

Interviewer: You're from Seattle. You came to Chicago. You came, you saw, you heard. What did you hear? We can work backward from the students-

Nate Bowling: Sure.

Interviewer: ... back to the parents, and then the teachers, if that's easier. What did you hear from the students?

Nate Bowling: So, for me, I always think in education that we do an incredible amount of talking, but not so much listening. And I've always said that students know good teaching, better than anybody does. And the students, they were incredibly insightful about their experiences. Some of it was heartening, and some of it was disheartening. They're aware of the inequalities that exist system to system, and place to place, kind of to a point of just like, painful obviousness to them.

At the same time, they're also really aware of their own [inaudible 00:17:43] and advocacy. And so just seeing these students, and I hear a lot of them say, it's up to me, and I understand that I have to look out for myself and look out for my future. It was really, really insightful. I think my favorite question was, well actually my favorite answer was, when they were asked how did you decide what school you were going to? And where are your kids going to go to? The answer was really powerful. There was one young man who said basically, I hate the school that I'm at. I hate the way they treat me. I hate the systems. My kids are going there. And like, that says a lot.

Interviewer: What about the parents? What did you hear from them?

Nate Bowling: So, I have always said an education is a three-part stool. There's parent-involvement, student-involvement, and teachers. The parents who were here, were current [inaudible 00:18:27] champions for education. There are a couple young ladies actually, sitting all right here, who were just all at the same school. The city of Chicago is blessed to have the caliber of parent.

You don't come across people who are so passionate about education, and learning to fight and navigate systems as much as they have to. And honestly, it's really sad that you almost need a college class, as a parent, to know the systems that your kids are going through. Like, parents have to navigate, am I going to send my kid to a public school, to a charter school, to a private school, to a Saxon-Roman school? If I send them to that school, will their needs be met? And just, the amount of ...

So, to me, all that expertise a parent needs to develop, is demonstrative of the inequity of the system. Every kid and every parent deserves an effective, meaningful educational experience. Although, that's not what

we have. And so these parents have to shop, and be very choosy consumers.

Interviewer: Do you feel that they really know about the inequity? They sense it?

Nate Bowling: Particularly from the parents. I think they are very aware of the inequity. A lot of parents talked about how often they go into the schools. One mother said that she's in the school three times a week. And I think if you're in a school three times a week, that says a lot about your commitment to the education of your kids, and also the work you're willing to do.

There was one parent that talked about how their child has gone through eight different schools. And to me, that says a lot about how dedicated she is. She's looking for the right fit for her child, and what's best for them. And even some of the schools that are really high regarded, they weren't a good fit. And that's what really matters, right? More important than school reputation, and image, is the fit. You can have a kid who doesn't fit in at this well-regarded school, and it took an excited parent to know that.

Interviewer: Are you a teacher? You had a whole room of African-American teachers. Did you hear anything from these Chicago teachers that you hadn't heard in Seattle?

Nate Bowling: It's interesting. A lot of teachers are saying the same things nationwide. There's an incredible amount of resource inequity. And the work that we're being asked to do is very difficult, and it's complicated by outside circumstances. I think sometimes we get fatalistic, and lose our hopefulness in education. I actually left this conversation very hopeful, because these teachers care. These teachers are dedicated to the work and they're dedicated to the communities they work in. And the systems they work in aren't always serving the parents needs, and the teachers needs, but the teachers we heard from today are incredibly passionate, and are advocates.

I loved how Mr. Grisby, I think his name was, he was talking about the work that he does, and then two hours later, two kids who didn't know he was here, were talking about how impactful he was, and changed their lives. And that's what the work is all about. Every teacher wants five years from now, ten years from now, their students walking around and saying Bowling did this, and Bowling shaped me this, and Bowling taught me this.

Interviewer: Now, when you put people, all African-Americans, in a room, is the conversation going to be a little different? Is it important to have a conversation like that?

Nate Bowling: So, for me, as someone from the West Coast, and in the Northwest, I sat with more black teachers today, than I have worked with in my entire career. And the conversation that happened was very frank, and very honest. But in times like this, we need frank, honest conversations. And nobody knows the inequity that exists in the system like the people who work in the system and experience it. And so, who better to have conversations with about what needs to be done, than this group?

Interviewer: Okay. Thanks, [inaudible 00:21:44].

Nate Bowling: No, thank you. My pleasure.