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FALK AUDITORIUM

BEYOND READING AND MATH:  
HOW TO ACCELERATE SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS

A HAMILTON PROJECT AND  
GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE POLICY FORUM

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

MR. GAYER: Good afternoon everyone. In case you're a little confused, I am most definitely not Bob Rubin. Bob was meant to introduce this event but he is in New York for the memorial service of his friend and colleague Pete Peterson. He sends his regrets and he asked that I fill in for him today. So, I am Ted Gayer. I am the executive Vice President here at Brookings. I also have the pleasure of serving on the advisory council of the Hamilton Project. And just as in a side, I'm noticing a bit of a trend four years ago today, well not today about three years ago, I was standing up here filling in for Larry Summers because he was attending the memorial service of one of his friends, so, apparently there's a market for being a stand-in for former treasury secretaries while they attend funerals. I worked for Hank Paul Sidney; he's yet to call but you know who knows. Nonetheless, it's my pleasure to welcome you all today to our forum on Beyond Reading and Math: How to accelerate student success, which is co-hosted by

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the Hamilton Project and the George W. Bush Institute. Access to quality education is a key contributor for positive economic outcomes. It increases human capital and productivity leading to improved living standards. Today's event is on the important issue of chronic absenteeism. There are 6.8 million students in the U.S. who are chronically absent each year, meaning they have 15 or more absences during the school year, and who have worse outcomes across a range of educational metrics including a higher drop-out rate. I was reading an article by a Washington Post reporter, Patula Devoray just the other day on the current state of D.C. Public School system, which has had some recent controversy. The first few lines said it much better than certainly an economist like me can say it, and so, I'll quote her. "The building blocks of a prosperous and healthy society are pretty simple; education, education, and education. And on this front our society is in peril." In a new Hamilton Project paper released today; the author is Jay Shambaugh, Lauren Bauer and Patrick Liu of

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Brookings, along with, Diane Schanzenbach of Northwestern University; described evidence based strategies for schools to consider implementing as they work to reduce rates of chronic absents among students. This paper follows work by Dan and Lauren that the Hamilton Project published in 2016, recommending that chronic absenteeism be adopted as a key school accountability measure. We look forward to exploring this issue today; both chronic absenteeism and the more broadly school accountability during our discussion. I should add personally I served both in the council of economic advisors and the treasury department during the George W. Bush administration so I'm particularly enthusiastic about the partnership we have here today between the Hamilton Project and the George W. Bush Institute. The school accountability was an important issue during the Bush Administration; it continues to be an important issue for the Bush Institute. I'm thrilled to have their voice here today on such an important issue and I'm delighted that Holly Kuzmich , Executive Director at the George

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W. Bush Institute has joined us for today's event. Last year here at Brookings we hosted education secretary Betsy DeVoss for a public forum. Today it's our pleasure to welcome a key member of her team, Jason Botel; who is one is way I've been told, along with all of our distinguished panelists and moderators this afternoon. I will not recite all of their impressive resumes, since you should have them with you in your programs. I'll just express, on behalf of myself and on Brookings, my gratitude for all of them for joining us today. So with that, I'm going to turn the lecture over to my colleague Jay Shambaugh to start the session, although I'm signaling -- am I turning it over to the right person? I'm going to turn it over to somebody of authority. Oh, Jason is here, oh, terrific. Jason Botel, thank you very much.

MR. BOTEL: Good afternoon everyone. Sorry for the uncertainty there; been some schedule changes, but, very happy to be here. I'm very happy to see you all so thank you very much for having me. It's definitely an honor to be with you all today. I want

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to start by applauding the teams from Brookings Hamilton Project and the Bush Institute for convening this important conversation and for your research and resources to support new and deeper approaches to accountability, including two new tools released today. I'm especially grateful to the state and local practitioners on the panel and in the room. I want to thank everyone here for being thought leaders and committed partners in the most important work of our time; preparing every student in America from every background and circumstance for success in the 21st century. So much of the future of our country; how prosperous we will be, how secure we will be, how much access to opportunity every American will have depends on this work. A few weeks back, secretary DeVos joined her predecessors and other distinguished speakers at the Reagan Institute summit on education. The summit's purpose was to assess our progress from the 35th anniversary of the release of the seminal report; the nation at risk. To be sure the assembled researcher, practitioners and policy makers could

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point to some promising programs and practices. But as secretary DeVoss emphasized, the conclusion was clear. For all the urgency that the report generated, the billions of dollars invested and decades of well-meaning national forms, our country is still very much at risk, and that's a sobering message. But from my experience at the local level, it's not a surprise. Real significance gains for American students require commitment and courage at every level, especially state and local levels. Though happened through student center solutions rooted in the unique needs and strengths of schools and communities and designed by the people who live, learn and work in those communities. That conviction is why I joined secretary DeVoss at the U.S. Department of Education; to empower state and local innovation so that every student can succeed. Secretary DeVoss is challenging us to fundamentally rethink school. Rethink means we question everything so nothing keeps student from pursuing and achieving their goals. So each student is prepared at every turn for success in their

education, careers and life. I believe now is our best chance in decades to unleash innovation and hold ourselves accountable for actions that dramatically improve outcomes for our students. In passing the every student act; ESSA; congress made clear that the U.S. Department of Education does not control how states district schools and educators ensure that every student succeeds. Every state community and educator needs a tailored instruction to meet the unique needs of every student. All students need learning environments that are agile, relevant and exciting. And every student deserves a customized self-paced and challenging life-long learning journey. To that end, ESSA invites each state to determine what type of support to provide schools that are struggling and how to allocate resources to ensure that every school improves. ESSA also empowers the U.S. Department of Education to help states explore accountability. Like an innovative assessment pilot, which allow states to field test new assessments with subsets for students without double-testing them. At

the department we look forward to working with Louisiana, New Hampshire and Puerto Rico on their recent applications to participate in this program. Moreover, just as we're empowering states to innovate, states must empower local innovations and districts must empower innovations within their schools and among their educators. When teachers and principals have the power to personalize instruction to meet student's individual needs, every student can succeed. I've spent most of my waking hours over the past year overseeing the review of state ESSA plans. The development and communication of peer and department feedback about those plans and recommendations to secretary DeVoss to improve plans once they have met all statutory and regulatory requirements. So far she's approved 39 of 52 plans including those from District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. We're working with the remaining 30 states who requested additional time to revise their plans. And we'll approve them as soon as we have determined that they met all statutory and regulatory requirements. In the end, the crucial

test of these shared efforts will be this. Do student outcomes improve for every student? ESSA, as compared to its predecessor and COB, offers far greater latitude for state accountability systems to incorporate more than test scores. Each state is required to develop long term goals and measurement of interim progress for academic achievement, graduation rates and the progress of English learners entering English language proficiently. Each state must also set goals for all student sub-groups required by the law. In addition, each state must have at least one indicator of school quality or student success. States have broad discretion in developing these indicators which must be comparable, statewide, valid, reliable and able to be disaggregated for each sub-group. I've had to repeat those words many, many times. And as states innovate, which is great, we've worked really hard to make sure that each of these new indicators meets all of those; comparable, statewide, valid, reliable and able to be disaggregated for each sub-group. At the same time,

we believe these plans are not a ceiling but a floor. We hope that many states will over time go far beyond the fundamentals of the law in support of students. As everyone in the room knows, while these terms can sound dry and analytical, they help to describe education's impact on real students' lives. I appreciate the Bush Institute's series of interviews with education leaders on accountability, fitfully titled the A word, and I have some, a couple of quotes from we've seen there. Here's what Denver Public Schools superintendent, Tom Boseberg had to say. "You can't have student's first integrity or equity without accountability" and I agree. If you can't have students first in all we do; we don't have real accountability. The theme of today's session is accountability beyond math and that's appropriate; giving ESSA's focus on expanded measures. Still, let's agree at the start that reading and math are and must remain fundamental. The law keeps that balance right, requiring that the four academic indicators receive substantial weight individually and much

greater weight in the aggregate than the school quality success indicators. That's important because according to the recently released 2017 national assessment of educational progress; our reading and math scores continue to stagnate, unfortunately. And it's especially troubling that the gap between the highness and lowest performance students is widening according to those results. So we can't take our eyes off the ball on reading and math. New accountability measures can't be an either or proposition. We need strong focus on reading and math and additional indicators. I learned the hard way as a school leader that when you only look at reading and math you lose sight of other important measures of how well students are being prepared for success. When it comes to the school quality and student success indicators, many states are adopting chronic absenteeism. And I really appreciate that the Hamilton Project's new strategy paper addresses the possible strengths of using this as an indicator and also includes some important cautions in using chronic absenteeism as an indicator.

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Some states are looking at proficiently or growth in science or social studies in addition to the required academic achievement indicator for reading and math. And many have chosen to include indicators for college career readiness. In our review of state plans, we've seen some include specific measures, such as, access to or performance on advanced course work, like, advanced placement, international baccalaureate or during roman options. Others like Delaware and North Dakota have chosen to development more comprehensive approaches that include multiple pathways for students to demonstrate that they are college career or Military ready using tools like the ACT, SAT or Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. Still others are looking at participation in career program. Like those that lead to career and technical certifications or internship placements. A few states such as Connecticut and Michigan have also chosen to include post-secondary readiness indicators as measured by enrollment or course completion data. It's helpful that today the Bush Institute is issuing a college and

career readiness spotlight with analysis, case studies and insights from a wide range of experts. Because in the end the true test of accountability is how we use the indicators to improve the educational opportunities we offer students. In her A word interview, Diane Tavener , CEO of the Summit Public Schools Charter Management Organization explained, "students need to be prepared to live lives of meaning and purpose. So we look at the skills, habits and behaviors they need to be successful in college and beyond our schools. Then we hold ourselves accountable by designing tools that help kids get those skills. Providing teachers and school leaders with the training they need to enable those conditions. And measuring everything along the way to ensure our students are on the trajectory that we want them to be on." So the hard work of implementation; translating plans into action lies ahead. It would be exciting to see how these new indicators help states and districts focus on schools most in need of support and how those efforts translate into stronger more



positive school climates in improved student achievement. This is an unprecedented opportunity to move decision making as close to students as possible and to empower parents and educators. So here's my challenge to the researchers in the room. Please help us identify the most sound indicators and develop the best data systems to measure them. Help students, districts and educators measure what matters and translate what we know into better results for kids. And to the practitioners in the room, we encourage you to be innovative and bold. You'll never succeed by making minor changes in struggling schools and hoping for better outcomes. So please don't rest until each of your students is learning in the environment that's best for her or him. We need to strike the balance Dr. Danny King from the Far San Juan Alamo School district in Texas had described. Accountability, he says, calls for patient and patience. So, let's be patient in designing and continuously improving accountability systems that help us deliver for students and families. And let's be impatient in

driving innovation and accelerating achievement; our kids and our country can't wait. So now is the time to rethink and to give innovation everything we've got at every school in support of every student success. And here's my hope. That the provision in ESSA and states in community's greater freedom to innovate launch a new era of accountability and progress. As that happens we'll gain unprecedented insights into our students needs and how best to meet them. And we can tailor our responses, personalize teaching and learning and accelerate student achievement like never before, then hopefully, we'll no longer be a nation at risk, we'll be a nation on the rise. Thank you very much for all that you all do. I really appreciate it and I look forward to hear what comes out of your conversations.

MR. SHAMBAUGH: Good afternoon, I'm Jay Shambaugh, the Director of the Hamilton Project and I'm going to be sharing with you a little bit of research. Some of you may have gotten the hand-out of the recent paper that we just released this morning on

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chronic absenteeism, and so, we're going to talk a little bit about that research now. We're going to start by playing a video, actually, that Lauren Bauer who's a fellow at the Hamilton Project and who is one of the co-author's on the paper that we just released, is going to demonstrate a lot about chronic absenteeism with Jenga, so we'll start by playing that.

MS. BAUER: My name is Lauren Bauer and I'm a scholar with the Hamilton Project at Brookings. Every morning millions of families start their day with a routine like mine; make breakfast, pack lunches, drop the kids off at school, go to work. Every day millions of students across America are in school learning, but, every year millions of students miss a lot of school. These absences are represented by the red blocks. In the 2013 school year, about 6.8 million students were chronically absent; meaning they missed more than three weeks of school. Being chronically absent is associated with a lot of poor outcomes, like lower student achievement and lower

course performance. High absence rates, the holes that chronically absent students leave behind affects students with good attendance too. If a teacher waits to introduce new material until more students are present; all students fall behind. When an absent student is in school, a teacher may use class time to bring them up to speed. Evidence suggests this reduces math achievements among students with better attendance. You might think that chronic absenteeism is mostly a problem among high school students with unexcused absences, but, that's not the whole story. Among elementary school students; kindergartners have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism. Students who are chronically absent in kindergarten are less likely to be proficient in reading and math in third grade. Chronic absenteeism gets worse every year from sixth grade to 12th grade. Students who are chronically absent in Middle School and at the end of high school are more likely to drop out of school entirely. A sad that's associated with a lifetime of poor economic outcomes. What can we do about chronic

absenteeism? Under the every student succeeds act, no child left behinds replacement. Thirty-six states and D.C. will be holding schools accountability for reducing rates of chronic absenteeism. In the new Hamilton Project strategy paper, we discussed some of the evidence based strategies that work. School based mentors who track chronic absenteeism and work with parent and students on improving attendance reduces chronic absenteeism. Classroom teachers who visit students homes and text with parents about attendance, helps reduce chronic absenteeism. Even just sending mailings home with good information about attendance reduces chronic absenteeism and gets students back on track. As parents we can make sure our kids are in school every day.

MR. SHAMBAUGH: Great, so, thanks to Lauren and, hey great, thanks to Lauren and to Melanie Golarski who and Carolyn Kemp who will help get this together. So now I'm going to talk about some more topics without Jenga which is probably less interesting. So, as many of you know through, in the

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Every Student Succeeds Act, states are required to put in place one other indicator; a school quality of student success indicator and, as mentioned before, a large chunk of states; 36 states and D.C. and Puerto Rico have included chronic absenteeism as part of that measure; either the entire measure or part of the measure. And chronic absenteeism, we're describing; and it's usually described as students missing three weeks of school, so, this is not the occasional absence or being sick or a short vacation; this is missing a substantial chunk of school. States have taken very different routes. The ones that have included chronic absenteeism, some it's a small portion of a more complicated indicator. In some cases it may be really the only fifth indicator that's been added and states have a wide set of goals around this. But in some cases, the important cohesion to all this is that they're paying some attention to the question of are a substantial chunk of students missing a lot of school and we want to talk a little bit about what that looks like in the data. Before we

do, just to reiterate some of the things that Lauren mentioned in the video is that chronic absenteeism matters and I think one of reasons that this is important is when people worry about additional indicators you sometimes worry or are you pulling attention away from things that may matter more. I think one of the reasons that people may think chronic absenteeism can be a useful measure of student success is that if you're chronically absent, you wind up having much lower academic outcomes in other ways. Attendance is correlated with academic outcomes. Chronically absent students fall behind in English and other test scores, poor attendance predicts dropping out before graduation and across a wide range of measures; school with low chronic absenteeism wind up scoring better in a number of ways. So by focusing on getting kids in school, that's something that should be helping schools across a wide range of indicators as well. And that last set of facts comes from an earlier, as Ted mentioned, this started from an earlier Hamilton Project paper when Diane

Schanzenbach, the former director at Hamilton Project and Lauren put out a bunch of evidence on why chronic absenteeism might be a sensible fit indicator. Attendance problems are really pervasive so this is actually data if you're flipping through the paper, this may look slightly different because they updated the data yesterday and so the team ran very quickly and made a new figure here. And what we see here is we're looking at the chronic absenteeism rate in schools. And one of the really stressing things is that almost no school has no one who is chronically absent. But even more than that, you're dealing with 58 percent of schools had at least 10 percent of their students chronically absent. So this is not a problem at a small chunk of schools or in a few different types of geographies, this is across a wide range of schools that we're seeing a lot of students who are chronically absent. We can look at this slightly differently. This is data from New Jersey and this is kind of fitting schools into high down to low chronic absenteeism rates and so the kind of wrench bars on



part of the bars over on your right are the students who are chronic absent. If you kind of look at the medium set of schools; a typical school in New Jersey, you're dealing with where they've got around 15 percent of their students are chronically absent. But even more than that, that next kind of brighter orange bar, are students who are missing 11 to 15 days. And so those are students who might think of as at risk of becoming chronically absent as well. And when you add those two groups up, you're dealing with almost a third of their students. And so, this is a problem that's really a wide-spread one. If we think about who's chronically absent, taking different data coming where the reporting is coming from the parents and so frankly all the absence reporting is a little lower in those cases. There are two things that stand out; one is poverty and one is health, and frankly the interaction of the two is really important as well. And so you can see in the green bar it's showing you what the chronic absenteeism rates are across a wide range of health conditions and they're all notably

higher than the students with no health limitations all the way on the right. But then within each set of bars, you can see that in almost every one, poorer students are likely to have chronic absenteeism rates higher than non-poor students for given type of health limitation. On top of that, the reason these interact, you could say, is that poorer students are far more likely to have the health limitations that then also lead to higher chronic absenteeism rates. And so for both reasons you wind up with poorer students having notably higher rates of chronic absenteeism. As Lauren mentioned in the video, it is not simply a question of older students missing school; in fact, it's the very younger students who have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism. You can look at the figure on your left there showing you for elementary schools what are the rates of chronic absenteeism across different grades across schools and you can see that for kindergarten students the grades across schools, that distribution has shifted far more out to the right where there is much higher rates of

chronic absenteeism amongst older students it then does shift in this pattern where this older student gets in high school where the more, the higher the chronic absenteeism rates are in school. But this, the fact that kindergarteners have a much wider absenteeism problem is important because one of the things when you look at the student level you find in chronic absenteeism is a huge grave persistence. Once a kid is chronically absent, that's the best predictor that they will be chronically absent next year. You can control for a host of other factors about the school, about the child's family, about the child. If they were chronically absent last year their more likely to be more chronically absent again. And so starting with a large chunk of students facing chronic absenteeism is kindergartners is setting up a set of problems later on. If you look across schools, the same story shows up actually about persistence. So this is data from Maryland and it's showing across 15 years what, how many years did a school have a high rate of chronic absenteeism so 10 percent of their

students chronically absent. And the thing that probably stands out is half of the schools are at 15; meaning every single year, they had a, they had chronic absenteeism. If you go through and control for a whole host of things about the student population they face, what you find is actually, yes, poverty matters, yes, a range of other things about the demographics may matter, including the parental education levels and things like that. But actually the most important factor is, did the school have a high chronic absenteeism rate last year. Which suggests in some ways it's policy and practices at the school level matter a great deal, because some schools continue to have the problem year after year after year. In some ways that's actually an encouraging message to people working in education thinking it's not simply the hand you're dealt and the student population you're facing; a lot depends on what's happening at the school level. So, in this paper we try to outline some of the lessons one can take from a lot of the research that's been done on no child left

behind to think about how should one try to incorporate this data. First of all, as we know, what gets measured is what gets done and so is suddenly if states are putting this into their plans and this is something people are going to start focusing on more; one thing that's important, and this is where there's a wide range of how states are approaching high chronic absenteeism, is the goal has to be in reach. If you just said you only get points if you have zero chronically absent students. It's unlikely that any school system is going to reach that goal and it may be something that starts to get ignored because it's unreachable. And so, trying to figure out the range of goals that you need to put in front of schools to try to make it something that is achievable but meaningful but with taking care of the fact that the goal post can be moved and if you're moving the goal post too often then it's something that it loses information content for parents. We have to take a lot of care that once this becomes a target that it can be gained and that you have to worry about

something once it's a measure ceases to be a good measure. So there is an advantage with chronic absenteeism is it's with working off attendance data that's important for a whole range of other things school are doing which makes it a little harder for people to gain at least hopefully there should already be high quality data tracking on attendance and it there's not some states including, I think, New Jersey, are trying to put in place people that may try to help with that data collection to make sure it's high quality and that's an important thing if we're going to actually hold schools accountable for this. And then lastly, it's important that you try to make sure that there are actually new plans in implementation not simply relabeling things schools are already doing and say, well, we're doing this for chronic absenteeism; if in fact that's just something they already were doing. In terms of the research, it's important to know there are high quality studies that have been done that suggest there are real things that can be done to combat chronic absenteeism and I

commend to you the paper that lists a lot of these studies and details about them. But two themes stand out; one is that deeper connections and better communications can really help. And so, there's some interventions that are frankly not that expensive, whether it's mailings to parents or in some cases, a slightly more intensive where you've got two-way texting between teachers and parents trying to let parents know what's going on, trying to let parents know actually most of the other students are in school and it's your kid who's not; things like this that can try to shift the culture around absenteeism. And then though, really importantly is putting another trusted adult in a child's life who can encourage them to get to school. And that mentorship programs and ways to try to connect either teachers to families or outside mentors to families can be really meaningful and actually have in a number of studies where people are actually doing controlled studies and high quality academic work showing that these types of programs can really help move the dial on chronic absenteeism. And

so, I think some of these lessons point a way for schools and states as they try to think about incorporating this into their accountability plans. With that, I want to turn it over to our friends from the Bush Institute to talk about other aspects of the accountability, so, I'll turn it over to Anne Wicks.

MS. WICKS: Hi, everybody. Glad to be here to have a chance to talk about this with you all. Before we get started, just in case you're not familiar with the George W. Bush Institute, we're part of the George W. Bush Presidential Center in Dallas, Texas. We are decidedly outside the Beltway, these days. And in addition to the museum and the library and the archives, we're the policy institute that sits on that campus and you can see the mission of our work there. Our Impact Center's in addition to the work we do on education.

We also work on economic growth, Military Service Initiative focused on post-9/11 veterans, Presidential Leadership Scholars program that's a partnership between four centers, Clinton, LBJ, Bush

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41, and Bush 43. That's an incredible program. And in addition to the work we do globally, Global Health Initiative focused on breast cancer and cervical cancer in Africa, a Human Freedom Initiative that works in places like Burma and North Korea, and a Women's Initiative in North America -- excuse me, Middle East and North Africa. Developing leaders, advancing policy, and taking action is what we really care about, in addition to engaging our community in North Texas and around the world. So that's what we're about.

In our Education Reform Initiative, we really focus on three areas: advancing accountability, which we're obviously talking about today, and then a School Leadership Initiative. Just so you know, we're focused on helping districts recruit, support, and retain highly effective school principles. In addition to the Laura Bush Foundation for America's Libraries, which is if you need a feel-good, that's the best. It's -- provides grants for books for libraries serving our most vulnerable kids, a passion

of Ms. Bush's and a cause close to her heart.

So our role in accountability is really focused around helping provide data and thought leadership in research and policy where we can. With the work we're releasing today, the spotlight section is part of our State of Our Cities tool. That was created at the request of Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings, who came to see Holly and was trying to figure out, "How on earth do I measure up -- figure out how Dallas measures up relative to New York or Chicago or San Francisco? There's all this education data floating out there. How do I make sense of this?"

He's a competitive guy. He wanted to know if -- where he's winning and where he needed to catch up. That turned into State of Our Cities, which I encourage you all to check out. It's an online interactive tool allowing for user comparisons where you can look at about 30 education datapoints, all publicly available data, and compare over a hundred cities to see what all sort of datapoints look like to try to make decisions and understand the landscape in

any particular geography.

In addition to the data dashboard that we have, we've released spotlights that let us go into editorializing a bit about some of the key issues of the day, college and career readiness being one, chronic absenteeism being another, and we really try to inform that with some case studies so you can see what different districts, cities, states, how they might be tackling a particular issue. There's no better way to learn than from and with each other and we think our spotlights allow us to do that. And just to know, our audience for that isn't really researchers or wonky policy types. It's actually mayors, city leaders, city council members, funders, people -- superintendents, folks who are in those communities really trying to make change and use data and research to do so meaningfully.

Just a quick reset on accountability. As you all know, No Child Left Behind really put the flag in the ground for federal accountability. Important things to note: it was a bipartisan effort, there was

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both republicans and democrats involved in getting that law passed, and that its equal parts civil rights -- or civil rights law and education law, you might remember President Bush talking about the soft bigotry of low expectations. One of the important legacies of NCLB is that we now have disaggregated student data and can see the perform of subgroups, which is so critical when we're trying to eradicate these performance -- or achieve gaps, excuse me. It was narrow by design. Reading and math scores are easy for folks to grasp and understand and we all sort of get why that's so important.

As we go forward, as you've heard from Jason and Jay, the states now are really leading the charge and we'll get to see what happens next. How will they embrace this responsibility? The plans gave us -- you might hear people talk about them and as being a little underwhelming, the state plans, but we've also heard a lot of stories that states are doing things that they didn't put in writing. So we're really curious what this will look like as we go forward to

make sure that all kids have an opportunity to learn and succeed, and our spotlights on chronic absenteeism and college and career readiness are a part of that.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time here because Jay just went through this, but in case you want to know, our spotlight that we have to add to the research that the Hamilton Project has done has four cities that you might take a look at. Baltimore, Grand Rapids, Paterson, New Jersey, and Tacoma, Washington are case studies that we've put out that show how those communities in particular have taken on the issues that Jay just described.

When it comes to college and career readiness, this is a much bigger, murkier, a little messier topic than chronic absenteeism. There's lots of ways to define it, there's lot of data that can be used as part of this. We've organized our spotlight around six areas that you see here: data, awareness, policy, equity, academic preparation, and partnerships. So there's -- and including our case studies. So instead of going deep in too many areas,

I'm going to give you a little taste of each of those. We interviewed a lot of experts who were part of building the spotlight. Their words are going to be the messages that you see as we go.

Let's start with awareness, the biggest piece of this. And the most important takeaway here is that we don't want to presuppose what kids want to do. Right? They need exposure to lots of things, I would imagine. There's many of you all in this room who may have prepared to do one job or started doing one job who may be in another job now, right? This is a common human -- it's part of being human, right? We evolve and grow as we get exposed to things. What's really important for kids in terms of college and career readiness is making sure that all children have access to lots of different opportunity. That includes an incredibly strong academic preparation, but also advising support, workbased learning, career pathways, everything that's going to lead to very clear choices for these -- for all kids to have in the future.

When we turn over to data, there is so much data that you can track. And, in fact, this part gives me a little bit of, like, heartburn to think through because there are so many datapoints. I think in our spotlight we have something like 25 to 30 different datapoints that people are tracking anywhere from SAT to ACT scores to post-secondary enrollment to counselor to student ratios. There's lots of things that you can track, but you need to make sure you can act on it. No experts have agreed this is what research says you should track and pay attention to, so our recommendation at this point is that you will understand if you are a person in a district or state or -- who has access to this information, you know what's out there. What is your district already tracking? What is your state tracking? You figure out how to access and organize that information so that you can then make some decisions.

Kate Kramer from Advance CT says, "Some districts do their own data collection, but most rely on what the state collects. This is a great

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opportunity for leaders to start engaging, to provide guidance, and guard rails for the city's priorities." City leaders need this kind of information to examine access and success. We think this is really important and that needs to happen at the city and district level. That data then goes to informing the policy, right? You shouldn't start your policy without an understanding of what the data exists. And this is -- Susan is in the room. Susan Tario , where are you?

Susan is such a great expert in all this; she's in the back. And this is what she offered to us. "It takes time to get at the outcomes we want to see. Things like post-secondary attainment and employment are strong indicators, but they outside the K -- the control of the K-12 system." The part we highlight I love. "Leaders should choose indicators backed by research, even when they require a longer timeframe and a stronger data system." Right? We still have a lot to learn as these states bring on their state plans and think through this fifth indicator idea in what will actually meaningful



measure student success. All datapoints won't be equal.

As we turn to equity, is a huge piece of this, right? We can't ignore the complicated, complex, and sometimes dark history of CTE, College or Technical Education. There's been a history of tracking that has -- based on race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity that we can't ignore, right? We can't ignore it. The important piece here is that data shines our light; this disaggregated data will shine the light as you're making decisions in your district or community and your state.

And I like this quote here from Rachel :  
"Some states have put access to high level coursework as an accountive -- accountability factor under ESSA and they'll have to figure out how to interpret that information. If they see kids from certain areas not taking a given opportunity, they will have to crosswalk that finding with access questions. Just looking at uptake patterns won't give an accurate picture of who had access." So a 20 percent gain is

not a 20 percent gain unless that's disaggregated and you can see from an equity perspective about what's happening for kids.

The part we feel really passionately about - - and this came up in Jason's remarks, as well -- is there's no daylight between a strong academic preparation and college and career readiness. There is -- every child needs a strong academic foundation to have genuine choices about what comes next. So there is no less than track, academically, or more than. College and career readiness is not college or career, it's college and career that we believe in so strongly. And you can see that in Quentin Suffren quote here: "We don't distinguish between college and career as two separate paths. All programs of study should have a transition to post-secondary opportunities, whether a credential, a two-year, or a four-year program." We think this is really important for everyone taking this on.

The case studies that we have in our spotlight that I encourage you to check out, they're

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very, very detailed, there's lots of good examples in there, and I want to give you a little taste of what we saw in each of these cities. We looked at Albuquerque, New York, and San Antonio, so we had a good mix. There are some common threads in all of them, most particularly around partnerships. So these are not -- this is not work that's happening in a district with closed walls to the community; it's happening in conjunction with Higher Ed, with the business community, with non-profits and sometimes government agencies, and that is very clear in every city that's doing this with intentionality demonstrates that.

And I love this quote here from Sarah Shah of the College Advising Corps: "District leadership is critical for successful efforts of the school level, since those leaders can ensure that CCR is a priority and that advisors are empowered to best serve students. But the cities doing this work best have multiple partners that help the school district and include supports after high school." Think that's

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really important.

So in Albuquerque, this is a really interesting place. Some of you who are SM Nerds, you know that New Mexico had a very strong state plan and there was connections between the state asset plan and the governor strategic plan focused on helping more New Mexicans get -- New Mexicans, is that the right term -- attain a credential or a degree. And we see that in their college and career readiness partnership that they've built in Albuquerque. It's called Mission: Graduate, it's designed to have 60,000 new grads credential or degree by 2020, they're about five years in. It's a partnership of Hire Ed, K-12, non-profits, and government. And they've been importantly a shared dashboard of data indicators that they use pretty publicly. They decided what they want to measure, they use that publicly. They haven't been winning or successful in every area, but they've learned a lot and they've had some great successes that spun off new work that we think is really important.

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And here you can see Angelo Gonzalez from Mission: Graduate. We talk about college and career readiness, but we often see more emphasis on the first C, which is college. This is important, but we would like more efforts to take the second C, career, seriously and measure that progress. They're engaging the business community a little more thoughtfully to make sure people are prepared to do just that.

New York City has taken a little different tact and I -- to be honest, I was a little surprised that they emerged as a great case study for us in this area. And the part that we're really optimistic about is their connection around that strong academic foundation. So many students in New York public schools, New York City public schools, go onto the City University of New York. There's a strong pipeline connecting those institutions. And a very deliberate partnership was created where kids can access, can take credits at CUNY course of -- CUNY credits while they're still in high school. They're taught by CUNY faculty, so they're not getting a

watered-down version. And that's been in place for a number of years and there's three important outcomes that they've seen.

One, that kids who've -- graduate from high school and matriculate into CUNY bring more credits with them; that's not surprising if they've been participating in the program. But what's really interesting is that they also end up earning more credits than kids who didn't participate in that program in their first semester and their GPA is higher. Right? So that experience is clearly helping and supporting their success over the long term.

The last one we looked at was San Antonio and San Antonio has really taken the partnership model and maximized it to their great success. Both the superintendent and the mayor in San Antonio are big believer in data and use it in everything that they do. They have a partnership with something called the P16 Plus, which is part of the Strive network, if you're familiar with that, that has created a city-wide district -- or a city-wide data platform that

several of their partners use. So they have brought together Diplomas , which is a group that's focused on helping young Latinos attain a degree or credential, along with My Brother's Keeper, which is focused on boys and young men of color, keeping them to stay in school and attain a post-secondary credential or a degree, and San Antonio Works, which is a partnership with the business community in San Antonio that's built a very robust internship program for about 70,000 youth in San Antonio to get real robust work-based internships over the summer. And then the combination of that has really changed the landscape in San Antonio that we're anxious to watch over time how they do.

So what's next for us? We are updating the data in that tool, as many of you know. There's some big new data that came out yesterday that we'll be adding. We'll continue to do the A-word interviews that Jason mentioned in his opening remarks. We think it's really important to hear from the folks who are implementing this work and leading this work about how

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accountability has helped them improve outcomes for all kids. And we're really looking forward to, like many of you, what does the implementation of this turn out to be over time in the states? Policy is one thing, implementation is a whole other thing and where it -- where really the rubber hits the road and that's what we're interested in.

So I encourage you all to go check it out, [bushcenter.org/stateofourcities](http://bushcenter.org/stateofourcities), and you'll see all the spotlights and our data. And with that, I would love to bring up our panel to talk about what this really looks like in the day-to-day work as they're living, adding this indicator -- these indicators to their work. (Applause)

MS. KLEIN: Okay, I'll insert that. Hi, everyone, and thanks for joining us. My name is Alyson Klein and I'm a reporter for Education Week, where I cover federal policy and the Every Student Succeeds Act. ESSA, which passed back in 2015, when things could still (laughs) be done in a bipartisan way, told states that they had to look beyond test

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scores, engaging student achievement, and they needed to incorporate new measures of school quality and student success in their accountability systems.

So states ended up choosing a wide range of options. Illinois, for instance, is eventually going to measure fine arts education. I feel like if you had looked at my childhood drawings and tried to (laughs) show progress in fine arts that wouldn't work well, but I'm curious to see what they'll be doing. Connecticut is measuring access to arts education classes. District of Columbia's looking at reenrollment, meaning the percentage of kids that decide to return to a particular school. California will look at discipline, Maryland is looking at access to a well-rounded curriculum. But as you've heard from our first two speakers, by far the two most popular measures are chronic absenteeism or attendance and college and career readiness.

As you've heard, at least 36 states are looking at chronic absenteeism and at least 35 are looking at college and career readiness. And as

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you've heard, states are defining that in many different ways from AP course-taking to dual enrollment to career certification to military readiness. So will these new measures help states and districts get away from thinking about just test scores and really considering these other factors in day-to-day learning? Will measuring things like chronic absenteeism or discipline disparities motivate policy-makers to do something to combat those problems? And what can states, districts, communities, parents do about these issues that these measures -- do about issues and inequities that looking at these measures uncover?

With us to unpack these tricky questions, we have a great panel. Scott Braband is the Superintendent of Fairfax County Schools, Ajit Gopalakrishnan is the Chief Performance Officer at the State Department of Education in Connecticut, Sandra Diodonet is the Assistant Superintendent of the Paterson School District in New Jersey, Broderick Johnson is the Care of -- Chair, sorry, of the My

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Brother's Keeper Alliance at the Obama Foundation, and Javaid Siddiqi is the President and CEO of The Hunt Institute.

You all probably noticed you have notecards over on your chairs, so if a question occurs to you as these folks are talking, feel free to jot it on the notecard. Someone will be around to collect those and then that's how we're going to handle Q and A. So I'll be reading from notecards at the end instead of folks getting up. But first, I'm going to ask each of these folks a question and I'll give some framing remarks. First question is for Javaid.

Javaid, how can policy-makers strite the rike -- strike the right balance in messaging around the importance of these new measures, around school quality and student success, while also emphasizing the importance of student achievement and growth?

MR. SIDDIQI: Well, thank you for the question and let's give Alyson a round of applause for just getting our names correct. (Laughter) (Applause) And thank you to Anne and Jay and the Brookings and

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Bush folks for inviting us.

So at The Hunt Institute, we work with elected officials from all over the country, governor's office, we work with senior elected sort of aspiring governors, and we work very intimately with three state legislatures, Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina. And so I had a chance on behalf of The Hunt Institute to participate in the Bellwether ESSA reviews, so it was a really interesting sort of cross-section because I actually had a chance to review some of these plans and also have a sort of ring at this policy lens. Unfortunately, while we have very unique opportunities and unprecedented opportunity with ESSA law for states to really lead. This would be clamoring for the autonomy, school district leaders having been clamoring and asking and begging and finally we have an opportunity to brace this autonomy.

What should be of concern, though, with our policy-makers is 36 days of chronic absenteeism is not -- I don't want to confuse this number, 36 -- the

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Victoria election's coming up this fall. And so there's a lot of plans that have been written and there's some new administrations coming down the pike that necessarily don't own those plans. They don't identify with those plans. The nice thing about ESSA, unlike NCLB, ESSA isn't necessarily not written in stone, so these state leaders will be campaigning and they'll be making some pitches to their communities in the coming months about what that -- what this looks like for them. And they're going to want to -- their administrations are going to want to put their flag in the ground for their state and how they think their state should be leading. So I am concerned, I think we should be concerned, about the potential shifts that might come from these -- the Victoria elections.

I think there's two main things that policy-makers -- state policy-makers need to be really thinking about, sort of rooted in messaging. One, we need to be very clear of, what are we measuring and then how is that being calculated? And then how do we take the -- what we're measuring, how we're

calculating it, and how do we convey it to the laypeople, to parents? How do they identify with if this quality school -- how these indicators -- chronic absenteeism obviously is one the most common indicators across the states; how did they come together, assemble, combine, and sort of generate a quality sort of, "Is this a good school, is this not a good school? How do we, as consumers, understand all of this?" So I think the messaging is going to be critical and I think policy-makers -- it's going to be impendent on them to really lead, to make sure they are able to articulate with some clarity what and if the school or these indicators, "Are we moving in the right direction?"

The last thing I'll say is, the thing that should probably concern a lot of us -- and I know my colleagues on this stage have been strong advocates for equity -- is, we don't want to be, you know, as a pendulum shifts, autonomy's coming back to states, it doesn't shift all the way back to a time where -- and I think Anne mentioned -- a soft bigotry of low

expectation, so a time where we didn't have high expectations for all students.

So I want to be really careful that we as policy-makers folks and influence policy-makers that we're reminding our folks that it is critical that all students should be afforded the opportunity to define success. We got to be clear what success looks like. So it is going to be an interesting next six months and interesting next couple years. Thanks for the question.

MS. KLEIN: All right. Ajit, next question is for you.

MR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: Sure.

MS. KLEIN: Can you talk about -- similar, can you talk about the implications for state and district leaders of broadening accountability systems to include these multiple measures --

MR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: Sure.

MS. KLEIN: -- as it changed things for you at ESEA?

MR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: Great. Thank you.

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MS. KLEIN: Yeah.

MR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: Thank you. And thanks again, Jay and Anne, for this opportunity to represent Connecticut's work.

Just to give a little background on our accountability system before I talk about the implications, we started changing our accountability system in Connecticut for schools and districts well prior to ESSA as part of ESEA flexibility. And I think part of the way we thought about our accountability system was really driven by our Board's commitment, our State Board's commitment to both equity and excellence. So the equity aspect remains in my mind very strong in our work. And there were really three big buckets, if you will, that were the - - for our State Board's goals and they had to do with academic achievement and gap closure, college and career readiness, and ensuring that every student receives a well-rounded education.

So those were the real framers through which we actually looked at, how could we build an

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accountability system that was broad enough? It wasn't necessarily -- in the ESSA language we talk about the fifth indicator. We didn't necessarily think of our accountability system as going out and looking for a fifth indicator as much as, "Here is our Board's goals for public education. Let's figure out how can we build an accountability system that represents that."

And so we have an -- indicators that fall into each of these buckets. We have, obviously, academic achievement, academic growth, we do have chronic absenteeism from an engagement standpoint, from a college and career readiness standpoint, we do look at access to coursework. I think you mentioned that, Alyson, in your opening. But we also look at performance on college readiness exams, as well as entrance and post-secondary, I think, and you might have spoken to that, as well. And when it comes to well-rounded education, we do look at the arts and fitness, so -- and physical fitness.

So it might seem like there was a lot of

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indicators and that we sort of randomly picked these, but we actually didn't (laughs) randomly pick these. There was actually a State Board goal and a vision that actually drove what we were after. And one thing to note is despite having maybe more indicators than what some other states might have, the waiting -- and here is where I think access guard rails are important -- the waiting of these indicators ensure that, for example, at the elementary level where many of these indicators don't actually come into play, achievement and growth still account for close to 80 percent of the weight for our schools. So I think it's important to sort of keep that in perspective. Even at the high school level where we have multiple indicators, when you combine academic achievement, graduation, or our college and career readiness entrance -- or college and career readiness assessments, those do account for a big, big chunk.

So having said that, so what are the implications for this? I think the main point for me with this sort of broadening is that we recognize that

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there are multiple dimensions to a student's experience and success in school and that looking at just one measure of a student on one day doesn't give us that full picture. I think it's important to look at that measure, our standardized measure, but there might be other measures that do need to come into play. And I think that's kind of the sort of thread for us that carries through all of this. And even with that state measure, that -- it's important for us just -- the way we look at it, it's that it's not just a -- a student isn't just a success or a failure. It's not a binary outcome for a kid, from our perspective. So we do like to look at these multiple pathways, and what has that done? It's brought in educators, many different educators in the school building and in the district, who were never part of accountability conversations in the past. They have been brought to the table and looking and asking about, "How are kids doing in your world and how can we enrich their experience?"

And to me, what that has done also is

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expanded the school's sphere of influence -- and I talked about this in our lunch -- prior to this meeting, is that from a chronic absence, for example, students were coming late to Kindergarten, for example, because they were taking time -- delays in getting their medical health checkups and immunizations done. And instead of just blaming the indicator, so to speak, or saying that we shouldn't be held accountable for the absences that are "out of our control," we're sort of reframing the discussion to say, "Hey, how you as a school district, a big player in the community, can actually help your incoming Kindergarten class make -- get these things done on time so that they can start school on time," it's really reframing that sphere of influence.

When you talk to post-secondary education, for us it was also about -- again, not just about it's out of the district's or school's control, but how can we -- how can that whole notion of summer melt come into play so that students who are accepted but never show up -- there are things that the schools or

district can do to bridge that gap between public systems.

The other implication of this sort of broadening has been to focus more on slightly longer-term thinking. And I'll just say slightly; we still have annual assessments, we still hold folks accountable for participation rate. It means a big deal in our system. But instead of just looking for the next year's quick fix to get a boost in scores, now they're feeling that districts and schools have the permission to say, "How can I put in place stuff that actually benefits our curriculum and our instruction for a slightly longer term?" So our interim milestones under ESSA are over three years. We have annual milestones as well that we look at with some of our lowest-performing districts and schools, but when it comes to sort of our state plan, we -- we've put in three-year milestones to sort of, again, give that slightly longer-term thinking.

The last couple of things I'll mention have to do with data quality. When you look at multiple

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measures like this, it draws attention to data quality on all those measures. And let me tell you, if we think schools were tracking attendance accurately and perfectly, we have learned stuff -- because we've been doing chronic absence not just as an accountability indicator, but really public reporting the little A-aspect of accountability for many years and we continue to work at this with schools. It's never a done deal. And what it's also shown us is that we need to have policies to really clarify, "What does it mean for a student to be in attendance? How do you handle a kid who goes for a doctor's appointment for a couple of hours and then comes back? How is that actually recorded in your systems?" So I think data quality across the board has been important and has been good. Because if you want to run a good school system and you want to be good administrators and stewards of our students, you got to have a handle on your data.

And all this, you know, these multiple indicators broadening the dimensions of a student and

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what it means to be a public-school student has allowed other aspects of the agency, the ESEA in my case, to really rally behind those indicators, rally their work behind those indicators so our school counselors are connected to our graduation and on-track indicators. That's part of their strategic goals for our State Board. Our Office of Student Supports looks at the chronic absenteeism indicator when they report to the State Board. So I think it's really given different aspects of our agency the opportunity to connect to our accountability system in ways that they didn't before. So, I hope that gives a perspective and I hope I didn't go too long.

MS. KLEIN: No, you're fine and we'll be able to dig more deeply into this issue in a bit. Mr. Johnson, we've heard a lot about chronic absenteeism. Obviously, it's one of the most popular indicators. You're someone who works in communities. What can communities do, now that we're identifying this as a problem to actually help solve it and address it?

MR. JOHNSON: Well, thank you and I made my  
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name pretty easy to announce.

MS. KLEIN: You did.

MR. JOHNSON: And thank you very much for the shout-out to MBK San Antonio. There are MBK communities across the country. In fact, there are 250 MBK communities. Some are really far ahead on the curve in terms of the work being done and San Antonio is among them. So, thanks for that mention of San Antonio. So, when I think of this issue though, there are two pictures that I have in mind. One is, I was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland and so, I notice that Baltimore, of course, is one of the cities that's part of the work you all are doing through the Bush Institute. And if you were to -- and it's not to pick on my hometown because I know my hometown is trying to do a lot to address some very difficult issues. But if you were to drive to Baltimore on any given day, you'd see lots of kids who clearly are absent from school because of how young they are. And these kids are probably chronically absent from school.

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There's nothing more heartbreaking than to see 11, 12-year old kids or just hanging out in the street in the middle of the day. So, we have got to address this and I think this is an indicator in so many schools, in so many states is just critical. And then there's like the flipside, the very positive side of it. I remember we did an event here in D.C. in an elementary school celebrating kids who were first and second graders for turning around their attendance rates in school. And they got certificates and these are these really cute, although they were snotty nose, it was February, so they were like -- this kind of like, they were like handing in their certificate and like, that's okay, I won't, but the fact that there was an incentive and their parents were there for coming to school and being where they needed to be and where everyone knows they need to be was so important. And so, that's an incredible value for these children to be and their families to be where it is that they need to be.

Let me just first start off with respect to  
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My Brother's Keeper by saying clearly where it is now. My Brother's Keeper, of course, the task force said, I had the distinct honor of being able to be the chair of in the White House. We did it for the last three years. The Obama Administration, but there was also parallel effort and that was my My Brother's Keeper Alliance that was started by business leaders in 2015 to mirror the work we were doing in the White House.

The My Brother's Alliance is now part -- a centerpiece really of work that's being done out of the Obama Foundation because as President Obama said many, many times, this is work that will be important to him for the rest of his life. Now, when we went to him, though, to say, well, Mr. President, what would you like MBK in your post-presidency world to focus on? He said, "We obviously can't do all the things we did and the White House with all these federal agencies, so I want to focus on some things we can do very well from the beginning. And those need to be around mentorship because we know there are millions of children in this country, especially boys and young

men of color growing up without their dads who need men in their lives, positive male figures in their lives, so let's focus on that and reward that and create incentives for that. And second, is around violence reduction." The President through his own experiences in his own life going out with without his father sees that it's so important, especially young men of color have positive male role models and so that became part of what he did in the White House with MBK, but it's central now.

So when we back in 2015 and '16, we're looking at this issue though of chronic absenteeism, we brought Professor Walfance in and others who had done research on the importance of mentors as a way to address chronic absenteeism and from that we built the Success Mentors Model to try to get a million adult mentors to agree to volunteer to work with kids who were chronically absent or at great risk of being chronically absent. So, again, understanding that a mentor can even intervene in this area is not just sort of amorphous mentoring, which a lot of times it's

just important to have an adult around. But to be really focused on kids again, who, there are lots of reasons as you all have done in the research and the data about why children become chronically absent, but to have an adult that this young person, the family can trust to get to the heart of the issue is whether it's about poverty; whether it's about being bullied in school; whether it's a host of factors that kid perhaps not feeling ready to go to school, or even things around trauma. So, mentoring and chronic absenteeism have been linked to work of My Brother's Keeper going back to when we were in the White House, it is an important piece of the work go forward as we are examining and making grants to communities based in MBK communities throughout the country.

I know there are many school districts that continue to work around this success mentors' model and we want to continue to see that that build out. And again, because it will be tied to the kinds of support that comes from the Obama Foundation. So, that's our view of chronic absenteeism and my own

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personal views of it as well, so, thank you.

MS. KLEIN: Superintendent Brabrand, can you take us to the district level here? How is Fairfax reimagining your curriculum beyond math and reading to accelerate student success for college and career readiness.

MR. BRABRAND: Well, thanks for letting me be here. It's wonderful to be here as a superintendent. I feel like I'm the luckiest superintendent in the nation because if I had all these thought leaders, all these posse makers around right now, there isn't any problem we couldn't solve. And I do think the rubber hits the road in school districts to able to implement the vision of no child left behind and now ESSA .

A lot of the focus really gets to outcomes. We all want to see a great quality education for kids. And now, we're having this discussion about indicators and what indicator states will pick, chronic absenteeism, or school culture, but a lot of it I think is looking at the inputs. We need a high-

quality teacher in every classroom. We need a high-quality principal leading that group of teachers, but we also need a strong viable curriculum that's based on 21st century skills. I'm proud to be in a school district that actually started in. I was a career switcher. A business person who changed my career to come into education and Fairfax has taken the lead in what we call portion of a graduate. What are those attributes that we want to have embedded in the curriculum that all kids need to be able to know and be able to do around creativity, citizenship, being resilient and goal directed, communication, critical thinking. We -- being a global and ethical thinker. We've got to embed those in the curriculum so that our great teachers can really be sharing great curriculum. I actually think one of the issues for achievement gaps that have so long plagued this country are really access and opportunity gaps. And they're access and opportunity gaps to good curriculum.

The work Fairfax County has done as a school district around this curriculum, and it's so great to

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go in and watch -- we've redesigned our science curriculum at elementary school from worksheets to labs. When you're a third or fourth grader you're getting to do a science lab and doing DNA, that's a lot different than reading about it in workbook or writing the words DNA on a worksheet. So, we really got to curriculum is an opportunity to really help us address these access and opportunity gaps for students. The work we did as a district was so powerful, it really informed the state of Virginia in doing their redesign and they have Portrait of a Graduate at the state level. So, I think as we keep talking about ESSA, how District work can actually start to inform state work.

We've been going a little bit the other way where the federal to the state and the state to the district, I think we really have an opportunity in Fairfax along with other school districts are helping lead the way that district work, the practitioner work can inform state and federal policymakers. And I'm hopeful we can have more discussions -- there need to

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be more superintendents at the table; there need to be more institutions like you all at the table. There need to be more policymakers at the table really helping solve these problems. And I think if we really put our heads together and bring everyone to the table, we can do more of it. And I'm proud of what Fairfax County is doing. We have more to do and we're really starting to expand the curriculum, the training for it; the assessments for kids doing capstone projects at elementary, middle and high school. More performance based assessments different from a standardized test, but I got to tell you, we asked our business community in Virginia, top 20 things they want as employers, the standardized content test information they were interested was only one thing out of the top 20 and it was for math. All the other 19 things were more Portrait of a Graduate attributes.

Final thing, just because it was a couple of the questions, I believe chronic absenteeism -- attendance is a habit and you start seeing it at

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elementary school. It's not just a habit about a kid. Sometimes it's a habit about our adults. So, we've really got to work on marketing not just to look at the kid level or the school level, but what are we saying to parents in communities about attendance and showing up, right. Ninety-nine percent of life is showing up. How to build that habit of showing up in our young people, right from the beginning when they walk through our schoolhouse doors.

MS. KLEIN: All right, thank you for that. Ms. Denay . So, obviously you're also seeing this summer school level.

MS. DENAY: Correct.

MS. KLEIN: Can you talk about what district administrators can really do to support -- combatting chronic absenteeism? Especially, how can climate, culture and parental involvement how can those things be employed to tackle this problem?

MS. DENAY: Okay, certainly. Thank you, Anne, for having me here and Ms. Picksford for inviting me to this. So, if he's the luckiest

superintendent of the nation, I'm the luckiest assistant superintendent in the nation. So, I think we have to go back to what Jay had mentioned in terms of what gets measured, gets done, right. And so in in Paterson, the way we got involved with chronic absenteeism, the Children's Aid Society that we work with, with our full service community schools gave us a list and said you have 176 students that are chronically absent. We were like, what's that, right. What are you talking about we have like a 92 percent daily average attendance rate and so, they came in and did workshop. On top of that the state was talking about reducing our funds by \$16 million because of attendance and so I was like -- I was a school principal at the time and I was like, \$16 million, already underfunded. If you try to take \$16 million from the district, my kids are really going to be at a disadvantage and we began that work. And I think that paying attention to the numbers and really having a commitment to them and having that R word -- the relationship with parents and walking and talking to

them. That, to me, was like the game changer was when you see Ms. Santana say, Ms. Santana -- I'm going to say Jay -- Jay's been absent three times this month. How can I help you? And really becoming familiar and personal with them or, you know, he's been late six times. How can I help you? And so, that, I think starts will work with chronic absenteeism and really knowing your students. From a district level -- and that's a school level, right. In New Jersey, we now have a new teacher evaluation system where teachers are really getting sort of nervous. They needed some leadership position, so we use what we have sort of as a tool. Oh, you need some leadership skills and points. We need some success mentors and that really helped numbers go down. And it was a 76 percent reduction when we did this trial and chronic absenteeism and so, from that they ask you to present to the board. I presented to the board and all of a sudden I became like the attendance person for, not only for Paterson, but for the state, right. And so, it was good work right because in my mind, if they

come to school then there's going to be some learning going on and we should see student achievement rates go up. And so, that became sort of our walk. We did tremendous work and then it started sort of people getting on board and they call me DO because of my last name. DO how do you do that? DO, can we come see and so, obviously yes, come, come. And so we introduced, you know, the attendance review committees where you actually have agendas with kids. These are our at-risk students. This kid has been absent five days. Why? And so we assign success mentors to them and we wanted teachers that had no relationship with them, so that that way it's not like a fear factor. It's more of like I want to get to know you and I really want to do what's in your best interest, so that became a game-changer as well because we did see kids coming to school more. Then the superintendent picked chronic absenteeism as one of her goals and so when it's the superintendent's schools goals, it's everybody's goal, right and so now, including the whole cabinet. So now, it's not just DO and her

chronic absenteeism work, right. Now, it's everybody and so we now have banners across the district where we partnered with our freeholders and our city councilmembers, so in all six of our wards, we have big attendance banners that say attendance matters. And then, we say, if you miss 5.5 if you miss 10 days of school, you've essentially missed like, 55 hours of instruction and really showing that not coming to school, you're missing two days, you're missing, you know, essentially 11 hours of instruction and so, if you don't come to school, you're missing a lot of time with that teacher contact.

We also, whenever there's a board meeting, an assembly, we always talk about chronic absenteeism. When teachers have one-on-one meetings, they have to talk about attendance. When you come to the district office to complain about anybody, our family and community service writes down at the top how many days absent the child has, so when they meet with anybody at the cabinet, we go, "Did you know that your child has been absent 17 times," and we go into that work

with them. We also made sure that all of our schools have it inserted in their school improvement plans. We have changed our policy, so everybody's attendance and you talked about data integrity, sort of making sure that, that's where we had to change our procedures because teachers inputted their attendance at 2:00 o'clock, others at 9:00. It wasn't uniform, so now, by 9:00 o'clock in Paterson Public Schools, everybody's attendance must be taken. So, it's not anything crazy for DO to call and say why isn't that lady's attendance in there, right, because what gets monitored, get's done. And so, we've seen a great change in that in terms of PBSIS in our schools. That has helped a tremendous amount. We've invited parents to come to assemblies for most improved attendance. And we've seen that, that has changed things around. We have a hashtag which is PPS show up. We have T-shirts, so just getting everybody involved. The funniest thing is when you talked to a parent and it's used to spend a child, and you want our kids to come to school, but -- just as -- you're talking about

chronic absenteeism, but you're suspending my kid that means that people are listening to us. But I also -- all right, when they start arguing back, and I'm like, thank you so much. I'm so happy that you know about chronic absenteeism. Right, and again, it's relationships and how you and how you treat your parents because you talk about climate and culture, just telling them the benefits of them coming to school. The conversation that now is happening in terms of climates, we talk about parents, you know and I'm sort of bold is big, green (inaudible) here, right, with everybody else. It's not uncommon for me to tell teachers, like, "Your attendance is horrible. How do you want our kids' attendance to bet better?" So I think changing the conversation to, if a kid misses five days of instruction and you're out for five days because you need a mental break, right, that's a lot of instructional hours that our children are missing and really being candid, with teachers and administrators, to say, everybody has to hashtag, show up, because attendance matters and I think that, that

has made a difference especially one of my smaller schools where the principal has really embraced this work and she -- just the other day, she was like, "DO I can't tell you how much the teachers' attendance has improved because I really was candid with them and told them." So, I think having those conversations is really, really important and really changing the teacher practice and in the classroom. If you're a boring teacher, I do not want to go to your classroom, right. If you're not giving me rigorous work or you're not having high expectations of me, I don't want to come to school. I'm bored. So that is also very important. If the walls on your -- I think I talked to you Anne, about that, if your walls are dirty and there's garbage on the floor, I don't want to come to school because you don't care about me, right. And so everybody has to be involved in this work. I'm going to stop here because I could just keep going. I could keep going, but at the end of the day, it's really about relationship and commitment and really following through. The last thing I can say



though, which is really necessary is for the district level to make sure that when they issue data that they talk about it. And to make sure what is the problem here that they analyze it.

We had for the hundredth day of school, we had a hundred day -- a hundred percent day. Hundred day of school, a 100 percent day, so we encourage everybody to really come to school wanted a 100 percent attendance and you would be surprised like, the schools that are really chronically absent at 44 percent at the end of the year how their attendance increased, so it's all about motivating and that commitment to the work. Thank you.

MS. KLEIN: Well, thank you. That was great. So, we talked about the many, many, many measures that states could have chosen, right. They could have chosen student engagement, climate surveys, one person joked that they could choose hugs. So, our chronic absenteeism and college and career, they were obviously the most popular indicators. Were they the right ones? Did states or did states miss the boat

here? And that can go to anybody. I know you're looking at a lot more in Connecticut than just those two things. But especially for our district superintendents who think your states are focusing on the right things.

SPEAKER: Oh, my, is this being recorded?

(Laughs)

MS. KLEIN: I think (crosstalk).

SPEAKER: I think there was a lot of discuss at the state level and even among superintendents is chronic absenteeism. The right additional factor. There was some interested honestly, around the school culture.

MS. KLEIN: Mm-hmm.

SPEAKER: And doing the dip sticking of that in several school districts are doing work around looking at the culture of a school. Kid of a why? Why is a kid wanting to come to school? And in some ways it's the flip side of the coin for chronic attendance, right. You may be able to find out schools with chronic attendance why are those kids and

that's part of the data review, why are kids not coming? Is it for health reasons? Is it for parental support or lack thereof at home for getting that habit of going to school or is it also about, "What's in school that entices me to come? An exciting curriculum, a teacher who's building a relationship with me, a school that provides opportunities not only in the classroom, but outside the classroom for extracurricular and co-curricular activities to excel." I think time will tell. I am not sure -- no one indicator is the silver bullet --

MS. KLEIN: Right.

SPEAKER: -- in education.

MS. KLEIN: Yeah.

SPEAKER: So I don't think this is the new silver bullet, but I do think it may help us look at some things a little differently and move away from just test scores as the only thing to unpack to look and find a deeper story, a deeper narrative. Because as you start to look at schools, I mean, Jay shared of those schools so many 15 years of chronic absenteeism.

MS. KLEIN: Yeah.

SPEAKER: What's really going on in that school and in that community? And it's something deeper than test scores. So I think it may be able to help us start the journey, but I don't think it's the endpoint indicator.

SPEAKER: So I'm just going to add to that. I think there's something to be said about the fact that we're already collecting the data. And as Jay mentioned those 15 years, I think the fact that that 15 years is now going to be associated with a score report card or some type of -- however the state's reported out on the accountability, that's going to shine the light. School leaders, superintendents are going to have to sort of reconcile that with their communities, "How have you sat back for 15 years and not addressed this problem?"

I think Sandra's point about this -- when she's talking about suspensions, I think, there is this push and pull here because we actually see in schools that have chronic absenteeism we also see have

suspension rates. And so, you know, we actually have Secretary King coming in next week to speak with Virginia legislators about this idea of disproportionate suspension rate. So it's going to help you sort of square that, also. Like, we're saying we want to have kids in school, we want to address this, but we're suspending -- overly suspending, we're overly suspending students of color, so restorative practices -- I know Fairfax is doing great work in this. I think other districts, it's going to compel them to start thinking differently about the way they engage students in regards to the discipline. Because they're going to have to sort of -- they can't be speaking out of both sides of their mouth. They're going to again have to reconcile that.

I think the college and career piece of all of this -- and my former boss, Secretary of Education or (inaudible) Obama Administration, she put this and something that we put in place is requiring for students CTEs some type of group credential. Now, what unfortunately came out of that is it became,

like, a -- you started seeing some schools just push kids into some workforce or keys -- work keys assessments just to give them something, the certificate. Since then, obviously, with Lumina's great research and great work we've obviously put a lot more emphasis on high-quality so when kids come out -- I think that's what Scott's point was. When they leave his door and he -- they go out into the community, are they equipped with something? And I think having college and career, especially the career piece of that, as an indicator is going to really change some behaviors.

Now, how that aligns to post-secondary universities, I think there is still an opportunity that needs to be -- I don't think there's one state that's really out there crushing that.

MS. KLEIN: Yeah.

SPEAKER: So I think that's going to be an area that we could address out at states. But again, I think those are great indicators. I don't think there -- I think there's definitely something to be

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said about the fact that, that data is there, so I don't want to minimize the fact that it -- as somebody said over lunch some -- maybe some states were -- found an easier path forward, nevertheless, it is really rich data that once reported it could really at least change some behaviors.

SPEAKER: Yeah. I would agree with that in that there is a data collection burden if you try to add a whole bunch of new things and I think the district folks will attest if we were to, from the state perspective, add one more thing that they had to collect and submit to the department, I'm not sure they would (laughter) be happy about us necessarily going down that direction. So part of our commitment when we redesigned our accountability system was to make use of the data we were already collecting. Because if we're not making use of it, why collect it? So I think that was kind of our commitment and I -- but to go back to your question about, "Are college and career readiness and chronic absenteeism the right indicators at this point," I think they are -- they're

good indicators and I think for our first salvo at a multiple measure system, I don't think they're a bad place to start at all, considering the fact that it is readily available. I do think that part of the decisions that went into our selection of indicators was balancing big A little A, sort of a formal accountability system versus just mileage that you can get from visible public reporting.

So, for example, we do not include suspensions and expulsions in our formal accountability system. We actually had several discussions around this, but we have so much press and attention that we draw to our discipline data that includes dis-aggregations by every subgroup, boys of color, early grades, pre-K through 2, et cetera, et cetera, that we have drawn so much attention to that issue that we didn't almost want to create a disincentive of -- I think they were talking about, you know, massaging the data or, you know, falsifying data, if you put it bluntly. We didn't want to sort of push that.



We wanted the data to be clean and really draw attention to it and it has caused legislative change in our state, including prohibition on pre-K through 2 out-of-school suspensions except in very cases. And so it has actually drawn -- we've reached out to individual schools that have had higher numbers of pre-K through 2 suspensions and really taken action on that. Because it starts early; these types of behaviors and things start early.

And the one last point is balancing between leading and lagging indicators. I think when you're dealing with college and career readiness, there's not just one thing. So I think when we looked at -- so we include on track to high school graduation, the Chicago School Consortium research approach and we did that because ninth grade was such a strong predictor on trackness and ninth grade was such a strong predictor of high school graduation that, you know, we wanted to balance a leading indicator with post-secondary entrance, which is a lagging indicator. So I think you try to sort of balance those different

types of indicators when you're trying to put an accountability system like this together.

SPEAKER: I was just going to say that the fact that we have close to seven million children who are chronically absent, that to me certainly argues for being a leading indicator technically since it's such a threshold issue. Like, we are not going to improve education for our children across this country if seven million kids on any given day are chronically absent. The impact of chronic absenteeism on young -- on children of color is, of course, profound. It's one of those cases where the disparities are heartbreaking and they are grave in many situations where almost 25 percent of African-American -- or 25 percent of chronically absent kids are African-American kids. So that does -- that's a huge problem, in terms of equity.

And speaking for myself -- and this is not a policy position of the Obama Administration, but I can sort of guess where -- or the Obama Foundation, where people would be on this. This issue of rethinking

discipline and the fact that it is now being reconsidered when we're also talking about chronic absenteeism, like, we can't address chronic absenteeism as we're -- if we're having, as the numbers now indicate, a greater disparity growing, in terms of young people of color being suspended or expelled or otherwise disciplined in school. So, let's not be illogical about this, I would say to some folks who hopefully are listening.

MS. DIODONET: If I could just add --

SPEAKER: Yeah.

MS. DIODONET: In Paterson, we also have catered to no-suspension rule and that has also brought the conversation to the table, "Are you suspending this child really for chewing gum and not, you know, not listening to you or for walking out of class," so that has reduced the number. Because when we talk about chronic absenteeism, an absence is an absence is an absence. So I think that, that is also -- administrators are also really looking at things differently in saying, "If I suspend him, I'm going to

jack up my chronic absenteeism rate, right?"

(Laughter) So they're having those internal conversations with themselves.

And so at the same time from the district level we're saying, "You know, you're actually -- should put in some counseling into this," so more of some remedies to help these children because some of them, the stories -- and I know you shared about a kid not having oil in his house and that's why he wasn't coming to school. But, you know, some -- that strict uniform policy of, "Oh, so you don't have your uniform on today. I'm going to give you a two-day suspension." Well, how about, "My mother doesn't have money to wash clothes?" Or how about, "Why do I have to wear a uniform to learn or hey, if we're doing well here?" And so that kind of changes the mindset of people and I do see -- because I have to sign every month those suspension reports -- I do see a decline in suspension, but one has to think, "Is it because we're jacking up your chronic absenteeism rate or because we're really rethinking discipline the way we

should?"

SPEAKER: Just to connect the dots to this issue of chronic absenteeism and discipline, I think historically school districts have had a legal approach. A legal approach to discipline and a legal approach to chronic absenteeism. I mean, obviously, a truant kid -- both places take you through the legal system. I think you're seeing a school district recognition of, "We got to move away from a legal approach to a social-emotional approach." Restorative justice works. We have seven folks now dedicated and I need 700.

And we need states and policy-makers to start to say, "It's just as important to have a school psychologist or a social worker in a school as it is to have a great classroom teacher." Some of the academic challenges that school districts and students are facing, behind that are social-emotional challenges or trauma-informed conditions that we have to deal with. And so I do think in the end this work around discipline and the work around chronic

absenteeism will see us move away from legal remedies to what I think are going to be more social justice, restorative justice, social-emotional support remedies to help kids get where they need to get, in terms of their social-emotional conditions, and then they'll be able to flourish academically and we'll see improvement on those traditional core academic indicators.

MS. KLEIN: Yeah, I hear that. So when as it first passed and these new indicators came, I heard from some folks, "Hey, you know, these indicators aren't necessarily going to pinpoint new schools that need help. We're going to see the same bottom performers. Because if you have low test scores, you're also not going to have high AP class-taking, you're going to have high chronic absenteeism." So what do you think about that? I mean, if the accountability -- if accountability systems exist to figure out which schools that need help, do you worry that these measures aren't really going to make a difference with -- schools with low academics are

going to do poorly on these measures, too?

SPEAKER: Well, I'll go back to what Jay's reminded us of this idea of measure and what gets measured gets done.

MS. KLEIN: Okay.

SPEAKER: The worst-case scenario is that you'll start seeing schools that will start setting aspirational goals for their students. Say, "Listen, we've got to get more kids enrolled in AP, dual enrollment and IB courses." So it's -- that's not a bad thing. We, as policy-makers, we should be thinking and be concerned with, "Are those students as underrepresented populations, are they finding success in those classes," but well you're going to certainly see a spike in some enrollment of some of those advanced courses. So I think in that regard, it's going to be a good thing. The support structures that had to be put in place, I think power state leaders -- (laughs) not to beat up on lawmakers, but the funding -- there has to be some requisite funding that will come with that because there are going to have to be

some additional supports that will have to go -- and especially in some of these schools that have been these so-called, you know, sort of bottom 5 percent of focus schools, however we identify them in each state. Because you can't move that school that's having academic challenges into having increased -- dramatic increases in enrollment in those college -- advanced types of course work.

MS. DIODONET: And we also have, like, 90/90/90 schools, right? So 90 percent of the children, free and reduced lunch, 90 percent in attendance, but 90 percent with achievement gaps. So I think it starts and ends with leadership. Sometimes, you know, like, district-level folk have to say, "This principal's not cutting it. We need to get him either another career or (laughter) get him on a corrective or get her on a corrective action plan and keep it moving," because at the end of the day, the ones that are suffering are the children, right?

And again, we talk about opportunity gaps and expectation gaps, so we just keep seeing the same



ones are moving out, you know, are going to stay the same and we're just going to start going back and forth. There are real decisions that need to be made at the district level regarding who's in charge. Because there are such things at -- as turnaround schools that do well. I mean, it's because of leadership, so I think we have to also do that hard work of having those fierce conversations, right and saying, "You're not cutting it, bud. Let's talk."

MS. KLEIN: Yeah. You also want to take a crack at that?

SPEAKER: To your question of the same schools getting re-identified, maybe so.

MS. KLEIN: Yeah.

SPEAKER: When you're looking at the lowest 5 percent of schools, maybe that's true. But what we are seeing, though, is when you focus on so many different measures of which are not just one test, one achievement measure, but measures of engagement and college readiness and career readiness and so on, that there are students -- and we say students of color,

poor students from low-income families, our most vulnerable populations, they actually exist in not just the 90/90 schools, they exist in many schools across the state.

And when you focus on more of these types of engagement indicators, we find that it actually draws the attention of those schools to figure out, "Why are these, you know, maybe it was on assessment, on achievement, we saw it. But now they're showing up on multiple measures and our overall school score no longer is high enough because you're getting pulled down, so to speak, on more indicators. Now I better pay attention to the students who are not doing well in my school." So I think it's actually helped to highlight our -- again, I will say -- vulnerable students who exist in many schools throughout the state.

MS. KLEIN: All right, thank you.

SPEAKER: I just really appreciate the answers they gave.

MS. KLEIN: Yeah. Yeah. No, I do, too.

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SPEAKER: That's really good. That's really important. Thanks.

MS. KLEIN: We got some great questions from the audience, so I'll start reading through those. One person is noting that the health sector is starting to pay a lot more attention to health-related social needs. It is obviously something schools are looking at, too. So they want to know what can be done to engage or scale up existing education health collaboration on things like chronic absenteeism.

MS. DIODONET: I can talk about it.

MS. KLEIN: Absolutely. That sounds right up your ally.

MS. DIODONET: Oh. Well, a full-service committee school is what we have in Paterson. We have about seven of them where we have a health clinic within the building. And so when you talk about not having your shots, that's the easy one. "Come with me. The doctor's here on Thursday." Right? "Come with -- and we'll -- can fill this out." You know, there's grants just in case they don't have insurance.

The other thing is our asthmatic children, right? Our asthmatic children -- you take them out on a fire drill, they get that cold air, they're not coming to school for four or five days. And I actually had a call last week where the lady said, "Ms. Diodonet, you're always talking about attendance. They're taking my baby outside in this cold weather and now I have to take her to the doctor and now you're going to mark her absent." It was, like, this whole thing and I was like, "Ms. Gonzales , you are absolutely correct," in terms of what we can do as educators. "Unless," then I told her, "Unless there's a fire or, God forbid, a shooter, we know when these fire drills are going to occur." In an urban school there is a bodega in every three in one corner, right? When I was the principal of School Five, I went across the street, they loved giving me free sandwiches, I had a relationship with them. And basically, when I had to do fire drills, my nurse would gather her kids, she would walk them across the street for that fire drill and it was a done deal, right? They didn't have to

suffer from asthma because one -- and my husband's asthmatic, so -- one cold air could really knock you out.

You know, in terms of having workshops for parents, having that connection with -- I'm going to say Saint Joseph's Hospital, which is our big hospital. Having connections and relationships with the hospital is another way. The -- it's really about relationships and planning well. And that can really take a lot of that away of those health issues. Now, the children who have cancer, God forbid, and all that, that's a whole different -- you talked about those serious diseases; that's a whole different story. But the ones that we could prevent, those are easy fix in terms of just planning.

SPEAKER: I've thought about this and it's in context of some work that I've also been doing around awareness about the impact of sickle cell disease. And that's particularly pernicious in African-American communities and there's such shame and misunderstanding, of course, around sickle cell

aware -- sickle cell disease and how episodic it is. And I would think that for a child who has sickle cell disease, chronic absenteeism is really pretty close to the line for them.

MS. KLEIN: Yeah.

MR. JOHNSON: When we did our event, by the way, the one with the cute, but runny-nose kids, we actually had not only Secretary King at the time from the Department of Education, but we also had Secretary Castro there from HHS, again, to emphasize how the -- these two issues, health and education, go hand-in-hand.

MR. BRABRAND: I think the work she talked about, community centers and schools, huge. Lots of school districts aren't there yet; that's something our district is taking a deeper dive. One of the groups missing out here is the city or county government municipality and their policies. I am proud Fairfax County school board and the board of supervisors this year decided to create a One Fairfax, an equity policy that will shine across all government

services, all school services an equity lens on everything that's delivered to kids, to families, to its citizens and residents. And I think this is one, again, where, "Are we doing the wraparound services necessary to help kids?"

Geoffrey Canada, if you read the book "What It Takes," Paul Tough, I think he found in Harlem 50 to 60 percent of the absenteeism was around asthmatic kids who just needed the right medicine.

I left a smaller school district in Virginia where access to health was a huge issue and finally the local hospital was saying they put in \$7 million in the building, a community center in the neighborhood where it was needed. It was a medicine desert. Just like food desert, so it was a medicine desert. No access to the health care needed. Everybody was making the trip in a taxi to the emergency room.

So we're not as far along in that holistic thinking. It's not just the child; in many cases, it's the family. And we've got to pull both of those

together in a more systematic fashion. So I think health is getting it.

One of the things we're doing, too, is we're looking at our curriculum around health, healthy life choices for kids, and beginning a continuum in our health and physical education to build that in more. We're redesigning our food delivery, we're putting salad bars in all of our two -- hundred elementary schools. Two-hundred schools we're putting salad bars, salad bars. (Laughter) I just went in last Friday. The kids are going nuts, filling up their plates with corn and carrots. But before, it was pizza, it was cheese pizza and French fries. So it sounds silly, but again -- and we market it as something exciting and fresh and new.

By the way, after with the salad bar, I could still go in the line and get my cheese pizza slice. But we put up front the good stuff. And I think putting up front the good stuff, good curriculum for kids, good access to health care for kids, if we give every kid the same access and same opportunity,



we're going to see those achievement gaps narrow. And we're going to see the academic indicators improve.

MS. DIODONET: If I can just say one thing. I think also for parents who have sickly children, knowing that they could have home instruction, come to the home for two or three to receive instruction each day is also important. Because sometimes parents don't have that information and because of a health issue they also miss out on their academics and then that -- they're really chronically absent. Because sometimes states call them differently, and so a kid that's sick, but is still receiving instruction would be a kid on home instruction and not necessarily chronically absent. So that's important for parents to know.

MS. KLEIN: This is a good question for the state and district leaders we have up here. How are states and districts supporting schools to implement these new school quality indicators that we have under ESSA? What are you doing for your schools? We've heard a lot about it, but --

MS. DIODONET: I'm getting \$84,000, so I  
(laughs) --

MS. KLEIN: Okay. (Laughs)

MS. DIODONET: I mean, \$84,000 and right now about -- she's trying to get me 20 attendance officers, but I'd rather not have 20. I'd rather four that are solid and get more monies so that we can have more programming. However, you know, when you're under budgeted and we're -- for the past seven years in total we've been under budgeted \$280 million, that becomes a problem. But that's a whole different panel discussion. But (laughs) the fact that this year we were able to make -- decrease chronic absenteeism, like, I think in the month of December the district went down 44 percent in chronic absenteeism when compared to the year before, with no money -- I'm hoping that this \$84,000 will, you know, make larger gains and decrease it more so.

MR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: I think -- from the state perspective, I think some of it is definitely need for additional resources. In Connecticut, we

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having some we call an alliance district program and it is intentionally not phrased as low-performing district program because we -- or a failing district program. It is our lowest-performing districts, but we call it an alliance because it is a partnership between the state and the local district. And over the past five years, we have invested over \$500 million in these 30 districts, 30 of our lowest-performing districts.

For Connecticut, where you can drive through in two hours, we have almost 200 school districts. So that's Connecticut, but we've invested over \$500 million in these districts and several of them have invested those resources into supports and engagement opportunities for students.

So I think there has been direct cash investment. We also have a -- something we call a commissioner's network school. That's a school-level thing where I think we currently have maybe 16 schools that apply to be part of the commissioner's network and they get additional resources and supports. But

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these resources and supports aside, I think what you've heard here is that -- and from some of your openings is that there are, I'll say, low-cost to no-cost strategies that can be implemented to really make a big difference on some of these indicators that we're talking about.

I mean, the two-way texting, I think there is actually solid -- some pretty rigorous evidence that shows that, that actually does make a difference and some of that's -- those studies just came out recently as it pertains to chronic absenteeism. There are also studies like that when it comes to summer melt and students engaging and following through and enrolling in post-secondary.

So there are, you know, steps that districts and schools can take and here -- this is what I mean by sphere of influence. There are things they can do to expand that sphere and really view themselves much more as a community -- school community organization than just a reading and math, you know, "That's all we do and that's it," kind of perspective. So I think

that's -- there are ways in which you can really extend this, from a school district perspective.

MR. BRABRAND: Biggest thing we're doing right now for our schools, we're giving a real-time -- we've taken all the ESSA indicators for testing, chronic absenteeism and we have a real-time database now that we're about to put out to the school principals so they can keep track. And even as the testing starts and we're adding it for the other indicators, they'll know exactly how they're doing, whether they're green, yellow, red, instead of waiting for the state timeline, "Up, here it comes," and a chance to be more proactive, to know your own data. And before we were doing some of the -- we didn't want to wait for the state, so we had people crunching it at each school. Now, we've kind of got that data already done and you can sort of pull up your iPad or your computer and look at it and spend more time responding to the data than trying to crunch the data in the first place.

MR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: If I --

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MS. KLEIN: Yeah.

MR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: -- might add --

MS. KLEIN: Absolutely.

MS. GOPALAKRISHNAN: -- one other point, which is, you know, in addition to more resources and low-cost, no-cost strategies, I think we have to stop doing things that we don't need to do anymore that don't add value. And this is a pet peeve of mine. When it comes to testing in particular, non-state testing, there are choices that districts and schools can make that don't need to invest additional resources and tests that do not yield additional information for teachers to actually inform instruction. So I think when you stop doing certain things, you now find time to do other things or invest in other things.

MR. BRABRAND: I think that's one thing my former boss stressed, actually, when he kind of surprised many folks in 2015 and came out against, you know, the crush of testing that his daughters were facing, but that he knows is -- was happening with

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millions of kids across the country. So does this testing really having an impact on how we are measuring how kids are doing, but also on their health and wellbeing as they navigate their way through school.

MS. DIODNET: I think more money needs to be spent, though, on social-emotional learning. At schools, it's particularly in the low-performing school. So if we're going to spend money, you know, to battle chronic absenteeism, it should be with that -- with those services in mind or those curriculums.

MS. KLEIN: Well, we are just about at time. I have a stack more of questions that I could have asked you all and I apologize to the audience for not getting to all of them, but I really just want to thank our awesome panel. Thank you so much; really learned a lot.

MR. BRABRAND: Yeah, thank you.

MR. GOPALAKRISHNAN: Thank you. (Applause)

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