

- Speaker 1: And so, I'll let ya'll just go down the row and introduce yourselves and you can say a little bit and then I'll hand it over you, Marylin.
- Chris: Start with me? Good morning everybody. I'm Chris Stewart I am the senior partner and CEO of the [Wayfinder 00:00:29] Foundation. We are a new foundation that makes direct investments into urban parents to become activists, to try and serve them. Most importantly we challenge the education system and the [inaudible 00:00:44] system, welfare system in 12 states, or in 12 cities, I should say. So that's the [Wayfinder 00:00:49] Foundation.
- Sharif: Good morning, [Sharif Felmeki 00:00:53], I'm from Philadelphia. I'm a principal at a turnaround school in West Philadelphia, born and raised, y'all know the rest. Also started a organization called The Fellowship, black male educators for social justice, where we're looking to support current and aspiring black male educators. As you know, around the country is two percent Philadelphia with all our black folks, it's only four percent, so not much better based off of the kids that we serve. Welcome.
- Marilyn: Hi everybody, thank you so much for coming. I'm Marilyn [Rains 00:01:30]. I am the founding CEO of Teachers Who Pray. If you want to know more about that please see me afterwards. I'm also a blogger for Education Post and I've worked in education, in CPS in particular, for 14 years as a teacher and a counselor. So I'm excited to talk to you.
- Nick: My name's Nick [Bolan 00:01:57] and I'm happy to be here as a guest of yours. I'm the 2016 Washington State teacher of the year. I'm from Tacoma, Washington, south of Seattle. I work in a traditional urban high school and teach AP government and AP geography, so a group of students who I adore deeply. I'm just glad to be here for the conversation.
- Speaker 1: Great. Marilyn, do you want to have them go around the room-
- Marilyn: Yes.
- Speaker 1: Okay. We also want to know who you are. If we could go around the room, if you could state your name and what part of the city you're from, what school you teach at, and what grade level.
- Jasmine: My name is [Jasmine Davenport 00:02:33]. I am from the south side of Chicago. I teach at Kenwood Academy on the south side, so I teach primarily senior high school students.
- Carla: My name is [Carla Matthews 00:02:42], I am currently the resident principal at Simeon Career Academy. I live on the south side. I was born and raised on the south side, and then I attended school on the south suburbs.
- Reginald: Good morning, my name is [Reginald Grigsby 00:02:57]. I just resigned from CPS, of being a teacher there for ten years and I left the district and went to the south 'burbs in Thorton fractional district 215. I teach social science. I live in Rogers Park but I was raised in the southwest suburbs. Most of my time in CPS was spent on the south side.

- Idevan: My name is [Idevan Evans 00:03:24], I'm not from Chicago, I'm a transplant. I moved here about three years ago from Detroit, Michigan. I teach on the far south side of a school called [inaudible 00:03:32] Prep, a charter school, and I teach tenth grade reading.
- Unique: I'm [Unique Morris 00:03:37], I'm from [Hamilton Vienna 00:03:38] but I was raised in Dolton, Illinois. I am an instructional coach, so [inaudible 00:03:43] interventionist in the Dolton west school district 148 in Washington school [inaudible 00:03:47].
- Vivian: Hi, my name is Vivian Green. I live on the north side of Chicago. I am a co-teacher in science and social studies at Nichols Middle School in Evanston, Illinois. I'm not from Chicago, but I do love the city. Thank you.
- Shake: Hi, my name is [Shake Porter 00:04:09] and I'm currently a third grade teacher at [inaudible 00:04:12] Academy. This is my 20th year and 15th of being a Chicago teacher's union delegate. I currently teach third grade, born and raised on the south side, and only taught on the south side. One school.
- Tanisha: Good morning, everybody. My name is Tanisha [inaudible 00:04:31]. I am the behavioral health specialist for Chicago Public Schools. I was born and raised on the west side. My work experience has been in charter, as well as public school at Southwest High.
- Tanida: Good morning, my name is [Tanida 00:04:42] Smith. Born and raised on the south side. I currently work in the [inaudible 00:04:48] neighborhood at Perspectives Charter School and I teach 11th grade English.
- Leandra: Good morning, [Leandra Caan 00:04:53]. I am a southsider as well. I just left a [principalship 00:05:00]. I was a CPS principal for ten years and then did Oak Park, and now I'm the CEO of [inaudible 00:05:04] Education Partners and we manage for charter schools.
- Michelle: Good morning, my name is Michelle Howard. South side born and raised, specifically, the lower end. But I currently serve as a project manager. I manage scholarships for Chicago public schools.
- Glenda: Good morning, my name is Glenda Hicks. Born and raised in Gary, Indiana but I live in the south side of Chicago. This is my 10th year teaching, sort of a second career, and I'm not in public school, so if you want to make me leave I can go. I teach at a private Christian school, which is not far from here, called Daystar. I really, really love teaching.
- Andrea: Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrea Parker. I was born and raised on the south side in the back of yards neighborhood and I currently teach in the back of the yards neighborhood at a school called Robert Fulton Elementary. I teach sixth through eighth grade writing and social studies and because of my love for writing, I recently am a co-founder of a non-profit organization called The Write Café where I teach young people how to write, have a passion, and find their voice in writing.

Quielle: Good morning, I'm [Quielle 00:06:15] Wells. I'm from Grand Rapids, Michigan but I've been teaching here in the Chicago area for ten years now. Right now I work at Field-Stevenson Elementary School in Forest Park, Illinois.

Speaker 1: Thank you all for being here. It's such an honor to have this time and space with you. It's not often that African American teachers, specifically, get a chance to come together and talk about issues from our perspective, about issues that affect African American children, specifically.

So we've invited you to come and share your perspectives, give us some ideas as we're all bloggers, and some of you will, hopefully, read [inaudible 00:07:02] with education posts. Then we want to not just talk about it here but use this video to disseminate some of this information, to share with a greater audience that won't be all African American. Just to have our voices heard.

So we're here, really, as a listening tour, so to speak. We want to talk as little as possible and hear from you. We haven't had a lot of time to get to know each other, but I just really hope that you will use this next hour and a half to express what's on your heart and to know that this is a safe space.

You don't have to say anything you don't feel comfortable saying, but I hope that you will feel comfortable being honest about your experiences, what you've seen, what we need to express to the powers that be, that we need and we want and support one another. Also, to give each other a chance to speak so we can share the mic so everyone will take part in this and walk out feeling like they've had a chance to speak their mind. So, sharing the mic is really important.

We don't have an agenda, I promise you. We have, like, three questions that I'm gonna probe, just to start it off, but if I don't to the third questions or the second question I'm fine with that. I want to give you guys a chance to speak, 'cause we're always speaking. So this is what it's about. It's not about charter schools, that's what we had. We invited Christian schools, [inaudible 00:08:58] schools, charter schools, district schools. We have union delegates in the room, suburban ... We're all united in our blackness and our experience, and that even is different, depending on where you're from and how you were raised. Doesn't mean we're all alike. So we want to respect each other and just have this time together. I've never had this opportunity before and I've done this for 14 years, to just be in this safe space, just among us. I take that back, I just finished [inaudible 00:09:36] fellowship, so it was kind of like that, but I'm done. I hope you get my point. Please, please indulge and take advantage of this opportunity.

So let's just start off with why you are teaching. What is it that excites you about being an educator, particularly for African American students if you have. What is it that drives you or keeps you coming back year after year? Providing the service that you provide for your students? You don't have to raise your hand. This is a conversation, so just jump in.

Unique: I would have to say for my experience in schools- I actually work in the district that I grew up in. So when I was in school, when we moved to Dalton from Chicago, I had a teacher that told me, "Your kind won't amount to anything." It was when Dalton had

just, kind of, slowly started integrating in the early 80s. So she really didn't expect much from me, and I was upset about it, but then I thought, "You know what, I'm gonna prove you wrong." I was the only black girl in my classroom, third through sixth grade, and I always felt like I needed to prove that my kind will do something. I did have some teachers along the way that were very inspirational - my fourth grade teacher, my sixth grade teacher - that poured into me, but as I grew up I thought about what is it that I wanted to be.

At first I didn't want to be a teacher because, of course, teachers don't make much money. They're not well respected, but as I saw my community change and I saw some of the same teachers still there, I really wanted to come back and show the kids that were in my neighborhood that, yeah, you can go to college and you may have had teachers just like me that didn't believe in you, but I'm here and I got through, and I succeeded, and you can succeed too.

So I come back every year just because I love the kids that are in my community and I want to give back and show them that there's more to offer and that there's more that they can do, that Dolton Riverdale is not the end all be all, that there's a world out there that they can discover.

Vivian: I'll jump in saying how I feel about being a teacher.

Originally, I was a realtor, a successful realtor at that. Been in my heart of heart, I always wanted to be a teacher. I gravitated toward university and became a counselor, an admission counselor at a university. I was successful there in mentoring people and guiding people as to their careers, adults, more so than children. But as I spoke with adult students on a day to day basis, I discover, very frustratingly, that they were frustrated about their level of education. They were not prepared to become college students, academically. Very disheartening for a lot of them, and they would drop out. So I said, "Something needs to be done. Something is wrong with the system." And by the time it gets to where I was, at the level I was, it's almost a little late. So I'm like, "I want to do something to impact people, educational minds, at a early stage." That you can make a different so they're not at a stage where they're an adult and academic is very challenging for them.

So I decided I was going to step out of a university setting and come into a middle school setting and teach at that level so that I feel that those students will have an opportunity to work with someone who's had the opportunity to be on the other side and know what it feels like. Oftentimes students at that age do not understand the larger picture, but they need someone who is passionate about guiding them. I feel good about where I am today and know it doesn't make a lot of money at the corporate level that I was used to, but I'm not here about the money, I'm here to impact young people lives and make sure they have an opportunity, an equal opportunity, to step forward and be able to compete with other people and other nations that we are looking at globally here in this country and around the world. So that's why I am a teacher, and I thank God for the opportunity.

Andrea: Just to pick it back up, what you said, that's a reason why I teach. I want our students to

have a passion for knowledge, I [inaudible 00:15:10] is just [inaudible 00:15:12]. People are going to school for the wrong reasons.

I remember when I was in college, my first year at SIU, I was in a classroom, I think it was a sociology class, and the professor asked us, "Why are you here?" And he gave us two options. He said, "How many of you are here because you want to make money?" And everybody raised their hand. And then he asked, "Well, how many of you are here because you just want to increase your knowledge?" And I was like, "Wow. Am I here for the right reason?" So that really sparked something in me, because from that day forward I really did have a love for knowledge.

I always had a love for reading and a love for understanding, a love for truth, that's why I majored in Journalism when I was in college. I want to parlay that to the students, I want them to have a love for truth, a love for knowledge, and to seek out truth and to ask questions, and not to take things at face value.

I feel like a lot of our students have been subjected to that, just been given information and they don't know how to decipher it, they don't know how to analyze it, they don't know how to evaluate it, they don't know how to apply it, and I want them to do that. I really want them to express themselves through writing and through reading because I feel like you find your creative side, you open up your imagination, and just to watch less TV. Read more, think more, and to allow your brainwaves to really move. That's why I'm there, to coax what was already in them, 'cause they have so much in them.

A lot people think that, especially with poor African Americans, that they're not gonna amount to much and your expectations of them should be low, but that's not true. They have so much that you can just dive into and bring out, and they really want that to be brought out of them, and they're excited about it. When I see that "aha moment" in their lives, where they're excited about who they are and what they can be, and what they can bring to this world, it's exciting to them. It makes even the bad days that you experience worth it. That one person or one student can come out and just be a blessing to the world and say, "I never thought that I could be a doctor. I never thought that I could be lawyer or an advocate or activist until Ms. Parker or somebody showed it in me," and now they're doing it, and they're inspiring others.

So that's bringing fruit and hoping they'll bring forth more fruit and it'll be a continuous cycle of positivity instead of the cycle of negativity and mediocrity.

Carla: Miss Vivian brought up the introduction of finding yourself in middle school.

Miss Jackson was my seventh grade algebra teacher. She was second black teacher that I had in my ten years, and my first black teacher was my sixth grade language arts teacher. So I got a black teacher later on in life, but Miss Jackson was my algebra teacher. She had a son, she talked about him every day. She spoke the language of mathematics like I had never heard it before, and I wanted to grow up and be just like her. That is why I show up in front of children every day, because the role model is just not there.

I pride myself on being a heroine. I pride myself on showing up every day just so they can see the image that matches something that they've never seen before. Now at this juncture I'm learning that the leadership really matters as well. If we want to have this conversation about race, it is a great indicator and it is a great measuring stick for children to see that not only am I a woman, because education is filled with women, and they know that, they know they're gonna get a mother when they come to school, but a well spoken, standing up straight, command of attention, mother, female speaking mathematics - oh, we are about to learn. So that's why I show up, 'cause kids expect to learn when they get to school and the package just makes it even more phenomenal for them.

Tanisha: The idea of image is why I think I ended up in the profession. I never wanted to work in a school. First day of grad school, they were like, "What do you want to do?" And I'm like, "I know I don't want to work with kids and old people," right? That was my response. I went to Jane Adams for social work, I want to do policy and advocacy 'cause that's what I'm good at.

One day I was walking my niece and nephew to school, and they went to a charter school that was around the corner from my home, and I looked and all of the teachers were white. And I thought, "Where are the black people?" There are no black faces in this building. So I had to investigate, 'cause I'm nosy. And it's a clerk, and it's a janitor. I said, "Oh, no." So I went to the principal and I said, "So here's the thing, I'm gonna have my MSW in, like, two weeks, and you're gonna hire me because I'm going to do amazing things in your school." He looked at me like, "Girl." He hired me and I did amazing things in his school.

The number one thing that I think I did in the school was I provide those children with the image of a woman of color, of a woman who looked like them, who walked the same streets that they walked to and from school every day, and I made sure that they knew they could do it. I made sure that they knew that there was more than these boundaries of our community, that there is something outside of this, and it's at your fingertips, and I'm going to show you this. I'm going to expose you to this as best as I can, and then I brought in my friends 'cause I'm [inaudible 00:20:44] like that. I'm gonna bring in all my people, every community partner that I knew, every alternate, every political person that I had ever worked with, 'cause I want you to see that these people look like you and they have a service to do on behalf of you, and you need to know this.

So I made sure that my kids understood that this isn't just about you. The more I began to work, I swear this chose me. I never wanted to work with kids, I was like, "No, Jesus." But I love my kids, and I'm gonna fight for my kids. Then it became for my own children, whenever I choose to become a mother, I want to make sure that my child experiences teachers that look like them, and the only way that I can do that is if I cultivate this in young people at this early age. So that's how education chose me.

Tanida: Teaching, for me, is a second career. I was mentoring a group of young girls and they were going to a high school, and they told me how they never had a voice. They didn't feel like they were seen, they didn't feel like that were being heard, and then they told me about an incident where the kids in the school decided to jump on the police. I was

shocked, I was like, "This doesn't happen in high school. Does this happen in the real world?" Totally shocked. So I transitioned out of my career as a grant writer to become an educator because I wanted my students, my kids, people who looked like me, to have a safe space where they can learn and grow with someone who understood some of the things that they were going through and understood some of their dreams so that they didn't feel like they had to lash out and resort to violence because they weren't being heard.

Right now, every day, I have students in my room like, "I just want to go home." But it's now a safe space, they know there's someone in the building that listens to them, that's going to give them advice, that's going to advocate for them. They're not my students, they're my kids. I go all in 100% because if they're not having a voice and they resort to things that we don't want them to resort to.

Leandra: For me, it's an issue of access. I'm a career changer as well, I practiced engineering for about a decade. I was in rooms and spaces where decisions about our city's infrastructure were being made, decisions about services we provide to the community were being made. What it signals to you, if you're a person of color and you don't see anyone who looks like you, is that you don't get to make these decisions.

My goal is to change the color and composition of the rooms and the tables where they're making choices about us, and the only way I felt like I could do that is in front of students. Again, to everyone else's point, being a model, showing people that someone who grew up on 89th and [inaudible 00:23:37], who wasn't supposed to be here can be here and there and in every other room that you can think of, making an impact.

Shake: I'm also a career changer. I had no intention of being a teacher, but my first boss, Mrs. [inaudible 00:23:55], she hired me to teach kindergarten, and I didn't want to teach kindergarten. She said she did so because there was an eighth grader who had to repeat and he saw the new sixth grade math teacher was a black male, and he said he never had a male teacher, let alone a black teacher, so she thought it would be great for the kids to start off with one, at least you can start with one.

She gave me the unique opportunity to teach an all boys class and that was- At the time I didn't realize what a blessing it was. I actually did it for two years. The first class will be graduating, those that went to college, will be graduating. So when I see them, some of the things they remind me of, it kind of touches your heart to know that you made a difference like that.

I thought of my own experience, I never had a male teacher until I got to Kenwood, to high school, so I kind of saw how important that was and she was a visionary in that area. I understand it now and having the same experiences coming up as those boys that I taught, not all of us were fatherless but a lot of them were. So every year I would be called "daddy", at least 10 or 15 times a year. They would share things with me, I would share my life stories with them and they were shocked that we had so much in common, growing up on welfare. For them it was a link card, for me it was food stamps, so they just thought that was like, "What? You lived around here? What? The first of the month?"

We shared stories. Abandonment, you know, one boy ... Kids don't have any coping mechanism so they would just say whatever, so one child, we talked about family structure and he just told me his daddy went to the store and never came back. So I had to tell my story. We bonded over stuff like that, and what you could be. I thought that it was important for me to let these boys know what they could be and I tried my best to show up every day to be an example from the way I dressed, the way I talked, just to offer an alternative for them because image is everything for our children. By the time they get to our schools they've seen everything - the guy on the corner, all these negative images, then they get to the classroom, I wanted them to know there was something different and that you could be something. You didn't have to be confined to your neighborhood, and I wanted to show them a positive male role model.

Then I eventually left kindergarten ... So the profession pretty much chose me also. Being an agent of change, that is the most important thing for me right now, being an agent of change for however long I choose to do this.

Michelle: Teaching, I believe, is one of the hardest jobs in the world. I always say that I'm not a teacher. My mother's a longtime educator, so similar to a lot of what's been shared, I was not interested in education at all. No way, no how. It wasn't until ... I went to school for business, so business marketing was really at the forefront of what I wanted to do. When I got out of school our country was in a recession, so there weren't great jobs or anything like that, so after some time it was a mentor of mine ... Again, I had seen education for so long, but it was just what you do. My mom, like I said, was a longtime educator, and I literally felt the pull from my household so that she could serve her school, so she was the principal of Kenwood for quite some time, so it was awesome for me to get the talent show tickets. I could get all my friends to go with a ticket, but she missed all of my tennis matches because she was always at Kenwood. I had my father on the other side of that who would meet that need, but as a kid, as a student, I didn't care that my mother was a principal, I cared that she wasn't at my match. I didn't look at education as something that was a good thing to do, I looked at it as a giving of your life because that was the example of the educator that was in front of me.

Fast forward to after college, not being able to get a real job, and she, of course, pressed me the whole time through Howard to at least get a teacher's certificate, which I thought was absolutely absurd, so I did not. But my mentor, who was a good friend of hers who she'd worked with at Kenwood, Dr. Joyce Brown, literally said to me the exact same thing my mom said, which was, "We need you in the education world." And I'm like, "Beat it, I'm not interested."

But she opened the door for an opportunity for me to go into King College Prep High School with a public policy company at the time, so we were really doing research. We were trying to research this college under matching policy - if you put a [meer peer 00:29:40] person in a selective enrollment high school in Chicago and put them in front of 3.0 and up GPA students and 20 ACT and up students, will we be able to advise and help them match to the appropriate college and then help influence their decision around going to the best school for them. So to me that wasn't education, that was research, and that was perfectly fine. So, I was given that opportunity - to see education

from another side, not being a teacher, but collaborating with the teachers. Not being a principal, or an assistant principal, but working with the leadership to say, "This is probably the best route to go based on the data, based on the experiences with students."

So that ushered me into CPS. After that [wall 00:30:33] I was able to transition into a network position as a college and career specialist, and I literally was able to see education from the business side. When I was in front of students, I could confidently say to them, "When I was in college, I didn't want to be in education." But the job I have now, so now the role that I'm in- But when I say to students, "My job didn't exist when I was in college. This role came out of the need to serve students like you. So the \$70,000 I was looking for out of college, I did not get that. But I have that now, so you have to understand that education is not just being in a classroom. That is very much the foundation of education, but you can be a leader in any field and use education to help you do that."

So now I am just like, "Education is my thing!" It is an amazing, amazing space to be in because it allows for creativity. Now I tell students, "I market scholarships to you," so I'm not just saying, "Hey, this is a good scholarship," I'm saying, "What can I do to make you open this email and apply for this scholarship?"

A good friend of mine, who's actually in the room, said to me, "Man, you're a projector." And when he said that to me I'm like, "Right. What I do is try to help students, or educators, or whomever I'm working with, see their light, whatever that is, then I help you project that. So it's been an incredible space to be in the education world, not just in a classroom, but really being at a table, to be a decision maker to say, "In Chicago, do we have scholarship opportunities that are meeting the need of one of our most vulnerable student groups, which is African American males?" My answer to that is, "Absolutely, I do that every day. Here they are, and this is what we can do to help serve these students better."

So I just think that I fell into this, but students need to know that if you want to be an educator that's great, but- And I can just speak for Chicago Public Schools, we're the third largest school district in the nation. What's happening in CPS, and what's happening in this city, we're an international city, and really helping students see that. Having a voice right now in Chicago, yeah, you can change history. You certainly can. That's what we do all the time. So helping students see a different perspective of what education really is, and how to become a change agent in education and why that's important.

Carl: ...[inaudible 00:00:01] on that, so not an educator, traditional educator by trade, I'm the supporter of those educators in the district. The roles that I've had throughout the district it's supporting those educators to reach those goals that many of you have spoken about this morning. One thing I want to say in terms of education, you have to see yourself in those different roles because it's later ... it's the classroom, it's the district, it's the main office, you have to see individuals, such as you, that help promote that change and promote the differences that you want

to see.

As a young man, my family teach, they're principals, but I just didn't want to do it. I think you also have to be honest with yourself to know that you're just not a teacher, everyday classroom person, but you can support the educational process. For me, that's one of the main reasons why I chose to stay within Chicago Public Schools. I wanted, especially our young men, to see that you don't have to be a classroom teacher to impact education and impact change and impact the future of the lives. Like I said, with the district roles I've had over the years I've been able to coordinate and collaborate with educators and principals to bring programs in that benefited their students.

Just like Michelle said, there's a wide range of what education means. I think for us, as individuals, we have to understand that and not pigeonhole ourselves to just say classroom or principal. You can be network chief, you can be the scholarship manager, you can be a family in community engagement manager, you can have different touchpoints that you can bring people together to impact the things that you want to see change. I think that's important to start to understand and have a conversation about education.

Speaker 2: Carl, what do you do at CPS right now?

Carl: Right now? I am the Director of Sports Operations for our Sports Administration Office. What that means do you want me to elaborate?

Basically everything before and after a game. I deal with HR, staffing, I deal with facility rentals, I deal with the business side of our sports office.

Speaker 2: When we talk about African-American students, particularly male students, I know sports tend to be a big thing. It's draw. It's what keeps kids engaged. Can you speak about the importance of sports, but also how you balance the academic needs of our students? There have been stories of athletes doing great things, but can't read 5th grade in college and all that so just speak on that.

Carl: Sure. You'll have to excuse me because this is a pain point of mine; I am not of the norm when it comes to my thoughts on this.

Speaker 2: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Carl: The vast majority ... Everybody knows Chicago is a basketball town, right? Everybody's son or daughter, they want to be the next Derrick Rose, they want to be the next Anthony Davis so everybody, they push sports. Sports, sports, sports. But when you look at the characteristics of a good athlete, determined, they persevere, they're committed, they have structure. All of those characteristics are the exact same characteristics of a good student. You have to be committed to your studies. You have to persevere when you don't do well on a test initially. You have to have those same qualities. Our focus as a city and as a people is if we just redirect it a little bit.

Those same qualities that you're pushing your son or daughter in 6th or 7th grade to play ball 6 hours a day you can do that same thing in the classroom with studying. When you talk about students who are ... they excel as athletes, but they're failing in the classroom I think, quite honestly, we have failed them. We don't show them that they can do both. That they are dynamic enough to be a star on the court or the field, but to be a star in the classroom. Honestly, the way I feel about it is that your athletes are really your ambassadors at your school, especially on a high school level because those are the individuals who everyone comes to see after school or on the weekend. Right? Those are the models. So if you really position them correctly they can have that same draw and attention in the classroom. But it's just that, I don't know, for some reason we just don't emphasize that to them. It's like we're trading them off and it's not a good look.

Just in terms of that, that's ... I do the business side of sports, but I'm really involved in trying to get us, as a district, to really realign ourselves. Some of the academic thresholds we're giving our students it's not enough. We're holding them to the bare minimum. They can do so much more. That's how I feel about it.

Speaker 2: I want to introduce a second question. If you want to answer the first question still at some point please feel free to jump in. I want to find out what keeps you, as African-American educators, up at night? What is it that really hurts your spirit? It's a loaded question, and you can go in multiple direct ... Like if you don't get it all out someone else will answer something that you would have said. I know we only have about 45 minutes left so you're going to have to share the mic on this one.

I know, for myself, I spend many sleepless nights. I've found myself dreaming about my students, at times, calling out their names in the middle of the night. It gets real deep. I get chills just thinking about this topic because I know we're in here, we care deeply about our kids. What is it? If you could just name one thing that keeps you up at night? And then if you can offer one thing that you think could address it. It could be a little tweak, that could help, maybe not solve the problem, but help a little bit more, that we could apply directly, immediately, as a district, as a school, just as a team of teachers, however you want to frame it, to address that problem. So if it's like, "If we only did this this would help, but we're not doing it. I just can't sleep at night because of that." Am I making myself[crosstalk 00:06:51]?

Carl: Yes [crosstalk 00:06:50].

Speaker 2: Okay, so if you haven't yet spoken this would be a great time to jump in.

Speaker 3: I know for me, specifically, as far as what got me to this place that I am, I was always surrounded around strong black women that were educated. All of them happen to be teachers. My uncles that were educated, they all were teachers. It was just natural that I would become an educator.

In all of my years, I never had a black male teacher. I had three African-American female teachers. Once I transitioned and became an educator, I felt like I wanted to

be I knew that I would be more than just a teacher. I knew that I would become a father and a friend and an advocate and all these other things for young black men. I decided to ... I started my own male mentoring program. Just this year, one of my students that I had he just graduated with his Master's degree. I shared him with Ms. Matthews.

Ms. Matthews: I was his math teacher once.

Speaker 3: He just graduated and he will be starting his first year as a math teacher at Urban Prep this year. It's a beautiful thing. I know for me, specifically, I worry about these boys. I know that I grew up with a mother and a father. Both my parents were educated so my upbringing ... and I grew up in the suburbs. It was a little bit different. My parents were divorced and my father wasn't always there. I think about my boys and the struggles that I know they deal with, day in day out and just being supported. And it's not enough coming from the sisters. The brothers are going to have to step up and step into education and into the classroom and be visible.

We represent 2% of the teaching population and there's so much other things the profession offers besides salary. If you are just looked and hooked on a salary, that's not going to keep you. My thing is, I know that I've made an impact and I'm definitely making an impact. It speaks volumes when I run into my students and I have conversations with them. The school that I just left, I had a connection with these kids. It's hard because they feel like no one else is gonna be there for them and support them like I have. That's the thing that troubles me and that was the thing ... I know I made a very good decision leaving where I left and where I'm at because I'm serving the same demographic.

But I think equity and resources, the school that I was at did not offer as many resources as the school that I went to in the suburbs. And what they offer the students and how ... how much more ready they are for the workforce and college, that these kids will be at, where I currently serve, compared to the students that I just left at CPS.

There has to be some other things. Mentoring programs, that are instituted into the classrooms, are not as impactful as a male that is involved in these children's lives every day. It's not the same. I think that's something we need to address definitely as a community. Offer more incentives for African-American male teachers. More supports as they enter the profession not just being thrown into classrooms, but really being supported, guided, coached and mentored. I think that's something we definitely need to address and look at. The sisters are doing it. The brothers, we need to step up.

Devin: I want to add on to that, the power of having a black male teacher in the classroom so I'm gonna start with a story.

When I was in the third grade, I was a very bad child, getting thrown out the classroom and very rambunctious. [inaudible 00:11:01] but I really was. However, I

had a teacher named Mr. Murray. He had a very strong, commanding presence. One day, I was acting wild in class, he came in the room and in a very deep voice he said, "Devin, sit down!" and I sat my behind down. They tried to give me like ADHD or something like that, but I realize as I'm older now because of his presence, that's what calmed me down was his presence. I think, for me, it's very important, as [inaudible 00:11:26] was saying, to have those black male teachers in the classroom. Additionally, I want to pay homage to [inaudible 00:11:32]. When I did student teaching he mentored me. I didn't have a father figure in my life growing up. When I got to the school he was at, he helped to father me that whole entire year, and he still does to this day.

Now I have my sons, who I mentor and who I pour in to, and I'm changing their lives because of that. I think it's important that when you are trying to even hire teachers ... because you're black doesn't necessarily mean that you have the skills to teach black kids, or to understand their background or etc., but hire people in the school who really understand what they're going through, and can support them, mentor them and excel them.

Speaker 6: In considering my answer, I thought about the first question too because one thing that drives me to continue teaching, through everything I've been through and all the reasons I've had to quit, would be the fact that as growing up I didn't have strong role models. My mom had me at 15. I grew up in an unsafe environment where school was my safe place. I think about going every day to create that safe place for other people and to show them that, "Yeah, your mom may not be able to do this ... your family may not be able to do that, but there are people that can be there for you." I can be there for you and you, most importantly, can be there for you.

Something that keeps me up at night is just thinking about the kids that go home ... they told me their electricity is off ... they've already told me that the gas is off. I work in a district where we have double digit per pupil expenditure ... but if I were to go and say, "Hey, this kid is cold at night.", we can't help them. The easy fix is community resources. Having the resources available, and not judging. Not making parents feel like they're being judged if you are to ask about it. What's the point of asking, if you're not going to help.

If you're gonna go with the conversation of safety measures at home, you should also go with solutions. A lot of times, people just don't know. We assume that parents know ...as a person who had a mom ... when I was five she was 20, she didn't know what to do. When I was 10 and she was 25, she didn't know; we grew up together. Now that I'm 33 and my mom is 48 ... often times, she commends me on the way that I parent. She's like, "I never knew or I never realized that you shouldn't take your kid here, or you shouldn't show your kid that." I think offering parents more of that, is what's needed. It's not assuming that everyone knows how to be a good parent. Sometimes what people are doing is really the best of what they know how to do.

Speaker 2: I want to follow up on that. A lot of people say, "Schools shouldn't be held

responsible for that ... making sure the lights are on, they need to go somewhere else for that." What do you say to people who say that? That schools should actually be a full wrap around support system.

Speaker 6: I believe in catering to the whole child. That includes whatever is going on at home. I say that the resources should be available because they are definitely out there. I know that they are.

Michelle: To piggyback off of Quila, it's important that school's become wrap around. What's going on at home will have an impact on what's going on in the classroom. [crosstalk 00:14:39] If a child is constantly traumatized ... whether that's not having adequate food at home whether that's being abused at home ... whether it's physical, mental, what have you ... lights not being on ... gas being cut off ... that's all gonna have an impact on that child. It's important ... if you want to build a good community working relationship and we want our parents to be involved, then we should be that wrap around school that cares for the child and the family.

The one thing that I can say, within my district, is that we have some awesome social workers. When they find out that a family has a need, my social worker would say, "Who can help?" As a staff, if there's furniture they need ... "Oh, I'll go pick up something, I'll get a truck." If there's food, "Let's go shopping for this family." By doing that, parents, then, also build that trust factor. A lot of parents don't trust the school system because of the experiences that they've had.

What keeps me up at night is the safety of my kids. Are they being fed? Is there something wrong at home? In the morning, "How is everything going?" ... "Did you have a good night's sleep?" ... "What is it that happened on the way to school?" ... "How can we be of assistance?" Calling up the parents, "Hey, this is what I was told that happened ... not to get in your business ... not to say I'm gonna call DCFS, but to see how I can help you do better. If you don't know what you're supposed to do, ask the questions and see if we can get some resources for you." [crosstalk 00:16:15]

Simply put, accountability is what keeps me up at night. Do we know ...we're saying one thing ... we say that resources are available but do we know if these resources are really in line to support the student ... who we're saying that they're for. We say we have scholarships. But if the schools don't know there's a scholarship manager, where they can get the information, how good are the scholarships? It keeps me up at night. It keeps me responding all day long and all night. It drives me to be more accountable because I know there are plenty of areas where we are not. If we say there are resources available, but we're not connecting the right people to the resources, then how good are the resources? If it's simply, "It's on a website.", but they don't have wi-fi, do they know that the resources exist?

It pains me to sit in my church and hear someone say ... what CPS is not doing ... what they're not getting, and I know that what they're looking for exists. It makes me come out of my lane and say, "This is the contact. Shoot me an email and I'll make sure you get connected. I'll make sure that we do this. Call me." Now that

makes me accountable for something that's not in my ship. That stretches my ability, but I feel accountable because Chicago is my city.

I don't have any biological children. I don't think about one or two seniors. When I talk about seniors in CPS, I talk about it being 20,000 seniors. That is who I serve. Not just those seniors but their parents. Their parents and their counselors, who also have to know that all of you are in line to help this one kid get to where they're going to be. When I really think about what keeps me up at night, it's the idea that my job is not to sell scholarships. My job is to help young people, or whoever the user is, understand how to drink once they get to the water.

Speaker 6: So Michelle's point -[crosstalk 00:18:29]

Speaker 2: ... just real quick. Is the lack of accountability from people, individuals, not doing their job that's supposed to do their job? Or is it because the district has laid off so many people that they're not there to do their job?

Michelle: It's a combination.

Speaker 6: It's a combination.

Michelle: It's a combination of all of the above. It's also a combination of ... we're putting a flyer in your hand to say that parent university exists to give parents resources to [inaudible 00:19:07] How good is parent university for the parent who needs it ... who is not interested in a flyer but still needs those resources?

It's a lot of things. [crosstalk 00:19:17] That's why I'm staying up at night ... I can't quite figure out the answer.

Speaker 6: So Michelle's point, about being responsive. What keeps me up at night is how to respond, and I'm about to use the air quote, "trauma". Our kids are resilient. The word trauma is overused sometimes. To me responsive, to help them change the narrative. Also balance that piece that Carl brought up about the profile that they see, but where they can go. I think I'm at Simeon this year to interrupt the pattern because I am instructional heavy. With 470 freshman entering the building, they were sold on a different brand. The brand that I'm bringing is, you're about to learn first. Then you can play whatever you want to play, that's cool. We're going to get this triple crown again.

Being responsive ... changing the narrative ... getting kids to understand the vital skills they navigate these streets with, are the same things you come in to the classroom with ... that you will take what's on campus [inaudible 00:20:29] your family because you will be somebody's husband, wife, mother, all of these things with fidelity.

How do I change the narrative for them is what keeps me up at night. That's you knowing them ... being approachable, open, understanding that our stories have some commonalities to them. I have to be willing to share and also be willing to

listen. Also, just sticking my chest out, like, "Halt, that is not a good choice. We're going to rationalize it this way," and then you'll be back on track. But, changing the [inaudible 00:21:07] and being responsive and understanding that if the flying doesn't work, how about you sit down right now? And you're not leaving until we get your mother on the phone. We can text her too.

Just being fully aware of what they're going through with their [inaudible 00:21:23] and then showing them that the wall that's put up for you is not harmony.

Michelle: I'm sorry, I was just wondering about ... everyone's talking about the image that we portray. I struggle with the fact that our students are villainized for being exactly who they are. Are we trying to make a square peg fit into a round hole? Have we defined what they look, sound, and talk like, based on a white framework? Are our schools designed for the students who look like us? We know this school doesn't work well for half white people. It just doesn't work anymore, and how can we ... it pains me to redirect behaviors of black boys. Is it bad? Or is it just different? I don't know.

Speaker 6: This is super funny and so personal to me, because my position is the behavior health specialist, right? This is my role, to discuss behavior and to support people in managing behavior, and to train our district around trauma and community resources, and all of those great buzz words that we are so interested in. What keeps me up at night is the district inability to think outside the box. We are so used to the norm and we're so used to trying to put circles in squares, and I think that is the most difficult thing for me, in my position. I'm very new to my position, and I agree with things being on the website being anonymous, because sweet Jesus, I have so much anxiety when I go and try to navigate it, because it's just too much.

If it's too much for me, I know it's too much for my parents, but how do we, as a district, really begin to think outside the box and meet people where they are and provide them with other resources and not be afraid to do something different. If Timmy cannot sit down in your classroom, let him stand up. Let him stand up. How can we shift the thinking of educators when it's not that you're standing in front of students to control them, but standing in front of you to understand. I'm standing in front of you to learn, and as I'm teaching you, you're teaching me. How do we change that mindset? How do I say to my teachers that because I have a story that my story isn't the same as yours, and what I identify as respect is different than what my kids identify as respect.

Let's have this conversation, so that we can understand it, that the trauma that I experienced growing up, may not be trauma ... and you're resilient, young black man, and because you grew up and you were poor, ain't nobody going to care that you were poor and that your mamma didn't have and your daddy didn't have, and I'm not going to label this as trauma for you because you're resilient enough to get over it and make it through. For me, what keeps me up at night is this idea of, "this is the way we do it." Why? At what point do we do something different? Our children are different, our communities are different, our family structures are

different, our expectations for our children ... at this point, they need to be different. I need to look at you and you know that I expect and I demand more of you, young black man, and young woman. I expect and demand more of you, so what keeps me up at night is this idea that I have to work and exist in a box. I'm not a box. I don't draw any lines, I don't paint in color. I just can't, and so that's what keeps me up at night. [crosstalk 00:24:55].

It gets on my nerves, and I hate when I wake up from sleeping at night, [inaudible 00:25:06] because I'm tired of waking up and seeing the lack of value of our teachers and our students. So, I'm tired of waking up every year, or every other month, and just seeing teacher laid off, which affects our children. When I was growing up, I felt I was in so many different classes and programming. I had music, I had art, I had orchestra, I had newspaper class, I had yearbook, and I had so many things because I was in journalism. I had a journalism class in high school that propelled me to major in journalism. It pulled out the writer in me, and when I see teachers being laid off every other day because their work is not valuable. They can't find enough money to pay for them to teach our children, to expose them to different things like journalism, like an electrical program, like violin and orchestra, and all of these types of things.

That makes angry, because they're not exposed to that. They don't know if they want to do something, who they want to be, when they have not been exposed to it. I wouldn't have known I wanted to be a writer if I didn't have a poetry program. How would I know I'd be an electrician if I didn't have that, if I wanted to do carpentry, or whatever, if I didn't have wood shop. And every year, these resources are just taken away, and everything is focused on reading and math, and I don't know who I'm going to be or what I can be if I'm not exposed to these different teachers who have these different talents and skills to expose me to.

They think oh, they'll be fine, they don't the art, they don't need the music, they'll be fine without it. They'll be fine without these different programs. My school doesn't even have sports, so my school doesn't have basketball. They can't afford basketball or soccer for the students. They don't have even that outlet to go to, and it makes me angry. We don't have it in the budget. I don't necessarily fault my principle, but I thought to them, what is important? What do we value? When I see more and more, a thousand more police officers constantly being hired, and we value criminal justice and [inaudible 00:27:10] increasing, but we don't value education that prevents crime, it just makes me angry. What is the priority? Why can't you find enough money to fund our schools, to pay teachers to get programming before school or after school, to get wrap around services?

I'm tired of people saying, "Okay, well your mother and father are on drugs, but you're resilient, so you don't need a wrap around." When you see white kids, in suburbs, whose parents get divorced, and they have three or four counts, they deal with that. But, my brother got shot last week, "Oh, you'll be fine." No, you're not going to be fine. You need assistance. It's not fair that because our kids aren't black that we're just going to shoot it off as they're resilient. And they are, my god they are, but they still need help. They need psychologists, they need social workers,

they need teachers who will cultivate and expose them to different types of things and will be seen teaching.

I see teachers getting laid off, and laid off, and laid off, and you've got 30 or 40 kids in the classroom, and then you say the teacher's going to be fine, because good teachers do that. I'm just tired and it makes me mad. I protest and I get angry and I become a delegate and I tell you what needs to be done, so it doesn't fall on deaf ears. I'm not going to give up, but that keeps me up at night, that makes me angry and it's good anger. This can't keep happening.

Speaker 1: What bothers me the most is being almost asked to lie to my kids about what they can do. If I know that you can't read, why are you in 11th grade? And why are people still passing you along? So being asked to continue to pass them along, when I know that they're not going to survive. That bothers me year after year. And I am so vocal about it that at this point you can send me as many emails as you want.

Because my kids know, you come to Smith's class, you're going to do the work. You're going to learn. You're going to grow. But why are we still being asked to pass them along? Why are there no resources to teach them to read before they get to the 11th grade? These things, like ... ugh, every year I just get so angry. Because I have kids in my classroom who read on a 1st grade level, but they're in 11th grade AP. I don't understand why they're in AP class. These things do not make sense, and it's year after year. No matter what grade I teach, it's always there. It's always present. And no one's speaking out about it.

Speaker 2: Who do you think is to fault for that? Is it the teachers?

Speaker 1: It's the structural level. Because there's no resources. Because there's 33 kids in my class, and 18 of them IEPs. And there's no co-teacher. Why are all of these kids in my class? Let me get these parents on the phone. And then you have parents who are not active, who really ... is it supposed to be a co-teacher? Are they supposed to be pulled out? So you have parents who don't know.

But on a structural level, admin knows what's supposed to take place. And the burden always falls on the teacher. And I'm always the bad guy, because when it comes to the athletes ... you're a student first. So no, you will not be able to play, because you did not do the work that you needed to do. And as teachers we become very villainized for doing what we know that our kids need and having expectations.

Speaker 3: I think that it's the structure. The schools are broken because the community is broken. So we can't have this conversation in silos, right? So how we do school doesn't work and it hasn't worked. And that's how we arrive at a student who has skills, talents, and gifts. I would say this to the families at Oak Park, because we were very tracked. They are all gifted because they all have gifts. So, we have to redesign schools for the kids that we serve. We keep talking about what we know about our students. We keep talking about what we know about what they go through and what their family life looks like or what

the community looks like. And then we hold them accountable to these systems and structures that are in opposition of everything that we know. So we just have to blow it up and start rethinking about what school is really for.

Vivian: I want to piggyback on Andrea and what she said earlier. Two things sort of keep me up at night. One is the parent, and I'm not quote-unquote "blaming" the parent. Because as we have all stated around the table here, there are many issues that involve family structure, positive as well as negative. But I'm perturbed when parents ... we reach out to parents over numerous times to engage in a conversation or interaction with them about the welfare or the academia of their child in the classroom, to be of a focal to assist them, but they lack the interest. And it's not all the time that they don't have the schedule, it's just that they just don't have the interest in the child.

So that's one thing that aggravates me. And there's numerous things I'm thinking about as I go into this academic year as to how I can pay a positive role in impacting that with parents. And I think some of it is that parents are just afraid. I teach in the northern suburbs, so there's more white kids as opposed to black kids in the classroom. So there may be a certain amount of fear on the parents side as well as the child's side on both races. So I'm trying to come up with ideas that I can present to the district as well as the principal in terms of how we can reach out to that.

The other area that really rubs me badly is in the classroom is our African American boys. I think ... I almost don't have words to express the discouragement that I experience in the classroom with them. Their lack of interest in wanting to gain a higher education, or even the fact that someone cares to [inaudible 00:05:09] guide them and show them that here, we're here for you ... is a pushback.

Now I realize that they come from different backgrounds and home settings and communities. But it really keeps me up at night when I know that I am trying to do all for this particular young boy, that one day hopefully will grow up to be a man in the community and in this world, and they just completely push it back to the point where it is abusive and rude to the teacher. They speak to you as if you're someone on the street in a gang form formality. Yes, this is the northern suburbs I am talking about. But it happens. And it disturbs me.

So I do the best I can as a teacher to speak to them one on one, and inform them that you do have a place in this world. You are cared about. I engage in conversations with them. Have you thought about what you might want to do with your life? I try to have a heart to heart conversation with them, because sometimes the academics don't get it. Yes, you need to know the math, you need to know how to read. But if you don't have a vision of where you see yourself going, or you don't have a representation in your home or community, you can throw books at them all day and night. They have no idea.

But it's a huge problem in our African American community. Our boys are falling along the wayside. And it's sad, 'cause you can see where the inner and the long run will be. It's a terrible vision for me to see. Oh my God. If Joey does not turn this around, or if I can't get Joey to turn this around ... I've even told some students, "I don't want to see you on the cover of a newspaper in a bad ... I don't want to turn the television on and

see that your picture or your name has been on here. But look, Johnny. If you don't turn these things around" ... I'll show a paper and say, "this is where you'll be in the future."

So those are the two things that keep me up at night. So I can't say I have all the answers right at the moment. But I am working with the principal at my particular school to interact and implement and come up with some creative ways that we can reach our African American boys.

Speaker 5: I haven't heard from [Jazzy 00:07:58]. I want to make sure we get in ... get her in.

Jazzy: So, she mentioned that our boys are suffering, and they are. But our black girls are also suffering.

Vivian: Yes they are.

Jazzy: The schools with confinement ... not just prison confinement pipeline is growing by the day for our black girls. They are often labeled as "too sexy", "attitudes", "aggressive", because people are in front of them that do not understand them and will not get to know them outside of their academic performance. And then when they are engaging in classroom work, they're reading stories that they can't identify with, that then they don't see themselves in. So they're not being exposed to things beyond being a maid or caretaker for other people. So there's their limited perception of themselves, so they grow up to repeat that. And they act out at school because no one will give them a safe space to be their complete and full and whole selves, like Bianca said earlier. So let's not forget our black girls, because they are also struggling in school and being pushed out every day.

Vivian: And I see that as well. I actually take them both on as a platform, and I've done the same with the girls. The pushback, it's exactly the same. Sometimes even more aggressive than the boys, which is even more disturbing. But the only thing you can do is present yourself as an example that you can do differently. Moving forward, you don't have to take those roles. Have conversations one on one with them about life and where that takes them. They have to have a role model to look at.

We were in a training yesterday at my school, and I interjected a conversation about a peace circle. Because what I've found with a peace circle, that it gives students the opportunity to open up and to share things with you. It gives them a safe place to talk and to speak. So a peace circle. Most schools don't implement it, but I think if it was something that is implemented at least once or twice a month, students will have a safe place to air that. So I am looking forward to doing more of that as this academic year takes place, so students can feel that they have a place to communicate and feel safe about it.

Jazzy: I just wanted to ... in the spirit of a safe space ... I wanted to go back to Miss Vivian's comment about parents ... I believe you said, not interested. So I wanted to bring it up because these mothers, these young girls that Jazzy just introduced will be mothers and they will be parents, such as Miss Will's mother and her dynamic, right? And so I want to bring the parents into the conversation because school is intimidating to some parents.

Because, yes. Race is a very important factor. But there's a class divide in schools. And so we starve as children that live in poverty so that means that parents are in poverty. But we have the college degrees, and we're the middle class people. And so there's a sort of intimidation that comes along with that, and then we are not presenting ourselves as being welcoming and understanding that the school is in the community. We drive into the community, and for some us, zip codes away. So understanding that class does play a role in there.

So when parents are invited, and the fact that they don't show up, it's not ideal on their part. It's a great opportunity to reflect to see if we've opened the door enough for them to actually come. And so if you are not in a school in which it has a great tradition of reciprocity, two way communication, and accessibility and things like that, it can be very intimidating for the mother that's only 13 years only than her child. One of my aunts. And so when you think about the parent, just be very understanding that they are sending their best because that is their only.

Female: And they're just comparative around poverty and middle class, right? So I am a working mother, much like Michelle was describing her mother. I give my all to my school, and I dare somebody to call me uninterested because I can't come to PTA meetings. I can't. I can't show up in the middle of the day and do reading circles, because I work to provide them a good life. And the flip side of that is that some traditions and some cultures just really trust the school. So they feel like, I sent my baby there. You know better. So let me let you do your thing. I'm not uninterested, I just have wholehearted trust for what you are doing for my children.

Female: I would also say, that a lot of students that it seems like it's disinterest. A lot of that is frustration and fear. I think about how you said things have been passed along. So if you've been passed along without the ability to read and someone is still pushing reading at you, sometimes you might push back because you know that you struggle with that. And that can be very frustrating or very fearful. What keeps me up at night is if I see someone struggling, how can I reach them, on their level, with their gifts? Because we all learn differently.

I have two children who are ... two sons ... who, of course I fear for them in terms of their safety in this city. I fear for them in terms of being able to reach their potential and to just remain passionate about learning. That was something that was instilled in me. I grew up in Gary, Indiana. Almost every one of my teachers were African American. And every one of my teachers were revered in our community and very respected in our community. And so they always encouraged us to be our best. So that's what I grew up with. And I realize that nowadays that's not always the case.

But I teach middle school. And sometimes when I get a new middle school student whose come from another school who may not have been served, then it is my job to try and reach them on the level that they are, and provide things that interest them, and to show them that the gifts that they were born with can be used to promote themselves or to advance themselves until they can develop other general skills. Because some schools won't ... or some teachers won't necessarily go the extra steps to

show that, you know, you are really artistic. How can we use your art or your ability in art to elevate your skills in reading or in writing? To try to introduce them to offers that would interest them.

My brother is a teacher in Gary, in high school. I mean, he has a variety of classes. Some are very strong. Some of his classes he has spellings, and he's just trying to maintain the classroom management. But how is he getting them interested in writing? Or in reading? So I just remember reading ... some of you who teach, there's a black author, Kwame Alexander. And he has this one book that I started reading it, and half of it I didn't understand. Because he was really writing it in their language. So I happened to mention it to my brother, and he was like, "Sister, I can't keep that book on my desk." He bought five copies. So once they started reading something that spoke to their ability to understand and comprehend the story, and then he was able to start introducing some other things.

So the bottom line is, sometimes when kids push back, it's not because they're not interested. But some of them are fearful to take the step toward that direction because there hasn't been anyone who made sure they had all those foundational skills that they needed to do those things. And so sometimes ... like you said, one of the things that keeps me up at night is how can I reach ... if I realize that a student is struggling with something, what do I need to do to try to reach that student. Not just to get [inaudible 00:16:16] you know, best practices of how to present a particular lesson. But how do I take this lesson and twist it. Teach the same lesson ten ways, but from a different perspective each way so that all these different multiple intelligences can connect to that.

Speaker 2: I just want to hop in here to alert us, we have about eight more minutes left. So we're aware of time. I don't know if that changes the direction you want to go here, Marilyn. But we have eight more minutes.

Marilyn: Well let me fit Shay in, 'cause I know he [inaudible 00:16:50] everything.

Shay: Okay, I'll be quick. As it relates to parental involvement, I don't want to be dismissive of any of these factors that we've talked about that could hinder them. But I do want to know, at what point does personal responsibility come in? I think sometimes we offer an out. And I say that because I teach in the ... I deal with the same thing, you know. Poor neighborhoods, all these factors. But at some point ... I mean, I think we're giving an out too much. At what point do personal responsibility come in, because we can't do everything. We can't. We do what we can. But, you know ...

Female: [inaudible 00:17:33] fact about Leandro saying though, that some parents are like, "I need you to be personally responsible for the education of my child. That's why I'm bringing you to this school." And so I could see that going both ways, right? They're like, I know I got all this going on, but you're the teacher. So I need you to make sure my kid can read.

Shay: But they're the first teacher. At some time ... I mean, you have to do something.

Female: You have you to see your social [inaudible 00:17:52] though. You have to see yourself as the first teacher. And if you yourself know you struggle with comprehension or reading, and you don't know if you have value. You have to really feel like, I am this baby's mom and I have something to provide this baby. I would venture to say there are a lot of mothers out there who are uncertain about how well they are even at the parent. I mean, I'm a scientific mother. And I struggle with mom guilt constantly. I feel like I'm a good parent, I think? But sometimes I'm like, "Damn, I just didn't do that really well." And I need help, with all these letters behind my name and all these careers I've had, and I have a son who is going into 8th grade and I just got my GoCPS app. And I saw his test scores and this little funky 2.8 GPA, and I'm like, "How does my son, who has a mother who is an engineer and super woman extraordinaire and a mathematician ... how does my son have a 2.8 GPA?" And I mean, that's embarrassing for me. And I just have to forgive myself.

Speaker 6: So, I think ... I didn't mean to interrupt. But I think one thing that is like the worst thing you can do is try to give advice when you really don't know where they're coming from or what they're dealing with. And so with that, just kind of piggybacking off of some of the statements that were said, what keeps me up at night is did I take every opportunity I had in interacting with our students and our leaders to speak my truth? How many individuals who interacted with our students and leaders did speak their truth? And then what did I do to combat the pity filter that I think a lot of our students are interacted with. And so when I say pity filter it goes back to understanding where someone comes from.

Our children in our communities, regardless of where they're at economically, are smart. And they will play you. So they will come in and say, "Ma'am, you know, the lights was out" whatever. Just to get passed on that assignment, right? And so a lot of our teachers who don't understand where our children are coming from ... "Oh, don't worry about it. We'll give you an extra week" or whatever. They just got played, for lack of a better word. And so it's really just understanding, like I said, taking the opportunity to understand who that student is. Taking the opportunity to understand what that family life is about. So that when you do give advice or when you do interact with them, you can come at them on level. Because again, like I said, our students are very adept at playing the role because that's the role that has been put on them by educators who are not like them or who do not understand where they come from.

And so I think that's really just a key point that we all need to just take away. But like I said, speaking my truth is at ... again, we come into contact with individuals all day every day about education. And sometimes we say the buzzwords, the keywords that are going to advance us. But did we really give or did we really speak our truth to help that student or to help that school or to help that community. I think sometimes ... like we said, it's a safe place ... that's the struggle that we as black professionals deal with. Am I going to compromise myself for the benefit of others? Or am I going to try to do what I need to do to advance myself? So I think that's a struggle too that comes into play that we have to recognize.

Female: And I think we also ... I'm sorry ... have to recognize that we weren't all middle class. We did not all grow up in a middle class. Some of us grew up in some of the same areas that

our kids are in and the neighborhood has not changed and we were able to come out. But how did we come out? What is it that we did, or what did people instilled in us, were our role models to help us realize that there is a life outside of just this area.

So we also have to connect to our parents and say, "Yes, I have a college education. Yes, you may see me as middle class. But guess what, I was a single mom. Guess what, there were times when my lights were cut off. Guess what, there were times where I didn't have gas. Guess what, I am just like you. And I can connect with you. And there's no judgment in what you're going through. But how can I assist and how can I help?" We can have this mentality of, we're up here and they're down here, when in fact we were down here just like them. And we just happened to have the tenacity, the people pour into us, the commitment, determination to rise above.

Female: I'm one patient away from being poor, so. [crosstalk 00:22:43]

Speaker 7: Right, so there ... a theme ... first of all, I want to say it's rare that I'm ... as I said, I'm a principal. It's rare that I'm in a space of educators to see so many black men, so it's great to see.

Male: I've seen that before.

Speaker 7: Yeah. Secondly, a theme that I'm hearing ... which I would expect nothing less from black educators ... is that our students deserve the best. So my question is around teacher, principal, educator of quality and accountability. How should we implement it, how should it be measured? You can say it from the perspective of your role. Like, what have you seen when it comes out in the best? And where have you seen that has been a struggle?

Speaker 2: And just a note, I would like a couple of people to respond to this. But we also only have a few more minutes. So when you give your answer, try not to give a long monologue to give space that a few other people to answer that.

Male: I believe, definitely, that it starts with good leadership. I've worked in schools where the leadership has been extremely poor and it doesn't matter if you have quality teachers if the leadership sucks. It doesn't matter. There has to be a strong leader with a vision that knows exactly where they're going, that supports the teacher, supports the students, is approachable to the parents. And I can say that I have worked for a principal, and she's at the end of that table. Leandra [Kahn 00:24:09]. She's amazing. And I think that's the dynamic that I've worked in six schools in CPS. I've found leadership that was exemplary in only two of them.

Speaker 2: Anyone else?

Female: I believe in partnership. I think it should be a partnership with the administration, parents, and students, and community. Often time we leave the community out, but I think it should be a partnership of all of that in order to get a child to be an independent individual when they grow up. So principals should partner with community churches, and churches within a community, and community within the home. I grew up like that,

and I think if all that is embraced we can make a difference in each one of our children lives as we move forward into this global society.

Male: Famous quote, unknown though. It says, "It's the blood of the soldiers that makes the general great." So when you're talking about principals, teachers, and students, that relationship. I think the best situation is when a principal understands what a teacher's going through, and teachers understand what the principal ... what good leadership looks like and what they demand. There are district mandates, of course. And sometimes what we're asked to do is impossible. I think as teachers, all we want to hear from the administration is that you know you're asking them to take the hill with a handgun. Just understand that, and I'll do the best that I can 'cause I'm here for children.

If we get that kind of understanding, I think that relationship works great. And from a teacher's point of view, we have to understand what they're dealing with also. And understand that and not just look at them as the enemy all the time. Sometimes they have an impossible tasks too. But I think it works best when there's a mutual respect. I have respect for my leader, her job is. And she has to understand and give me the resources to do mine. And so, I'm not saying ... heavy is the head that wears the crown. I get that, I understand that. And I've always been taught, if you're under somebody you respect that leadership until you ... you don't know what they're going through, 'cause you're not in that role. But do your best and at the same time it would be nice, in the perfect world, they could understand likewise and not forget that they were once in that classroom too. So.

Female: We're ambassadors for the career. So I think to attract talent we have to appropriately market what we do for a living and make it sexy. Because when someone's going off who's really an intersection of genius and passion, like how do we get that genius passionate person to not go be a lawyer when they go to undergrad?

Female: Michelle brought up that Chicago is international, so I'm going to speak on that behalf and how Chicago is approaching the administration pipeline. So there's a number of partnerships that I have the opportunity to be a part of with University of Chicago, University of Illinois at Chicago, and also some other elite schools that have built a collaborative called the Chicago Leadership Collaborative. So it's a pipeline to principalship. So what it does is it takes your course load ... and I will be Dr. Carla Matthews, soon. But I also will be a phenomenal principal. So back to your point about the talent. The package is what it is, but the talent, the brain, the passion, the brilliance intersection is what Chicago public schools and charter schools are attempting to provide for the teaching staff and the children. So that they know and understand that whoever has the crown definitely deserves it, and impacts children at every decision being made.

Female: Forward trajectory. I think that's a issue for me around kind of evaluation and SQRP and all that good stuff. Again, I'm not a teacher. But I do believe that I'm an educator. So when you put someone like me in a position where I'm literally asking you, "What can I do better to make this work?" SO having that trusted leadership and then also saying ... you know, 'cause I started off in a school. And somebody saw in me like, hey, you've

been doing this well on the school level. Let's see if you can do this on the network level to really see if you can help impact other folks who are interested in doing this work, but might need to see it from a different lens. So being able to say, like NCPS. There's a lot of ways that you can go. Let's figure out what the next pipeline can be for you. Because you're talented and we want to keep you here. All right.

It's hard to have me in a room and completely talk bad about CPS, because I'm always trying to convince somebody that we need you and your skills and your gifts in CPS. So really being able to see the ... have trusted leadership, have real vision and not just continuous looking outside, but saying, "Who was I already doing something ... " Like can we put you to the next level to help more teachers. You've been a rockstar teacher. We don't want you to leave the district because you're burned out. We want you to be an instruction support leader, so that you can help other teachers become rockstar teachers.

Speaker 2: And you all, I'm so sorry. I'm gonna have to cut it there. There will be an opportunity to have some quick reflections. Actually I think we're gonna do that in this room. So if there were other things that you wanted to say. Not thirty minutes worth, probably just one or two minutes worth on the camera, we can do that. And you can just stay in the room if you're interested in doing that. And then I'm gonna hand it back off to Marilyn so she can [inaudible 00:30:38]

Marilyn: Yeah, I just want to thank all of you for taking this time out Saturday morning to sit with us, share your stories. You all are amazing. I want to get to know each and every one of you. And my little bit to the conversation is, as a woman of faith ... and I know faith has brought us as a people a mighty long way. I see a deficit in our community with our children. They're not being given that nugget of faith and that hope, that spirituality that we had when we were younger and that our parents had. And for that reason a lot of the trouble that we're having today, I believe, is because there is a spiritual deficit.

And that's why I founded Teachers Who Pray. Because children ... all of us ... we're body, we're mind, and we're spirit. And education focuses on the body. We have PE, we give lunch, we do little things. The mind. We have our curriculum, we have education. But that spiritual piece is the strongest piece that needs to be fed. And you know, there are legal ways to groom that spiritual piece. And that's my sweet spot. And that's what I want to infuse into a legitimate conversation about education reform.

And it's not necessarily what faith background, if you're Muslim, if you're Christian, if you're Buddhist, or whatever. Whatever it is, we have to tap into it. Because our kids are killing each other. Our kids are dying. Our kids are feeling hopelessness. And the only way to combat that is to reach out in that spirit, and let them know they are important. They are valued. Their life matters. And they matter. And there is something bigger than them. They have a goal, they have a mission. They're here for a reason. So I want you just to think about that and see me after class and I can expound a little bit more.

Thank you again, so ... thank you for the Ricola. You saved me. Oh thank you, I appreciate it, everybody. Thank you so much