income students.

This is, like, flipping by itself – turning away from low-income students and chasing SAT scores. They are offering institutional aid to kids who don't need that aid to attract those kids to their campuses to raise their ratings in U.S. News and Barron's. And we have to change those policies from non-need based aid back to need-based aid because our kids are not going to be to get to and through college without it.

And this is the last slide. I'm sorry, Rehema. It's really depressing. But as we look, we did a study a couple of months ago now that looks at the cost of college. If you look at families in the lowest income quintile, they have to spend – this is after all aid is considered, you know, after their Pell grants, after their loan – after all – no, this is just grant aid, excuse me.

After all the grant aid is considered, a low income family has to spend the equivalent of 72 percent of their annual income to send a kid to a public 4-year college. You look at the richest families in the country, that number is 14 percent.

Until we figure out how to make college affordable – not just for the fortunate few but for the many – we are not going to close the gap in this country. So that's my little spiel. Those are some numbers for you to think about and have the conversation on. And now, Lisa will tell you the stuff with texture. (Applause.)

LISA DELPIT: I'm going to close – can I close it?

MS. WILKINS: Shut it down, yeah.

MS. DELPIT: I don't know if it will destroy anything if I close it. OK, I need to put this on. OK, good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

MS. DELPIT: I just wrote a book called – just published – called – oh – (laughter) – there it is – “Multiplication is For White People.” And I want to talk a little about how some of the statistics that Amy talked about are actualized, how they happen in classrooms. The name of the book is a black child saying to a tutor: Why are you trying to teach me this, Ms. L; black people don't multiply. Black people just add and subtract. White people multiply.

So it's a little bit funny but the question is – but it's very sad. Where does this child get this? Nobody said that sentence to this child ever. And I want to talk about Beverly Tatum. Now, she talks about the fact that if you live in Los Angeles, you're a smog breather.

You don't intend to breathe smog. You don't want to breathe smog. You don't even know you're breathing smog. But you're a smog breather. And she says if we live in the United States, we are racism breathers. No matter what color we are, we don't intend to breathe racism. We don't want to. And we aren't even aware. But we are doing so.

Just to give you a couple of little historic – I have pages and pages – but a couple of little historical quotes by very well-known people in the U.S. Linda Gottfredson is the Miller awardee for outstanding journal article in American Psychology Association. She was also a Mensa award – she received a Mensa award for excellence in research.

Here is her quote: “We now have out there what I call the egalitarian fiction that all racial groups are equal in intelligence. We have social policy based on that fiction. For example, the 1991 Civil Rights Act,” – I'll stop there. William Bennett on his radio show – some of you may remember – in 2005 said if you wanted to reduce crime, you could if that were your only purpose. You could abort every black baby in this country and your crime rate would go down.

And so there are many other messages. I just wanted to point two out to you because as these messages seep into our collective self-consciousness, several things happen. The first is that teachers believe that students of color can't learn and they adjust their instruction accordingly, and teachers and school districts by the way.

A study by the Education Trust in 2005 looked at the curricular offerings across a number of schools in California. In the predominately white, upper-middle class school – in a predominately white, upper-middle class school, this was a writing assignment, an essay on Anne Frank: “Your essay will consist of an opening paragraph which introduces the title, author and general background of the novel. Your thesis will state specifically what Anne's overall personality is and what general psychological and intellectual changes she exhibits over the course of the book. You might organize your essay by grouping psychological and intellectual changes or you might choose three or four characteristics like friendliness, patience, optimism, self-doubt and show how she changes in this area over time.”

In a low-income, black and Latino school in California, this was the seventh grade writing assignment. There is space for one line, one space for each answer: “my best friend; a chore I hate; a car I want; my heartthrob.” Point being that when you believe that students – whether you’re conscious about believing it or not – are – can perform less, you teach less.

The second consequence of the racism smog in our country is that the students believe that they can’t learn. Aside from “Multiplication is for White People,” another example of Southern University student-teacher told me she didn’t know what to say when a student said to her: So Ms. Summers, they made us the slaves because we were dumb, right?

When students believe they can’t learn, they have two responses. The first is to hide out, and those are the students who have their heads on the desk and the hoods over their heads, trying to look invisible.

The second is to act out and those are the students who try to keep anything from going on that will prove to them that they are less capable. So they keep lessons from happening. Then, teachers usually misinterpret both of those responses, usually inferring that the students are incapable, unmotivated, uninterested or behavior disorder.

And consequently, when they believe – when they see the students reifying the beliefs that they already hold, then the beliefs get even more strongly entrenched. And so teaching less occurs even more. There’s a lot that I could say about this and a lot of observations in schools all over the country. A lot of it I’ve written about.

But what I want to just say in the few minutes that are allotted to me is that there is hope for all of this. There is a new area in cellular biology called epigenetics. And biologist Bruce Lipton has written that 95 to 96 percent of our life activity originates in the subconscious, which was programed by observing and listening to others.

When our subconscious is filled with negative messages, our bodies and our brains react with unconscious stress levels and stress hormones leading to – does this sound familiar for black communities – high blood pressure, heart disease, decreased intellectual performance and even changes in the genes.

However, the happy part is that reprogramming of the subconscious can happen through conscious thoughts that feed the subconscious, leading to different kinds of ideas about one’s self. We can change the programming of the subconscious by inundating it with positive thoughts about one’s self, one’s abilities, one’s appearance, one’s intellectual potential, et cetera.

And I believe that is what we must do for our children and their teachers, rather than this history of failure, failure, failure associated with low income, which is what our teachers are taught in – teacher education. We need to show the counterexamples that Amy talked about. We have to constantly feed our children with the understandings that people who look like them have a long legacy of academic richness; that they come from brilliance.

Tommy Escalante, in the movie “Stand and Deliver,” said to barrio children who performed so well on ETS tests that ETS said that they were cheating, he would say to them: You have to do well in math. The Mayans discovered the zero. It’s in your blood.

We also have to let them know that they are important and valuable not only to their families but to their communities and to the world.

When I was in school – and I’ll talk in a second about that, but – we were told that we had to do well in school because we were standing on the shoulders of those who suffered before us and that we had to do well for those who were coming after us because we were responsible for our communities. Our children are not taught that anymore. They’re told you have to do well so you can get a job.

We must help them understand and create school lessons that they can make a difference by using what they learn in school, that it’s not just something you sit here and incorporate. You can use it to make a difference. We have to continue to tell them they’re too smart to do poorly in school, that they already have the capacity but that what they need to learn is skills, and skills is something that we can teach you. We have to let them know that they are the hope for the world.

When marginalized children of color are inundated with ideas and beliefs to counter societal views of themselves as useless, dumb and criminal, we can make a difference in what goes on for them in schools as long as we also convince their teachers. I want to just point out, lastly, that we have a history that we can look to in this country in this regard.

Theresa Perry, in the book “Young, Gifted and Black,” wrote most if not all of the historically black-segregated schools that African-American children attended were intentionally organized in opposition to the ideology of black inferiority.

In other words, in addition to promoting education, these sites were also designed to counter the ideology of African-Americans’ intellectual inferiority and ideologies of African-Americans as not quite equal and as less than human. Everything about these institutions was supposed to affirm black humanity, black intelligence and black achievement. In black schools, churches, clubs, everything was focused on this goal.

And I know many of you are in community organizations. They created intentional activities designed to convince students of their intelligence and to assure achievement, including rituals like uplifting songs, recitations and performances, high expectations, extensive academic support in and out of school and regular assemblies of students to express the expectations of the adults around them that education was equated with freedom and they must work hard to be free.

And I think we need to relook at our history and re-implement that which our forefathers understood. Thank you. (Applause.)

EDWARD FERGUS: All right. Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

MR. FERGUS: Buenos dias. Well, thank you all for coming. I am – my name is Eddie Fergus, and I'm at NYU. And I do a – I'm actually very excited that I actually followed Lisa because think what you just spoke of, it reminds – it reaffirms a book that Pedro and I have coming out this coming fall of a study that we did for four years following 1,500 boys – black and Latino boys in single-sex schools.

And the focus of the study was really around not whether single-sex is the way but rather what happens when school contexts actually pay attention to who they're serving and how they organize themselves and what are the ways in which kids actually respond in that context.

And one of the key findings that we're having qualitatively and quantitatively – and that was one of the most exciting pieces, that we were actually able to quantitatively annotate that it's actually the degree to which climate in relationship to engagement actually predict performance. So kids feeling better about schools makes them actually know how to do school better that results in better grades. And particularly when we're talking about black and Latino boys. And so I'm excited that we're in such great conversation.

What I want to talk about now is one of the projects that we have going on at our center. We – as a center, we do a lot of work with school districts around equity-based issues. So as I say, we get to do, similar to what Amy talked about, you know, in some of ways sort of the unsexy work with school districts. We come in because school districts have been cited on some level by state education department that your subgroups aren't doing well.

So I'm going to talk about one of the particular projects that we have going on at our center that focuses on disproportionality in special education and suspension which I consider within our – as you see here, we have three particular strands of work that we do at our center.

And our Center on Disproportionality – that work actually allows us to look at what we consider to be the silent killer. The silent killer in the sense of there's two dynamics that are happening in school institutions which is the idea that cognitive ability is racialized and has poverty components. And that behavioral ability has racial components and poverty, right?

So what do I mean? That the degree to which somebody can think and how far they can think is predicated on the degree to which there is something genetically bound to who they are in terms of their racial components as well as their experiences of being poor, right? And I always say when I work with teachers is that the degree to which you are actually here is not predicated on how poor you were, right?

We all have learning capacity, right. It may be compromised at certain points, but then that compromise – being comprised means that then you need protective factors. So part of the work that we've been paying particular attention to in disproportionality in special education is looking at schools as protective factors, right?

So when you are – if you are experiencing different levels of vulnerability – and we all have vulnerability, right. I always say I feel a little bit more vulnerable when I'm around somebody who's tall, OK? (Laughter.) I feel a little bit compromised. But it doesn't mean I can't reach to the level that I can, right? When I used to run track in college in the early '90s, you know, I always say these big, buff guys. And I could beat them down to the hundred because I had been practicing a great deal.

There was a little bit of vulnerability but did not – it did not minimize my capacity to get there. So how we've been actually framing our disproportionality work is that, yeah, there are populations that have vulnerable conditions, but we have to look at it in relation to the types of systems they are interacting with that also have opportunity gaps, right.

You know, we live under this guise to a degree when we're looking at outcomes that are challenged around particularly low income and racial and ethnic minority kids is that they have gotten to this point because there is something wrong with them, right? We're fixate on the question with our kids that there's something wrong with you.

We never ask the question: What happened to you – right? And what's happened to you actually is also tied to types of institutions that they're living in. Yes, home is an institution. Families are institutions. Community is an institution. Faith-based organizations are institutions. A particular institution that we spend our time looking at is schools, right?

So looking at that institution, we have to pay attention to the degree to which the institution of schools exacerbate(s) vulnerability, right.? So we are really borrowing from Margaret Beale Spencer's work around vulnerability that she's paid particular attention to and its realm particularly around community context.

I have been telling Margaret – it's like, yeah, we've been using your model and applying it to the institution of school and really looking at what happens in that intersection, the intersection which is risk and protection, right? We all have some level of risk whether it's high or low and we all have protective factors whether it's high or low, right? Right?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

MR. FERGUS: Some of the risks vary, right? You know, when we work with our school districts and ask them about what risk factors do your kids have – well, they're poor, they're black and, you know, their parents aren't involved. Well, depends on your vantage point, whether you see poverty as a risk – right – and the same thing is whether or not you see race as a risk. I always challenge my practitioners that race in itself is not a risk.

Racism is a risk factor. You know, my being – myself, you know, I was born and raised in Panama, and I came here to this country when I was 10. And you know – you know, I joke around the fact that it wasn't until I came to this country that I had to change my name.

You know – so and at that point, that moment – I became vulnerable. I became vulnerable in having to be renamed by others because they refused to call me Eduardo, right?

But that's – you know, but at the same – so now, I'm Eddie in Americans' faces, but then at home I'm Eduardo.

But the risk is actually the context in which you're in, not simply just the label whether you're black, Latino or poor. So that also, you know, predicts a type of lower risk. The other part of the vulnerability is also the protection, right? We all traverse different types of protective environments, right? You know, I always say, you know, I feel a greater sense of protection when I'm around people who are like-minded, right? I feel a little bit safe.

When I'm in environments that I'm not, my guard is up a little bit, right? I'm in an environment, a protective environment – it's pretty low for me, right? So when we think about our kids, we always need to think of the intersection of high and low, protection and risk. So you have kids who are highly vulnerable. Those are the kids that we pay particular attention to. We pay less attention to the other categories of kids.

I wanted particularly to give you attention to the top quadrant and the bottom quadrant, right? The high and low-risk and the low and high on this end. Those are the two groups that we keep comparing each other to. We compare our low-income to our high-income kids without paying attention to the reality that they have different facets of risk that are engaging in their lives and the same degree protective factors that are playing a mitigating role in terms of their outcomes.

The protective factors that I'm most concerned about is schools, because schools really operate in this bottom quadrant around this high protective factor. But the reality is, for our subgroup kids – and what Amy really sort of highlighted – is the degree to which there is a high degree of threat that operates within the conditions of schools, right?

So some of the conditions in which low protection happens for racial and ethnic minority and low income kids is the presence of stereotype threat – right – which Lisa highlighted, that they're just consuming it all the time. You know, I have school districts that we work with that are implementing particular structures around reading interventions that's supposed to help everyone, right?

But at the same time, they are maintaining an investment in their tracking system. And I said: This is antithetical. How can you be trying to lift everybody up but at the same time making sure that you're maintaining institutions that lend themselves to ensuring that there is (sic) cemented tracks that individual kids can stay in and which means that there's cognitive ceilings that kids have, right?

And the reality is that practitioners work a great deal to maintain those. They have a good investment in making sure, you know, the kids who are not doing so well, those are not my kids. Those are kids that need to go to the special ed teacher, right? So there is another low-protective factor that I want to highlight in terms that we're finding in some of our disproportionality district is the pattern of tracking.

And I call it the pre-tracking, soft tracking and explicit tracking, right? The pre-tracking, which my – I have an 8-year-old daughter who's – she's in that – she's in that pre-tracking right now. She is in the blue group, the blue reading group, right? Luckily, the blue reading group is a high-performing reading group. And she's been in that group from year to year. It just gets rolled over, right? And you've seen it in many school districts where they talk about the blue jays, the sharks – right – the different leveled reading groups.

And they try to, you know – so it's not the – it's not any pejorative language that kids are sort of understanding. But kids clearly understand what tracks they're in. Those pre-tracks turn into soft tracks in grades five and six.

There's a pattern in which – there's a particular attention that practitioners have where they are paying more attention to the types of diagnostic assessments that they're doing with their kids to isolate kids who are, you know, outside of the bell curve, those kids who are higher performing.

And that soft tracking becomes much more explicit by the time they're in middle school. We did a study a couple of years ago where we had a dataset of 20,000 black and Latino boys in New York City who started fourth grade in 1998 and were intended to finish in 2007.

What we found was that, one, between fourth and eighth grade, there was a flat line of growth, right? Two, what was fascinating, it was actually sixth and seventh grade where those kids who demonstrated some level of growth or performance, they branched out and went in completely different trajectories than the rest of their cohort of black and Latino boys, which further solidified the degree to which there is a point that's happening between fifth and seventh grade that is cementing not only tracks but it's also cementing the types of cognitive opportunity that kids are made – that are made available to them.

And I think, you know, as Amy was pointing out, we're seeing some good patterns happening at that – you know, those 9-year-olds, right? But there's something happening at the middle school and high school that's really preventing our kids from having substantive growth. So what are we seeing? And I'm just going to quickly go through some of the disproportionality patterns because I want you – and I keep saying this.

This is a silent killer. This is a very silent killer that nobody's paying particular attention to. So we've been working in New York state for the last eight years with every school district that they cite for disproportionately placing black and Latino students in special ed and suspension. So this is just six school districts that we worked with from '04 to '08. And these are the patterns in which they – the rates in which they were classifying black kids in special education.

As you see there, one of my lovely school districts that we worked with which is high up top – when we started with them, they had 55 – a little over 55 percent of their black kids were in special ed. There was a great investment in that. There was an investment. And I said, I said there's either two pieces going on here.

You all are working diligently to make sure those black kids end up there or there's something in the water that's lending your – that all – that 55 percent of your black kids are ending up in – or they have these sets of abilities that are not the norm or pattern in your particular school district. The rest of the school districts, as you see here, range between 30 percent and around – closer to 15 percent.

The national average is really 12 percent that we're looking for, right? So these are school districts that are highly problematic when we're talking about black students. Latino students, we're finding similar sets of patterns, but yet a lot of variation, right, because the school districts we end up working with, there's movement. There's a lot of mobility that's happening but yet are having, you know, growth patterns.

So as you see, that school district that all of a sudden just shows up, the Latino students just all of a sudden showed up. And where do they end up? Special ed. And why? They have these speech and language impairments, right? I had one particular school district where the speech pathologist said – because we spent some time doing some hunches work to say, give me your hunches; your theoretical hunch, based on your practices as to why you have such high patterns.

The speech pathologist said, oh, because Latino kids live in households where they live – listen to salsa really loud.

I kid you not. And I had to honestly, because we were – you know –

Yeah. So they can't hear and it's causing them to have language impairments. And as somebody who's a second language learner, I took a little bit of issue with that. (Laughter.) And the fact that I also listen to salsa, I'm like, look, I'm not sure that's happening.

So I had to still chart it out because I wanted them to still understand as a district community to really unpack these notions – you know, this idea that if you listen to loud music, it's going to – it's causing your disability. So the other pattern that we found with our school districts – and again, this is one of the six school districts that I have out there – we wanted to look at the course achievement patterns because the silent killer is you're sending them over here to special ed and suspending them but what's the resulting effect in regards to grades.

So we just looked at – I wanted to look at between sixth and seventh – twelfth grade, sixth to twelfth grade, the grades, the course grades. And I like to look at the course grades because it is a pattern that teachers use to predict what grade – what tracking group kids are going to go into the next following grade. So that's why I like to look at course grades.

So this is – and I did – this is a very simple analysis I did with the school district which is let's look at how many – the percentage of grades that kids were receiving between A's and F's. So this is a pattern between A's and B's from sixth grade to twelfth grade. And as you obviously can see, your black and Latino kids are having a downward trend from sixth grade to twelfth grade.

So either they're just not getting smarter or they're just not earning the grades, right? In terms of the rates in which they're receiving C's, you see white kids have this deep dip, right? They're not getting the C's. And then here, when you look at D's and F's, right, you see the complete inverse from the A's and B's, right, where you – A's and B's, you saw your white students sitting up top. Now you see them in the bottom quartile in terms of performance.

So what we're understanding is that in terms of – they're ending up in special education, they're not getting the types of course grades over time that it's leading them to actually make movement forward. I'm not going to do the behavioral stuff because that – if you look at the suspension stuff, you would be – it's disheartening to kind of see that.

So what are some of the common causes that we're finding? One is that there is a great deal of gaps that are existing in terms of the instruction, curriculum and the assessments that's happening. Interventions or referral process – what I love is existing – and I do this exercise with our school districts where I have them bring into their referral forms, their academic and behavioral referral forms for every building.

And what's fascinating – everybody has a different form. And not one form is common in terms of what are the criteria, what is the information the teachers have to bring. And it's very simple sets of practices that in of themselves become institutional issues that are not good safeguards for our kids, those protective factors.

These are ways in which institutions create – exacerbate the vulnerability simply because adults just don't do the right thing, right? Discipline policies and practices – the degree to which – you know, I have one school district that they had a discipline form where on the form the category that teacher could select was annoyance – annoyance. And of course, I took a pause and I said, please describe to me what annoyance looks like, right?

And of course, you know, everybody – well, annoyance looks like this and so forth. And I'm like is there an annoyance by race, right? And everybody was like, well, the black kids tend to have annoying behavior that looks in particular ways. They roll their neck, right? And that's – so again, it's putting out there the reality that there's a great deal of subjectivity in terms of these institutional practices.

Tracking, as I mentioned before, was one of the causes that's lending into their issues with disproportionality. Teacher expectations and misconceptions – the one that I really want to highlight is the cultural dissonance that's happening. And this is my soft way of saying bias, right?

I call it cultural dissonance because I work with a lot of – one suburban school district – affluent school districts and school districts that have different degrees of integration. And I've learned over time over the last 10 years that I can't say bias. I can't say racism because they just get, you know, stiff and –

AUDIENCE: Tight.

MR. FERGUS: – tight and people, you know – I’ve actually had people yell at me.

AUDIENCE: Tight.

MR. FERGUS: So I said cultural dissonance, right? There’s just something that’s between what I think of you and how you’re behaving. It’s just not matching for me. So that’s why I just call it dissonance for right now, right? I talk a lot more in this – in this quick brief that I did for the Equity Alliance.

It’s called “Distinguishing Difference from Disability” where I go much more in-depth in terms of this cultural dissonance. But this cultural dissonance, one, it’s – I want to point out one piece of it, which is the third bullet down, which is around the idea of situating poverty-induced traits, right?

That the ways in which kids are expressing who they are cognitively and behaviorally, that practitioners have married themselves to this idea that it is poverty-induced, right? The degree to which kids are willing – are interested in doing call and response in the context of the classroom, they situate it as a behavioral piece that’s poverty-induced but don’t recognize it as just a mere cultural expression that in of itself can still be a powerful tool for practitioners to use in the classroom.

AUDIENCE: Or an annoyance.

MR. FERGUS: Or an annoyance, you’re right. (Laughter.) So what are districts doing? And I’m just going to go through these common remedies real fast, to try –

So as we go through – and we spend two years with every district. We try to get them to a point to address these issues. So some of the common remedies is response to intervention. I’m sure many of you’ve heard this in terms of response to intervention.

The caveat has been around response to intervention is that school districts are now implementing it as if it is a verb. But rather, it’s a framework. RTI is a framework. It is not intervention itself. So you know, I hear a lot of times, you know, districts talking about, well, you know, I RTI’ed a kid. And that’s like – that’s not what it is. The same thing with PBIS.

The big caveat around PBIS, the Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, is that – colleagues Russell Skiba and Bob Horner have a piece – an article that came out a couple of months ago where they looked at school districts that have high fidelity of implementation of PBIS. And PBIS is one of those intervention pieces that a lot of school districts are implementing across the country.

And so there’s a great deal of fiscal investment there. They looked at the high-fidelity school districts that are implementing PBIS, the ones that are doing it at the rate we want them to. And what they’re finding is that the rates at which suspensions are happening are radically – they’re reducing. But when we looked within the subgroups, it was the black and Latino kids who – their numbers were going up.

So what's happening is that what PBIS allows schools to do is to – really, instead of having a discipline mantra that's focused on being punitive, but it's focused around what is the culture for us for positive behavior. Well, we can all understand that our understanding of behavior is also culturally based. How I see behavior differs from individual to individual, right? My body gets policed very differently, right, than my white male counterparts, right? And that's part of the reality that happens within the context of positive behaviors, even in the school context.

The other piece that's happening with many of our school districts is that they're doing a lot of diversity sensitivity trainings. But it's really – it's a little problematic some of it. Some of it is either how do we help them fit in. I have a school district who (sic) created a transition program because when they first started with us, they had 10 percent of black student population in the district. By the time we left, they were around 35 percent. So they did diversity training around how do we help these black kids know how to fit in with us, right?

Another form of it was what do we need to know about them. So it's almost this, you know, National Geographic type of exploration of sensitivity training.

And the last piece is sort of this, you know, you know, they kind of struggled between learning new cultural knowledge versus making actual institutional changes that connect with the types of vulnerabilities that we know our kids are showing up with.

And the last two pieces, what I think are probably the two areas that I probably spent a great deal of time making sure our districts work on, around this silent killer is two institutional areas to fix.

And I like to focus on these institutional areas because these are safeguards that need to be in place during the process of healing. Our adults are going to be healing in terms of issues of race and ethnicity. They can heal, and I'm all good for that. In the meantime, I need institutional safeguards for my kids, right? I think about it in relation to my own kids. I have an 8- and 12-year-old.

So two areas that we pay particular attention to is the improvement of support teams or the problem-solving teams, who are those teams that get those referrals from the teachers who say I don't know what to do with these kids. So we've been working on shoring up that team so that they can actually work much more proactively with teachers in the context of the classroom.

The other area is in terms of every school district has data. Some of it's really bad data. But I try to focus in on to building a team structure so we know what good data looks like but also building in data equity markers, right, which most school districts don't know what to do with. They – you know, the companies that are building these data systems, oh, they're making money.

They're making a lot of money right now. But not a one of them have equity markers. So it makes very difficult for districts to know what to do or what to look for. So those are the

two institutional areas that we've been paying particular attention to in our work around disproportionality.

And then, finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the fact that even within as we're doing these institutional safeguards, we're also paying attention to the degree to which these environments needs to be culturally responsive. And we pay attention to it in using this idea of three tensions. There's the personal tension, the structural tension and the strategies tension, which is you can't try to fix anything structural or have any strategies until you deal with the personal set of issues.

That healing part of it – right – you have to have a degree of healing to want to move into a structural level of work. And that – and that's just core to how we need to address what we consider the silent killer to try to make sure that we are mitigating the types of vulnerabilities our kids are having. Thank you. (Applause.)

MS. ELLIS: Isn't this a great panel? All three of you are terrific. (Applause.) It was – I wanted to take notes but Amy told me don't, so –

MS. WILKINS: And you're so well-behaved.

MS. ELLIS: And I'm well-behaved. But I'm going to be getting their PowerPoints later because it's tremendous information. One of the things that I want to do is open it up to questions because some of you may want to ask our panelists some of their thoughts of how we move beyond these racial barriers in education.

And while I wait for you to gather your thoughts to come up with a question, I have a question for the panel; and that is: How do we ensure as a society that black kids get the same caliber of teachers in their schools as those children who work in high performing schools? Amy, your thoughts?

MS. WILKINS: Well, the first is a question of political will. And we have to create the political will to do it. But the other thing is within the teaching profession, I find that it's a little perverse. Status – the status of the teacher is very much derivative of the status of the children she is teaching.

That is, you are a valuable teacher if you're off at – excuse me – Hotchkiss or Choate or one of those fancy schools teaching a bunch of rich white children, you are valuable, right? If you are a teacher in a school where the kids are black, Latino, poor, and work in there, you are not seen as of value in this society. We have to change that culture.

We have to change that value proposition, such that teachers who are doing the hard work of teaching children who have challenges and teaching in schools where nobody was bright. You know, it's easy to go teach where the science lab work. It is not so easy to go and teach where you can't even get the Bunsen burners to turn on and the water doesn't work. We have to change the value proposition.

And I would say the district that is doing the best work at that is Charlotte-Mecklenburg, which has really decided to honor teachers who go and teach at high-poverty schools and schools that serve high-poverty concentrations, primarily of black kids. And the town is beginning to see those teachers differently. They're rewarded differently, and I think too often we just think the money thing is the trick.

But it's also teachers go to schools – one last thing. When you look at why teachers go to schools and why teachers leave schools, it's leadership. They're like the rest of us. They want good bosses. They want bosses that value them. They want bosses who will develop them professionally. They want bosses who support them. So one of the keys of getting really strong teachers in our schools is getting really strong principals in their schools.

MS. ELLIS: Lisa, your thoughts? Thank you, Amy.

MS. DELPIT: I'm in stereo, yeah –

One of the things I think we really need to take a look at is those programs that are putting in young teachers for two years into the lowest poverty schools. And that – well, yeah. (Laughter.)

Teach for America and others, because there are some local programs as well that are doing the same thing in New Orleans. And the whole idea is it's OK in these communities to put people who are only going to be there for two years – who have five weeks of training – even though they might be bright and idealistic young people, you can't teach if you don't know how to and you don't know the community.

And so we have to – I've spoken to people at more – well, in Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge Magnet, which is a high-performing school and several other folk around the country and asked them, well, would you have – are you going to have any Teach for America teachers. And basically the answer is always, hell no. And they know that they're not going to get good teaching or they're not going to get consistent teaching.

They're going to continue to get rookie teachers. And that's one of the things I think parents need to be aware of in their schools, that we need to make sure that if we get some of these young teachers in there – which is not a bad thing to have them in the school – that they're working with people who have a lot more authority and that they – a lot more experience and that they are committed to being there for more than two years.

MS. ELLIS: Thank you. Eduardo?

MR. FERGUS: Every time I tell my story, it always changes – appreciate it.

MS. ELLIS: I didn't know.

MR. FERGUS: You know, one of the key things is the degree to which of how expectations are actually resonating among teachers. I think we – on one hand, you know, I love

that there's such attention to teacher evaluations across the country. But there is very few rubrics that allow for an exploration of expectations among teachers.

And not expectations in terms of the rhetoric but rather demystification of expectations, right? You know, one of the key – and again, I'm drawing it from the research, you know. You know, one of the findings that we have with some of our teacher surveys across all of our school district work is that we find – we have two sets of questions where we ask teachers, you know – you know, what's your level of confidence that you can reach your hardest to reach students?

And they're off the charts with confidence, right? But then we ask them a question later on in the survey around what's your expectation of how far low-performing, mid-performing and high-performing kids are going and what disturbs me is that the low performing kids, which are their hardest-to-reach students, they don't see them going as far as high school.

And what's most doubly disturbing for me is that I look specifically at the elementary level teachers because already they're able to designate that their low performing kids don't have the capacity and don't expect them to actually end up that far.

So I think an element of expectations work as part of teacher prep – that is very targeted. And part of it is the exposure that teachers need to the types of communities that they're going to be walking into. And you know, so as part of teacher prep.

MS. ELLIS: They're going to kick us out of this room soon. So I'm – I'm going to take questions from the audience. But we're going to have to keep them brief as the responses brief. Yes?

Q: Well, I didn't even get a chance to ask a question last year, so I got up here first. Julie Woestehoff; I'm with Parents United for Responsible Education in Chicago. And I'm so glad that you mentioned bad data because I wanted to raise one issue of the explosion of high-stakes standardized tests in this country and how critical it is that we address that.

I'm here because African-American students in Chicago are being flunked in disproportionate numbers based on their standardized test scores. This has been going on for 15 years, even though the research shows that it doesn't work.

So let me give you a takeaway. I'm with a new group Parents Across America –

MS. ELLIS: Please give me a question. I need you to give me a question.

Q: I'm with a new group called Parents Across America. Take a look at our website; [ParentsAcrossAmerica.org](http://ParentsAcrossAmerica.org). And also sign and urge your local school boards to sign the new national resolution on high stakes testing. And I would like to ask the panelists if they would work together on bringing the national conversation about standardized testing and racism, because there is a divide in the civil rights community and among many communities about the value of those tests. And with the dangers that are implicit in them, it's very serious.

MS. ELLIS: Thank you.

MS. WILKINS: I think I'm going to disagree with you. There was not a lot of talk about high-stakes testing and the damage that high-stakes testing does until there were stakes for adults. There – you know, the tests that kids are taking now (serve to raise grades ?) – zero! – zero stakes for the kids.

You know, when I grew up in New York State and had to take the Regents – you know, I was wetting my bed, breaking out – it was – there was a lot of stress for students around the Regents. There are a lot – there's a lot of stress around some of these high school graduation exams.

Nobody really cared that students were having a hard time with these. As soon as we began to judge schools, and adults, based on test results – that all of a sudden high-stakes exams were terrible, terrible things. You know, without the data – I am quite serious about – without the data that we now get from these state-wide – because they are the only way you can compare across districts, and which kids are getting what in what district, and school-to-school – we have no evidence of what our kids are getting and what they're not getting; who is learning and who is not learning.

And it goes back to something that that panel was saying before. You know, there are a lot of people who not only want – who – there's some people who want to get rid of the test; there's some people who want to get rid of the subgroups, you know, because we're all the same, we're all the same –

That data from those tests, while not perfect, is the only evidence we have to push back a bit against school systems where they say, no, your kids are doing just fine; they're doing just fine. We need those tests. We can have a different conversation about tests with stakes for students. But we need to have assessments that have stakes for the adults who are running these systems.

Q: OK.

MS. ELLIS: Do you feel compelled, or should we take another question?

Q: Yes. My name is Patrick Gusman, and I work in a technology-based, sector-based nonprofit called ConvergeUS. My question is the following. A lot of – and first of all, I want to congratulate you; I never hear this type of discussion in the technology sector meetings that I attend.

But my specific question is: Technology-sector tools, now, they're pointing toward online things such as Khan Academy, and all of these online tools as being the great equalizers. What are you seeing in terms of your work as – what can the technology sector do for great equalizers, and are these tools some things that we should be pushing out to minority parents?

MS. ELLIS: Lisa, you want to start?

MS. DELPIT: Yes. (Laughter.)

MR. FERGUS (?): Part of the – go ahead.

MS. DELPIT: I'll – I wouldn't call it the great equalizer, but I would say, yes, parents need to be aware of it. And we might want to get them some computers, as well.

Q: (Off mic.)

MS. DELPIT: Right.

MR. FERGUS: Right; yeah. I think that's the – the infrastructure isn't necessarily there in low-income communities to allow for this proliferation of technology that we want to see – that I'm sure many of you have access to. I know I'm constantly on something, right? But it's also about having the level of access within the communities that need it.

MS. WILKINS: But I think we got to be careful here because there's a lot of – there's a lot of online stuff that is weak tea – is I guess what my grandmother would say, right? And we – you know, whatever happens to us – in is that there is something out there and our communities get it – but we get the, like, the low-grade version of it. And so we have to ensure, again – you know, this is –

The kids who need – we've got to create systems that give the kids who need the most the most. And if we just sort of leave it to a market, the market has never treated our kids right.

So yeah, we need access for our communities to this, but there has to be some sort of market intervention; there has to be some mediator to ensure that what we get is as good or better than what other communities are getting.

MS. ELLIS: You question?

Q: I don't have a question, just a quick comment. Ms. Ellis; like you, I gave up on writing notes because this panel was so great I was afraid I was going to miss something. (Laughter.)

But I live here in New Orleans, born and raised here and working on the education front for 20 years, pre- and post-Katrina. And the reason why so many people were hung out, left to die, was because of the effects of the educational system.

I just want to say that if we don't get the parents engaged and connected and have ownership of the system, we can have the best teachers in the classroom. That's that cultural thing that you were talking about. So because a lot of parents had bad experiences in schools and schools are not positive places for them; but yet they are the biggest influencers over the children and the culture. And whether education is a priority, we all have to work daily to help those parents reinforce that education is the only way. Thank you.

MS. ELLIS: Thank you for your comment. And I know we had been talking earlier about even if the parent is not engaged, it is not an excuse to say it's OK for our children to fail. And your point is so well taken. Sir, your question?

Q: Yes, the conference began with Mitch Landrieu saying that were no witnesses when so many black boys were killed. Harry Belafonte spoke yesterday about where's the assignment, you know, where is everybody. I was at Xavier University yesterday afternoon with brilliant young women who didn't even know who Harry Belafonte was, OK?

So the question really – and of course we tend to travel in tribes. That's why people on the panel know each other and know the literature, et cetera. We need to figure out a way to reach out to a larger group of people to mobilize them to register to vote, to do all the other things that we're saying.

I'm so curious – from the panel, can you give us some more success stories of either historically or currently where we found a way to sustain the engagement of everyday people; to say, this has got to stop.

MR. FERGUS: I just – you know, I can give a quick note. One of the school districts we're working with right now in Denver, they – it's a Latino community that actually mobilized themselves because they saw that the school district was at the point of needing to close the high school, one of the high schools in their area.

And they mobilized to the degree to which to say, no, we're going to dictate what happens, whether it closes and what comes up afterwards. And it was fascinating to kind of hear their story, because now we're working with that community and the schools that are in that region – that they mobilize themselves; they armed themselves with the type of information that is necessary. So your point around sort of we travel in tribes, you're right.

We do kind of travel in tribes. But also we try to travel in tribes to work with other tribes, you know, to make sure that there is – you know, I know within, you know, academia. You know, I don't like talking to academics, right, because we all speak the same stuff and I don't need a conversation to pontificate. I need action.

And what I loved about this group is that they paid attention to knowing what the information they needed to have to arm themselves to make decisions around closing the school, which they did. As a community, they made the decision, yeah, we want to close the high school.

But in its place, we want three different academies opened up and they interviewed the candidates for the principalship and as well as the type of academy setup that's going on there. So I think there is great promise I see in various communities where the community actually takes that on. But it's not commonplace. And that's my only concern.

MS. WILKINS: There's one nice story about engagement that I adore more than any almost. In California, there is something called the "A to G Curriculum," which is the college preparatory curriculum – you know, sort of the – what the smart kids get. And there was legislation in the state legislature to make the "A to G Curriculum" mandatory in all California schools.

And that was defeated, and that was a tragedy. But what began to happen after the legislation was defeated was high school kids themselves – black and Latino high school kids themselves in various districts around California began to organize and say, this is what we want. And when you have – you know, when you have high school students stand up and say, work me harder – it was very, very powerful.

So I think as we begin to talk about how we organize around education issues, one of the real important voices that we can't forget to have in that conversation and in that mobilization are the students themselves.

MS. DELPIT: You know this better than I do, but the Algebra Project, particularly in – all over the country but in Baltimore, where the kids actually went down to the State Department and sued the State – I'm sorry, did a citizens' arrest of the state superintendent for endangering the lives of minors – (chuckles) – and various other things. But I think there are some programs like that, certainly in New Orleans and other places.

I was in – when I worked in Alaska, in one of the villages, they just took their kids out of the school and said we're going to homeschool all of them. (Chuckles.) And the school immediately had to figure out some other option because there's only one school in each village. So they had to figure out how to talk to parents and change it because otherwise none of those – the school would have had to close.

And the third thing I just wanted to say is I am concerned about the tribe issue – particularly for academics – that have recently – well, not recently, but for a long time said that we should not – black people and people of color should not be able to get a doctorate unless they can write their dissertation in a form suitable for Jet Magazine. (Chuckles.) If you can do that, then you're reaching the people that you need to reach.

MS. ELLIS: Again, we are very limited on time here. They are going to kick us out of here. So quick questions, and quick responses.

Q: I'll be quick. First, just a quick thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And specifically, Amy, if you could just talk about the things that you said took place at the two schools you mentioned – one of them was in New York – where they made – you said the – you know, the folks in leadership decided that the children could do more. So if you could just speak specifically to that.

And then just also, if other folks on the panel can speak to examples where young people in fact were at the center to your, you know, final point about the need to have young people's voices as a part of the conversation, when we talk about the improvements that need to happen in

school and in curriculum. If you can give examples to where in your experiences you've seen young people be at the center of those conversations and decision-making. Thank you.

MS. WILKINS: You know – there are a couple of things. And there is a book that – there are two books that my colleague Karen Chenoweth has written about these schools. One is called “It’s Being Done” and the other is called “How It’s Being Done.” And so if you really want the stories of these schools, you will find those – the two schools I mentioned and many others. And Karen really does go inside and take it apart. But I think a couple examples of how they do it are real important.

One is that there is very strong leadership in all of these schools. And it is leadership that believes in its kids and believes in its teachers. And it is a very – they are a very supportive environment. And it is a – and they focus relentlessly on what they can do, not what they can’t do. They don’t sit around saying, the kids are poor, they come from single parent homes. They talk about those things that they can control. For example, you know, I have seen too many teachers and have been in too many schools where they say, well, the kids don’t know the vocabulary.

Well then dammit, teach the vocabulary, right? I mean, you know, they say, well, you know, these kids come to school and they don’t have – you know, they’ve all read the Hart and Risley research and they don’t have as many words. Well, teach them the words. And be very intentional about teaching the vocabulary if there are vocabulary issues that will come up in a science unit, teach the vocabulary before you move into the science unit.

So that’s one of the things that these schools are quite, quite intentional about doing, is recognizing if they don’t do it, it’s our job – you know, if the kids don’t bring it, it’s our job to teach it. And so then – and lastly, supporting the teachers while they do it, recognizing that the teachers need strong support is also key.

Q: So I’m the founder of the California Alliance of African-American Educators. Hi, Lisa, and –

MS. ELLIS: So you all know each other.

Q: Yeah, we do; we try. But so I wanted to say to – and I love the Ed Trust’s work. I use it in our work all the time. But “A to G” is an issue for us in California because there’s no infrastructure to ensure the kids can access it. So we’re good with “A to G” as long as kids can get to it. So segregation, again, so there is – to the brother’s point over here – a national black education agenda summit that we’re convening.

Actually, I’m leaving here on Friday to go to Atlanta for the planning of it. But it’ll be in Chicago, October 11th through the 13th. But it’s an invitation-only. We’re taking our schools back because we feel that there was a lot of good stuff that happened. And I’m a child of the completely integrated Southern California – all white teachers from K to 12.

But I understand that there was a lot of value in segregated schools and that a lot was lost in integration. So we're just – we're not saying, you know, resegregate our schools. We're just saying bring back the days of yay and nay, you know?

MS. ELLIS: The truth of the matter is our schools are already segregated.

Q: Yeah, they are.

MS. ELLIS: You know, I mean, it's de facto segregation.

Q: Exactly. That's our point. That's our point. And the black teachers are just as responsible for ill-performing schools as the next person. So don't leave them off.

MS. ELLIS: Yeah.

Q: But anyway, my question had to do with alternative assessments. And you mentioned – see, we have issues around high stakes testing too, that lady – wherever she went – from Chicago. So my question is, OK, what about alternative assessments?

You know, because I agree with you that one of the positives of No Child Left Behind – the one positive we can think of, is that it did make them disaggregate the data around subgroups. And so the high-performing Palo Alto high school; you looked at the subgroups, they were low performing, right?

So I'm just saying alternative assessments because, see, you know, we're African people and the assessments that are Eurocentric that they put up on our kids don't always work with our kids. So what about alternative assessments – but we still find, you know, those subgroups and the gaps, but it's not a Eurocentric paradigm.

MS. DELPIT: Deb, I just want to say that as you know, there are schools – and Carry Secret comes to mind – that our children are excelling on these tests. So the question is: Is it the test or is it the instruction? And I would say it's the instruction.

And the other problem that's happening is that where the schools and principals and teachers view doing better on the test as teaching solely to the test – that's when you have the poorest performance.

In the schools that are the most successful for African-American children in terms of these tests, teachers are not teaching to the test but are indeed teaching extremely rich, extremely rigorous material. And I believe that's what we need to focus on.

MS. ELLIS: Can I say this too; just quickly. I work in a big old corporation with a peacock. There's no alternative assessment of whether you can write a simple declarative sentence. And so I just say that coming from a corporate world, they are – people are assessed on a lot of different things. But a simple declarative sentence is a simple declarative sentence.

And the subject matter can vary, absolutely. But I think we should think about the world we are sending our children into and whether that world is yet ready to do an alternative –

Q: (Off mic.)

MS. ELLIS: And I hope you share it with corporations around the country, because they're not reading it. They're assessing children and they're assessing prospective employees one way. But and that doesn't – I'm not saying that there's not a racial component to that. But words are the structure that drive the engine where I work. And it doesn't matter what color you are. You've got to be able to write a simple declarative sentence.

MS. DELPIT: Well too, I think the alternative assessment does not indicate that it's less rigorous.

Q: Right.

MS. DELPIT: It's done differently. And I appreciate – I understand and appreciate it. But I also want our kids to be able to – and for the teachers to understand that we can get the – even for – even like we've had to deal with America in a racist society – we can do well on these tests. I want – you know, even if they are biased.

MR. FERGUS: I just wanted – just one quick point around the segregation – you know, is that I can appreciate your comment but I think we need to add to the water stream of conversation academic segregation – not simply sort of, yeah, because segregation is well maintained and it hasn't very much deviated. But I think there has been a great deal of deviation and intensification around academic segregation as it happens within school districts, and particularly urban districts.

MS. WILKINS: Within school buildings.

MR. FERGUS: And buildings, yes.

MS. ELLIS: Your question, quickly?

Q: Yeah, actually I completely disagree with the previous person. And I don't know you, so sorry about that. But my question – I've been waiting until the end because I was actually hoping that someone was going to talk about the role of school segregation. I think that we cannot talk about equality in education without addressing that. And there have been, like, a million reports linking zoning regulations to residential segregation, school segregation.

The levels are incredibly high. It's not getting better. For Latino students, it's getting worse. And yeah, I recognize the tracking issues within schools, and everyone did a great job about addressing things within schools, within districts, even within classrooms. But in addition to that, I think that's also consistent with the effort of the foundation.

We talk about structural-based system in relation to healing as being a two-way thing. And here, I think I heard primarily strategies around healing within institutions that are really segregated because of larger structural reservations.

So I was wondering if anyone can speak to the value that they see in a desegregation agenda – and just as an additional piece of information, I’m a member of the advisory board to the National Coalition on School Diversity, led by PRAC, which is an anchor institution of the foundation.

So I think that not only in terms of putting this on the table, but also in terms of understanding the effort that we collectively are making to try to address this issue. There are the structural people, the desegregation people. There are you guys. We have to find a bridge, I think. Otherwise it becomes very non-productive.

MS. DELPIT: I’m a little confused at the question.

MS. ELLIS: I’m not sure I know what the question is either.

Q: The question is why didn’t anyone talk about school segregation being a main agent for maintaining inequality. The reason that we have schools with very high poverty rates, very low scores for minority students and low-income students is because our schools are incredibly segregated by race and income, which – (inaudible) – on segregation. And I don’t want to engage in the academic debate citing the 10 million papers they have demonstrating all these different pathways.

But I think to talk about within something – district, school, classroom solutions is important. But without the structural reasons being addressed, it’s like this morning when we talked about the issue about voter suppression. And we were talking about the map. It’s those policies –

MS. ELLIS: So you’re talking about zoning segregation?

Q: Which is – zoning is related to housing segregation which is linked to school segregation.

MS. ELLIS: Right.

Q: And the root of a lot of the disparities that we are seeing is school segregation. So how do we talk about all the issues that you put on the table, which are incredibly important. And I deal, you know, on a daily basis with them as a mother of two children. How do we deal with that but also address the structural issues?

MR. FERGUS: I think you’re right. I think there – I don’t think the absence of the segregation point means that it’s not in the forefront of our thoughts or conversation. I think it’s also sort of a recognition that there is – as you mentioned, there is a direct correlation between where you’re living, where you’re sending your kids. You know, as – so the healing part on the

education side is that education can't work alone on the segregation part. They have to work with housing community.

They have to work with, you know, community-based organizations who (sic) are also attentive to the degree to which we're trying to make such movement. Now, on the flipside, you know, I also pay attention to the reality of what's been our history in trying to legislate the degree to which people can integrate.

And so I'm – you know, I'll just say I'm cautious in terms of how we expend our energy within that work, and – but at the same time try to do some of this within schools, within district work to make sure that our kids don't lose traction along the way.

MS. WILKINS: I guess I would say two things. One is an Ed Trust opinion. The other is a total Amy Wilkins opinion, and you should not hold the Ed Trust accountable for it. But the Ed Trust opinion is, as we look at heterogeneous schools, what you see is just because you go to school with the white kids doesn't mean you're in the same school; that there are very often two different schools operating under the same roof.

So just getting our kids under the same roof doesn't get us very far in terms of resources. The other thing to me – and this is the Amy Wilkins opinion. Do not hold the Ed Trust accountable for this. You know, my job while I was in college – I worked while I was in college.

I worked for Dr. Clark, Kenneth Clark – you know, the doll man, right? Yeah, he was my boss for four years when I was in college. And you know, he and I fought all the time – I mean, had big fights all of the time because I didn't understand the “doll test.” I still don't understand the “doll test.” If I think the black doll is ugly, right, how is telling me the only way I can get a good school is to go to school and sit with the white children?

Right? I mean, you know, I am really – this is me personally tired of saying the only way I can get good stuff or my kids can get good stuff is to go be where the white people are. And so I'm just bored of that conversation. And besides, they run away from me all the time. So it's like, you know, like – (laughter) – let's just be where we are and make it good for us. I mean, OK, that was me, not the Ed Trust. (Laughter.)

AUDIENCE: Amen, Amy.

MS. DELPIT: The reason why – one reason why integration came up during the Civil Rights movement was not of course just to be with white children. But I think it relates to what you – maybe what you're raising is that the resources – if you can segregate children, then you can give less resources to certain children.

And that's the piece that we really need to look at – at the resources. What we found out as a result of the Civil Rights integration struggle is that even when you have integration, they still find ways to give less resources to the black children, some of which by the white children run away, as you point out, or the white parents run away.

And secondly, they put them, as Amy indicated, in differentiated classrooms. So that even if they're in the same building, you're going to get the children of color in classrooms that have less resources. And it is –

AUDIENCE: And worse teachers.

MS. DELPIT: And worse teaches, yeah. And that's why I think we're talking about let us focus on the school and what's going on there and improving what's happening in there for our kids rather than spend a lot of the energy in trying to get people just under the same roof.

MS. ELLIS: OK, last question?

Q: OK, very quickly; I'm Phoebe Ferguson with the Plessy and Ferguson Foundation. I just got back from Washington last month where there was a very little publicized – supposed to be a media release by Mary Landrieu and New Schools for New Orleans, rolling out a plan for a guide to cities – a guide to cities rolled out by Mary Landrieu and News Schools for New Orleans to give the rest of the country the rubric for creating a hundred-percent charter district.

So anyway, it was – the presentation was – the data was completely skewed, as you can imagine. But I encourage you to download that report at the New Schools for New Orleans website because there is a sentence in there that says, by the way, we also want to start universities to educate, basically, Teach for America teachers.

And the first university they've listed is called Relay University, which I looked up. Yeah, it's open – and you know, if you look at the sponsors, it's Kipp and Broad and Gates.

My question is I can't – I'm trying to figure out where are the universities with the major education programs like NYU, Stanford and Columbia, on the issue of, you know, promoting a history of educating our educators with education theory – not just practicum – and lesson plans, which is actually what they say in the proposal.

MS. ELLIS: So let me – quickly, is the question is how are universities teaching our teachers?

Q: No, the question is where are universities on the issue of not educating future teachers?

MS. ELLIS: OK.

Q: Why aren't they fighting for educating our teachers in a -- yeah, I'm not a technical. I'm not a teacher and I'm not an educator. So you have to excuse me.

MS. ELLIS: OK, Eduardo, you're at NYU. Just very quickly, this last point?

MR. FERGUS: Yeah, there is a tension in terms of making sure that within the confines of teacher prep that universities do take a stand and understand in saying that, yeah, we are the leaders in terms of what it means to teach teachers. We have a methodology in terms of that. Now, the degree to which it's good enough, given the context of what's happening to our kids, I think that's – there needs to be a lot more work around that.

But there has been particularly – and I'm glad you mentioned AERA because – the American Educational Research Association. If you go to their website you will see that they have done some position papers around this point in terms of what does it mean to teach our future teachers.

MS. ELLIS: Thank you all very much. Two things I want to say to you real quick. I feel hopeful about all of this because one of the folks who's been teaching a lot of our kids things is a rapper whose name is Jay-Z. He just recently said he will no longer call women the b-word because he now has a little girl.

That is positive. Whether you are angry about the way he comes to his decision or not is almost irrelevant. The point is he has come to it, and it's teaching. It can be instructive. The other thing is that you have a lot of power – and to think about what Martin Luther King said when he said that power without love is reckless and abusive. Think about Bernie Madoff. Think about teachers who don't teach.

It's reckless and abusive. But also love without power, without exercising your power to influence your schools, it's sentimental and anemic. So I hope you'll exercise your power to do what you can to get over these racial barriers in education. Thank you, and thank you to our panelists. (Applause.)

(END)