

Chris Stewart: I probably have to leave at three. I don't know what time it is, now.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, quarter to three.

Chris Stewart: Quarter to three? Yes, yes. Well, my flight is at 5:30, so ... I don't know how far I am, but ...

Interviewer: Okay, so real quick, just a couple of questions. So, let's reflect on-

Chris Stewart: What's that? Over here, all right. Yeah.

Interviewer: ... each of these groups. You can start with the kids and then work back to this point. Just any reflections on what you heard: anything unusual, and inspiring, different.

Chris Stewart: I think with the students that it's very clear that they know the difference between a good class and a bad class. And they know the difference when adults care about them and when they don't. I think it's very clear to them, when they're not being challenged. When they know that they want to do more, they can do more, and they can't. Multiple students said the same thing about that one teacher that gets it right. And they really feel inspired and makes them want to do more. But then they talked about, that's like, one out of five, one out of six, one out of seven. And that was a problem. That was like a wake-up call to me that number one, they know what a good education is and they're not getting it. And they know that they're not getting it.

Interviewer: Talk about the parents. You've been very, very clear about the importance of having real conversation with these folks, unlike some of the conversation that they're having around the country. Talk a little bit about that conversation, what you've learned there, and just, why it's important.

Chris Stewart: So, I think with the parents, the thing that is really important for them, is that they just don't get great information. And they feel like they have to navigate a byzantine system just to get their kid to a school that fits and that matters. Especially in a city like Chicago, a big urban city like this. It seems like they have too many different directions to go to get information and to find out. Many of them have put their kids in several schools. Like the school that they're in today, may not be the school that they're in this same time, next year.

That's heartbreaking, because you know that these are some of the most engaged parents. These are the ones that really dig for the information to find it. And you have to know that there's a whole bunch of other parents that aren't able to get their kids into the school that they want. They just don't have the information.

Interviewer: Can you hold the ... Sorry, this is, [inaudible 00:14:22]. Okay, so real quick, let's talk about the first group is teachers. What did you learn there? You and I have spent a lot of time in the teaching profession and what did you learn from the teachers?

Chris Stewart: Teachers are really dedicated beyond just the craft of teaching. They have a reason to be there. Many of them knew that it was their job to be present, and be a role model for kids that aren't going to see many black teachers. In their lifetime, they're not going to have many role models. I think it was clear that there was a heightened reason for them to be there. There was also a very strong sense that they weren't set up to do their best work. That the system didn't always support them the way that they need to be supported to do their best work. And I think for all of them, they could imagine a way to do it better. They could imagine a way in which this would all be better, but they're not being listened to, and they're not being heard.

Interviewer: And just, last question, just reflect on if this was a conversation with all African-Americans [inaudible 00:15:28] but generally conversation among people of color, among African-Americans, why was it important to have a conversation like that?

Chris Stewart: Because there's a lot of people talking about education. The reasons really important to listen to groups of black students, black teachers, black parents, is because they're the most left out of the big conversation that we're having nationally. There are a lot of people talking about education, about us, without us. There are a lot of people that are making rules, and changing the game, and changing where and how you go to school, and it's not us.

And when we have these really honest discussions with people of color, with black folks specifically, teachers, parents and students, you learn right away that there is a detachment from where we are, from where the institution is. There is a gap between what we know would be good for us, and would be optimal, and what the institution is doing for us. And the institution is not real good at listening. I think the motto right now, for the institution, is we know best. Let us just take care of you.

I don't think that's true. And it will never be true, if it is never informed by real people. No successful anything, does it without bringing its end user in mind. It just can't succeed that way. I think it's obvious to everybody, we're not succeeding. I think there's nobody who's going to disagree with that. When it comes down to black kids, we're not succeeding. We're probably out of ideas if we don't talk to black teachers, black parents, and black students.

Interviewer: Great, thanks a lot.

Chris Stewart: Did you get all that?

Interviewer: You're from Seattle. You came to Chicago. You came, you saw, you heard. What