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Tricia Johnson:

It's Aspen Ideas to Go from the Aspen Institute. I'm Tricia Johnson. Across the United States, school is starting. It's a school year unlike any other. Some districts are holding in-person classes while others are opting for remote learning. Janice Jackson is CEO of Chicago Public Schools, which is starting with kids learning at home. She says it's a unique time to address long standing inequities in education.

Janice Jackson:

We're creating a brand new way of educating students through our remote learning structure. Let us not repeat the sins of the past. If we're creating a brand new system, and all of us are sick and tired of the old system with all the inherent structural racism in it, we shouldn't create a new system that perpetuates that.

Tricia Johnson:

Aspen Ideas to Go brings you compelling conversations from the Aspen Institute, which drives change through dialogue, leadership, and action to help solve our greatest challenges. Today's discussion is a collaboration between the Institute's Education and Society Program, and Aspen Ideas Now. In this historic moment, when the country is grappling with the crises of the pandemic, and social unrest around racism, kids are trying to find their footing. From kindergartners to high school students, dealing with unpredictability and big changes in routine can be tough.

Tricia Johnson:

The challenges for educators are also immense, but some say it's a teachable moment when long established problems can be fixed. At Chicago Public Schools, the third largest district in the country, students have been learning about equity and restorative practices even before the death of George Floyd. Students are taught Chicago's history of police brutality. Student activism is thriving, and kids are encouraged to get involved with civics. With COVID, the district sees an opportunity to identify inequities, and address them. If they aren't fixed, CEO, Janice Jackson fears the outcome.

Janice Jackson:

Otherwise, when we're on the other side of this, I think we're going to see gaps in student achievement that are much more wide than what we currently see today.

Tricia Johnson:

With today's crisis, bringing into focus large disparities in education, how can educators avoid returning to the status quo? Janice Jackson joins Linda Darling-Hammond for a conversation about equity in education. Darling-Hammond serves as President of the California State Board of Education. Ross Wiener leads the talk. He's the Executive Director of the Education and Society Program at the Aspen Institute. Here's Ross Wiener.

Ross Wiener:

Linda and Janice, thank you so much for joining this conversation today. You both exercise tremendous responsibility for public education systems, and that gives you unique perspective on what young people in this country have been going through for the last six months. So, I want to start our conversation by asking you to set a little bit of context for us. What have you experienced as leaders? What have you observed young people going through both in terms of adversity, and in terms of some of the resilience and the way that they've been activated over these months? So, Linda, I'd like to start with you and just helping us understand the context in California.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Well, of course, it's been a traumatic time for everyone. And, for young people, there's all of the unpredictability. The lack of stability that you get from being physically in school. We have the added immediate impetus of climate change, and that is bringing fires all across the state right now. So, for young people, the vision of the future, the sense of stability that you get from knowing how things are going to be, and having all of the routines and so on around you are shaken right now. The experiences that different kids are having are extremely different. So, for affluent kids who are home with parents who often can stay home with them, they may be fighting about who gets to use the internet where, but the general environment is feeling much more safe than for kids in many communities.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Los Angeles is a hotspot right here in San Jose and Oakland, where families are losing employment, where COVID rates are extremely high, where the effects on health, family members, et cetera, are very stark. And you then add onto that the digital divide that we had going on when we started the pandemic that is changing. And I'll talk about that later, but you had families without internet or connectivity, as well as kids who couldn't get online for school. You had parents who couldn't get online for telehealth or for benefits, or for job searches, or for Instacarts, so that grandma wouldn't have to go to the grocery store and be exposed to the virus.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

So, the inequalities in the experiences are also extremely stark. And in California, we've been mobilizing to a very intense degree around how to address both the general pandemic, and the inequalities that have surfaced as a result.

Ross Wiener:

Thanks, Linda. And so, yeah, Janice, let me turn to you, and just ask you to characterize what have you seen in Chicago?

Janice Jackson:

Yeah, well, I think it's important to know the time and space that our kids are coming of age in. This is a historic time for all the reasons that Linda pointed out in her introductory remarks. They are grappling with the global pandemic, a pandemic that I think caught all of us off guard. I can't imagine what it's like to be a young person during this time. But I also think, likewise, the response to the death of George Floyd, and the civil unrest that has occurred as a result of that is particularly interesting. And I think that while it has added more layers of maybe stress, and for some people trauma, I also welcome it. Here in Chicago, we've seen a lot of student activism at work and at play.

Janice Jackson:

Students doing a lot of the things that we've been teaching them in our schools around making sure that their voice matters. Speaking up around civic issues that impact their daily lives. And we saw people do that in pretty extraordinary ways back in June. With that said, there have also been some unintended outcomes, negative outcomes of that, particularly, here in Chicago with some of the looting. And we still grapple with another epidemic of violence here in the city. So, there's just a lot to unpack. And more importantly, a lot for our students to deal with.

Janice Jackson:

I think the district has done a good job responding where we can, we're uniquely positioned to do quite a few things. First, addressing the needs around food insecurity for many of our students, but also using all of the outreach, whether it's through surveys, or through remote learning, or other touch points with students to really reform and improve upon how we educate them starting this fall, how we interact with them, what engagement they have to their teachers, and other related professionals in the building. So, I think there's just a lot to unpack.

Janice Jackson:

What I would like to underscore from Linda's point is really this concern around the disparity. This is the thing that keeps me up at night. I feel like it's the thing that people aren't talking about enough, but I worry about what the impact will be five years from now, 10 years from now. And I think school systems have a awesome responsibility to address this.

Ross Wiener:

So, really appreciate those reflections, and the context it creates for this conversation, because as you both know that there are huge inequities that have been with us for a long time, for the whole history of our country, and yet they are right in front of us. And our students are living them and experiencing them so viscerally right now. So, I do want to shift our conversation towards how then we take advantage of this moment to address these topics, and these dynamics really explicitly in our schools. And I want to read you something, a statement that we issued from the Education and Society Program, I, along with my two senior colleagues, in June.

Ross Wiener:

And we said, "COVID-19, and the protests against police brutality and systemic racism are the most important teachable moments of a generation. Students will feel the hypocrisy viscerally if education ignores these issues. And we will miss an opportunity to lay the foundation for truth and reconciliation." So, I want to ask you first, Janice, as the CEO of Chicago Public Schools, how are you thinking about tapping into what has activated students over these months, and making that really what it is that they are talking about, and learning about as they return to school?

Janice Jackson:

Yeah, well, first of all, CPS has always been a leader in this space, which gives us a little bit of a headstart on this. We've talked before in other meetings about some of the curriculum materials that our office of Social Science and Civic Engagement has produced for our students. And I like to tell people we've been talking about equity and restorative practices before it was popular to do so. And I realized we have a lot of advantages here in Chicago. It's a very liberal city. Sometimes things are messy, but it allows for the

discourse and engagement that I think makes it easier for students voices to be lifted up and heard. So, what you'll see from us is more of what we've done, but at an accelerated pace, obviously.

Janice Jackson:

So, we've created curriculum packages around police brutality here in Chicago. We have a pretty ugly past with Commander Byrd, who used to lead our Police Commission here in Chicago. And we reconciled on that. And one of the components of that was to teach that history in our schools. It's a part of the curriculum in CPS. We also produce, the 'Say Their Names' materials after the death of George Floyd, which really built on a curriculum set of materials we distributed after the death of Freddie Gray. So, I say all that to say, we have continued to provide our teachers with resources, so that they can spend time engaging with students.

Janice Jackson:

They don't have to spend time finding articles and materials, and we'll continue to do that. I also think some of the work that we've started around civics engagement, which goes beyond learning the three branches of government, and voting, but really talks about how do you actively participate in the governance structure around you? We are encouraging our students to do that. If you look at our student code of conduct, we have at the front students' rights and responsibilities, where we start by explaining to them, here are your rights. This is how you advocate for redress, if you feel that your rights have been violated. And I don't think that we oftentimes think about that when we're in the school system.

Janice Jackson:

The adults are in charge, we make the rules, we enforce the rules. So, I think, making sure that we understand that schools are a microcosm of the world, and the degree to which we can create the equity that we want to see in our schools, the degree that we can do that in our schools, we have a better chance of our kids fighting for that in everyday life. The last point I'll make is, we're gearing up for the start of school. And I've been meeting with teachers, administrators, et cetera, across the district.

Janice Jackson:

And really the charge that I have been giving to them is this, we're creating a brand new way of educating students through our remote learning structure. Let us not repeat the sins of the past. And we're creating a brand new system, and all of us are sick and tired of the old system with all the inherent structural racism in it. We shouldn't create a new system that perpetuates that. So, that means if we know these inequities exist or lack of resources exist in particular communities, we have to start there in order to make sure that things are equitable. Otherwise, when we're on the other side of this, I think we're going to see gaps in student achievement that are much more wide than what we currently see today.

Ross Wiener:

So, Janice, I really appreciate those reflections. And I want to name two things that I want to come back to. One, this concept, when you name the rights and responsibilities, it's this concept of students as citizens of their school to practice being citizens of our society, and taking their place. So, I want to make sure we come back to that, and to this idea of new practices. This new moment that we're in really unlocks potential for not recreating some of the inequities of the past. So, let's make sure we come back to that.

Ross Wiener:

But Linda, I want to ask you just to help our listeners understand the concept of a teachable moment, why that's so important to really take stock of and notice. And what's some advice for the education system to take good advantage of this teachable moment that we're all living through?

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Well, first of all, I love the fact that you're labeling this as a teachable moment, because a lot of people have been labeling this as a moment of learning loss. And kids are always learning. We are all as human beings always learning. What are we learning? And how do we learn in this moment what it gives us the opportunity most to learn? So, the authenticity of the learning experiences that kids have are extremely important right now, authentic to the pain and distress of the moment, but to the opportunity to make social change, which I came of age in the '60s. So, those were my teachable moments in the same way. And I remember when I was in college, and they closed down the college in the spring of '70.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

And I learned more in that period of time about the social context, the way to make social change, and a variety of other things that have been life lessons. And kids are also in that position right now. So, I want to just say hats off to Janice and the Chicago Public Schools. But we put together our first guidance in California around distance learning, and the importance of having kids engage authentically in the moment, engage in project-based learning that is relevant to the issues and the topics of the time. One of the first resources we grabbed was one from Chicago Public Schools, and put it in the California guidance, so that it could really inform some of the work.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

We certainly have had, in the governor's statements, encouragement for people to make their voices heard, to engage in peaceful protests. Lots of activity around reorienting the way in which policing is thought about, and handled both in schools, and in the general society. A youth taskforce that's been set up at the state level to guide us through a way of thinking about restorative practice. Now, California has been for many years moving towards eliminating discriminatory discipline, putting it in the accountability system, holding schools accountable for reducing suspensions, increasing restorative practices, et cetera.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

But this has given an even bigger leverage on those issues, and really an opportunity for communities to think about how they are supporting kids in schools. You've got places like UCLA Community School and others that have used the opportunity to have kids in their studies online now, right? To take up a project-based learning around COVID itself. And in that particular school, and they're not alone, they really explored the ways in which COVID was impacting communities of color that they belong to, that their families are part of, what was going on health-wise, in terms of employment, in terms of the economy, et cetera. Really studying that, and using that as part of their own learning, their shared learning, and then sharing it out with public officials, and others about the impacts of the experience.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

So, I think this is a moment for authenticity in learning. And for taking up these issues that have been with us, and really moving them to resolutions that are more productive than had been the case

previously. Like we've had the issue of the digital divide, which you mentioned and Janice did as well. This is the time to just solve that. It frankly doesn't take a lot of money to solve the digital divide. If you look at the two trillion or so dollars that have been put out in the recovery, the amount needed to close the digital divide nationwide is about six billion.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

It's way less than a percent. You could just handle it. And we've in California, not only called on philanthropy, and they've been terrific. Google, and T-Mobile, and Apple have stepped up, and we've got a million iPads with hotspots going out right now. We've had hundreds of thousands. We put \$5 billion from the federal and state money into this issue of both digital divide, closing and learning loss. So, at the other end of this, we should have handled that. We should be done with that issue, and moving on to others. And so, it's both a matter of mobilizing parents, and community members, and also recognizing the ways in which students as citizens of their school, and citizens of their community can add their voices to this process in a way that brings them into the populace, so to speak.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

It's part of growing up. But also, sets the tone for what the next chapter will be, what the next generation will be.

Ross Wiener:

I know that that \$6 billion figure can sound like a lot of money, and that is a lot of money, but we need to muster the will to find it. We spend over \$700 billion every year on public education in this country. And it is overdue to recognize that broadband access is a utility. You need it to access society. And right now you need it to access just basic learning. So, kudos to both of you. Janice, I don't know if you want to add. I know that Chicago has been incredibly proactive on this front as well.

Janice Jackson:

Yeah, absolutely. And I really appreciate Linda's remarks around, it's time to fix it now. I think I would count our response to the digital divide as a positive thing that has resulted out of COVID. And what it looks like here in Chicago is now we have a four-year commitment to provide high-speed, broadband internet free of charge to 100,000 families. And that's about a third of our students in the district. And we believe that that's going to give us the runway to not only support them during this remote learning phase, but beyond that. I think about a story, an anecdote from a principal towards the end of the year when we were reflecting the spring. And he was talking about when we were distributing devices to schools, and how principals were holding onto that, and worried about getting it back.

Janice Jackson:

And then, once he did what the district asked him to do, which is provide students with the devices. And then, a couple of weeks into remote learning, seeing how his students were responding, the type of education that was allowed for in an environment like that, it just dawned on him like, "We should have been doing this all along." And I think that's how I feel even as a school superintendent. I like to think of myself as innovative, and always cut ahead. But on this one, we just weren't there. And so, now, we will be there coupled with our curriculum initiative, which is going to be an online student-facing curriculum from preschool all the way through high school.

Janice Jackson:

I think a lot of pieces are coming together. And it's happening faster than we anticipated because of COVID. And so, I think it's important during this time to reflect on those wins as well. I know we've lost a lot, but there are also some things we're gaining as a result.

Ross Wiener:

And I want to acknowledge that is a technical challenge, and I want to move to the adaptive challenges. But I also want to acknowledge that students see it when we don't address the technical challenges. In prior work, I did a lot of visiting to public schools, especially, in the rural South and saw the state of facilities. And just recognize deeply that students then come to understand how society values their education. And I think it's the same with access to the internet right now. They see that everybody who's accessing what society has to offer has access to the internet.

Ross Wiener:

And if we don't provide that to everybody, it's a strong signal that we're unwilling, and we don't value their learning enough. So, again, kudos to you and the leaders that you're working with for stepping up. And I do think we're going to make some big advances on this front, out of this crisis.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Thank you.

Ross Wiener:

But I also want to turn to the adaptive challenges because, Linda, you acknowledge that students are experiencing a lot of pain and distress, and they need an opportunity to process that, and to put that in context. And we need spaces for healing as well. And we're going to need to do this in a context of intense polarization in our country, especially, on issues of race. And so, Janice, I want to turn back to you because, Linda, you gave a shout out to Janice and Chicago Public Schools about the materials they are putting out.

Ross Wiener:

And I want to ask you, Janice, talk about any of those materials that I want to name the 'Say Their Names' guidance that you produced for teachers about how to enter these conversations productively. So, could you share a little bit about that?

Janice Jackson:

Yeah, first, I appreciate that question because the best advice I can give people is that you have to be trained and approach this appropriately. And I think sometimes teachers avoid these conversations, avoid controversial issues in class because they don't want to be uncomfortable. And what I've heard from teachers, if I can make this a bit more topical, is they're even more afraid to do that in a remote environment, because you don't have the benefit of observing body language, and intervening. And the technology is intimidating.

Janice Jackson:

But what I would say to them is, number one, it is a moral imperative. We have to have these conversations. And teachers are important in students' development. And it's the safest place for them to have these conversations, inside of a classroom. So, I want to encourage teachers to do that. I also

want teachers to really reframe the problem. Our students are digital natives. They're not afraid of the computers, and the devices the way that we are. And so, embrace that, and understand that you can do this work. But for CPS, and I'm a former social studies teacher, so, I have to share my bias at the top. I think civic education is one of the most important things we can teach our students.

Janice Jackson:

In fact, when I became the Chief Education Officer, we revised the vision for Chicago Public Schools, and talked about preparing kids for college and careers. And we also included civic life. Because there is no way in order to help people regain power, and empower themselves without talking about how to engage with the people who are making decisions for them. And so, I see this as a time to enter that if you've been hesitant to do it. And there are a lot of great resources. School districts are producing great resources. And there's a lot out on the internet.

Janice Jackson:

The last thing I would say to school superintendents, and other leaders at the local and state level is you have to provide training for this as well. And so, in Chicago Public Schools, we just launched our District Equity website, which people can go on there and look at all of our tools. They are open source. We wanted to make this stuff available, not just for CPS teachers, but for anybody who wants to utilize them. But I think you have to complement this with an aggressive, and robust training program in a network for teachers to go back to when they find themselves struggling with how to set up these types of conversations, in units, in their classes.

Ross Wiener:

And Linda, just want to turn to you for context, either from California or just even in your broad knowledge of education practice. What makes this kind of work, taking advantage of these teachable moments possible? What makes it hard? Just what do we need to focus on to get this right?

Linda Darling-Hammond:

I think, what makes it possible in part is, both giving teachers tools as Janice was describing and permission. We've been in an era of approach to standards based instruction, tied to high stakes, accountability and so on, where people thought their job was to march to the standards, the standard 3.1, 3.2, et cetera. And this is a moment where, first of all, if you understand the standards, so course standards, for example, they really do speak to connecting the knowledge to real world authentic examples, and events et cetera.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

So, to rethink the way we approach the traditional curriculum, and it's there to be done. We got to give permission, we got to give people tools to do it. And we've got to give some incentives. So, just on the point of civics, which I know Janice is passionate about. The last time we were together, Janice, you spoke to the civics question. Absolutely. I loved it. In California, we are creating a seal of civic engagement. So, as part of our college and career index in the accountability system, it will become I hope a college career and civic readiness index.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

There will be along with the seal of bi-literacy, which recognizes kids for becoming part of the global world, and being multilingual people, and multicultural people. We will also have a seal of civic engagement that will be part of what we're encouraging schools to provide and kids to engage in. And it will be action civics. Getting involved in the issues that affect your community, affect your school. And so, I think all of those things help. The other thing is getting examples out there.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Think about, in this time of distance learning, the schools that have had kids showing up, engaging, where there's hardly been a break in the flow of learning have been the schools that had kids engaged in deep and thoughtful project work, which brought in the math, and the science, and the social studies, and the writing, and the reading, and the English language arts, but that did it in ways that were really powerful. So, for one example, in Oakland, there was a school that was trying to figure out how to get kids to school safely, because they're in a very busy urban area where there are a lot of problems getting across the highway, and getting across the street, and getting kids in, and there are safety issues around the neighborhoods, and there are safety issues around the streets.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

So, they had done a whole big project around how are we going to make our getting to school, and being in school a safe thing? And they continued their project when the distance learning began. And they presented their findings to the Oakland City Council, and got some action around the things that will be in place when we do come back to school physically. So, I think those kinds of examples also allow us to support kids in that civic engagement, in their learning, in all the academic areas, and in their seeing themselves as efficacious, and knowing that they can make a difference.

Janice Jackson:

Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense. And I also think that there are some other areas that we should capitalize on. For example, interest in science. I know any time I have an opportunity to talk to students, I'm, especially, encouraging our young women, and people from underrepresented groups to think about these career fields. I think people are paying more attention. They have I think a much better understanding of things than I did as a child, and access to more information. And so, I see this as another opportunity as we expand our STEM programming, our computer science programming, to really get more students of color, and more girls involved in the STEM fields. So, I just wanted to add that to the discussion.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

I just want to add to Janice's point that the amount of science and math learning that one can do in this moment of COVID is really quite extraordinary. I find myself reading the medical journals every day, and talking to other members of my family, and others who are students about the science of this moment. It's a great opportunity to get kids involved in all of those topics. The math of this moment, exponential functions, and what does it take to bend the curve, and how steep is the slope in your county and your community? So, this is a moment where we can really get kids to apply math and science in ways that will make it so meaningful.

Ross Wiener:

I was just thinking about how the inventor of the next vaccine that we will need, or the epidemiologist who will help guide us through the next pandemic may be going to Chicago Public Schools right now.

And thinking about how to make sure we're activating them with seeing these challenges out in the world, but recognizing that education actually is a way to enable themselves to address these challenges, and to be the leaders who can help us see through to a better future. So, really appreciate just taking a moment to recognize the teachable moments, or just they are incredibly ripe right now in so many ways.

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Ross Wiener:

So, I want to ask for some more personal reflection. I think one of the things that is both a huge resource, and sometimes a challenge in public education is that we all went through public education, or we all went through formal education. It shaped our views about what it is. What's appropriate, what's needed. And so, want to ask each of you, if you would, to reflect on when you first saw a teachable moment taken advantage of in your formal education. I'll just want to acknowledge that, for me, it wasn't really until I was in college. That all the time I was learning K through 12, it felt like I was learning because that's what I was asked to do, to go to the next level in my learning.

Ross Wiener:

And it was all about deferred gratification about what it would open up later. And when I was in college, I remember reading texts, and being in discussions where I said, "Oh my God, this learning is so deeply meaningful to me right now about who I am as a person." And I thought maybe I could have done some of this learning earlier. So, I'm curious, and I'll turn it to you first, Janice, what was your first experience of that, and what does it teach you?

Janice Jackson:

Wow, well, I mean, I could unpack that question all day. And I think our experiences are probably very similar. I went to Chicago Public Schools, and got a really good education. I went to a neighborhood school. And I was in a gifted program for high school. And I think that my teachers did a great job, but I also think it was very traditional in its approach. And I didn't recognize some of these connections in a school setting. Now, I did have the advantage of being raised by my father, in particular, who was very involved, and engaged in politics, and social events, and things like that.

Janice Jackson:

So, there was a lot of discussion about that around the dinner table, but not so much in school. And the thing that stands out to me as maybe a missed opportunity I recall is, Rodney King, that situation. I was in eighth grade when that happened. And it was a big deal. It was just like everything else. It was all over the news. Of course, we were just entering the 24 news cycle that we're in now, but it was all over the news. People talked about it. It came on every day. My dad talked about it a lot, had a lot of strong issues about it. We had zero discussion about it at school. Zero. And I went to an all black school. We had Black History month assemblies. We talked about these things.

Janice Jackson:

I would characterize it as a pro black school. There was zero discussion about this in school. And then, I remember on the flip side of that, being in college, and this was around the time when the OJ Simpson verdict came out. And that was discussed in class. And I remember feeling both passionate, but also ill-equipped to have that discussion in the classroom because it was so new, and so raw. So, I was just responding probably in a very emotional manner. There was a lot of debate about it. But I say all that to say there were some missed opportunities in my educational experience to really hone that.

Janice Jackson:

Now, the one place where we did have that outlet, which again, goes back to my views around civics education is in my debate afterschool class. That is where we talked about the things that nobody wanted to talk about. We debated issues. We had to learn the other side's argument, and be able to articulate that. But that happened in an afterschool program that was run for a couple of months throughout the school year. But it was very absent from the education during the traditional day.

Janice Jackson:

Now, 20, 30 years later in CPS, that's no longer the case. Our teachers have the permission, and Linda talked about earlier. And a lot of our materials are organized to engender these types of conversations. But I would have to say when I was in eighth grade, 30 years ago, that was not the case.

Ross Wiener:

Thank you. And it feels like we're so lucky to have you having gone through the system, and to be able to reflect on it, and now leading that same system, and being able to build on the foundation, but create even more opportunities. Linda, let me just ask you the same question. What was your first experience of an authentic teachable moment in your formal education? And what does it leave you thinking about?

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Well, like Janice, I think I had a pretty good public school education that was very traditional. And so, the teachable moments were not often grabbed upon. But when I went off to college, 1969, that was when campuses all over the country were blowing up in New Haven, where I was in school. Bobby Seal was on trial right there in New Haven. There was a lot of social activism. I was involved in it. And of course, at a moment in time, I was at Yale University, they closed the campus in the spring. People could go home. Those of us who stayed, engaged in a sit-in, and teach-in movement. And that was where we really started to get all of the issues. In fact, and those were the teachable moments that were most taken advantage of.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

One of the results of that era, in addition to the civil rights marches, and marches about the war in Vietnam, and the issues that were going on in terms of racial injustice, the assassinations that had occurred in that decade of time. So, if we think we're in a bad era now, it does help to think back to some of the things that our country has gone through. But one result was the creation of one of the first Afro-American studies departments on that campus. Yale and Stanford actually wants to compete for that distinction.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

And I've been at both places, and been part of that debate. But I will tell you that that actually also created a curriculum pathway for many of us, including myself, that gave many more opportunities for the kind of study, and depth of understanding, and engagement that had previously been lacking. One of the reasons why the ethnic studies movement is so valuable, and important today, because it does give both a way to locate the broader narrative, to create a better understanding of the history of the country, and the moments that we are in today. And to create the settings, and context, and permission, and training that Janice was talking about for the conversations that we need to be having.

Ross Wiener:

So, I want to stick on that, around the settings and contexts that are needed. And I want to think about the adults who are responsible for the system, even those outside the classroom, what are the lessons we need to take? What are the teachable moments we have to take advantage of? And I want to ask you each. And I'll start with you Linda, to speak on what needs to be true about this school year, to enable students to fully engage in school? What does the science of learning and development tell us about the conditions that have to be in place, the school climate that really enables students to invest the most in their learning?

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Well, I think there's a few things. One is that, of course, from the science of learning and development, we know that learning is social and emotional, as well as academic and cognitive. And that those things are interrelated. That you learn most effectively when you are in a situation with trusting relationships, where you feel safe, where your mind is not, literally, affected by toxic stress and anxiety. And kids are coming to the educational experience with a lot of needs that need to be addressed with social and emotional supports as well as explicit instruction that helps them figure out how to be aware of their feelings, and how to manage those, and also how to identify resources and supports they need so that they can be accessed for them.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

So, I think one of the things that's front and center is making social and emotional learning a very central part of the process. Another thing is that the learning they have to engage in must be authentic. That is, it has to be true to the moment. It has to allow them to deal with the things that are present in their lives, whether it's associated with the public health crisis we have, the economic crisis, the political issues that are going on, the civil rights crisis that is front and center, and just their own personal experiences.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

So, this is the moment to move the curriculum into a space where we use the academic disciplines to enable people to pursue the questions, and challenges, and inquiries that are meaningful to them. It has to be supportive of accelerated progress. This is not a moment to say we're going to give everyone a test to determine who's above and below the cut point, and then label them in ways that actually connote stigma to a group of kids, and further demoralize them.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

But it is a time to assess where kids are in their learning trajectories, and then accelerate progress for them, which will also mean more personalized learning experiences in many cases, so that kids are making progress in the areas particularly of literacy, and quantitative reasoning on which we build a lot of other skills. So, the challenges for education to become more focused on the needs of kids, and connect it to their families, as well, are many.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

And schools are doing very extraordinary work in many, many cases in this regard. So, we may see some ways of working at the other end of this that are different than what we came in with, that are more personalized, that are more authentic, that are more connected to family. That are more cognizant of the social, emotional environment than was the case before.

Ross Wiener:

And Janice, I know, yeah, social, emotional learning, and just identity and school climate has been a huge focus for you in Chicago. So-

Janice Jackson:

Yeah, just building on that, I think I would go back to what I said at the top of this is that we cannot create a system that reproduces the status quo. If people listen to this, that's the biggest takeaway. And figuring out what that means in your local context, what that means for the things that are within your sphere of influence, I think that matters a lot. So, a few things that jump out at me around this is, number one, we start in this new system doing the things that the research tells us works. That starts with high expectations for all students.

Janice Jackson:

So, if we're creating a brand new system, let us not start that system by still walking in with the same different expectations that we have. And we know that there's a lot of information out there about the culture of low expectations, in particular, for African American children. So, that will be my first point. With that, I think for teachers really understanding that it's not about more work, or giving kids work, or being on computer screens in order to be engaged. Challenging people to really think about the quality of the work, and the quality of the tasks that we're asking students to do.

Janice Jackson:

I think the fact that teachers they have to revisit the things that they've been asking students to do for the past few years, they have to be much more discerning about what matters in the work that they're assigning, what is practice? What is going to advance their learning? I would encourage teachers to really think about that every single day as they are designing lesson plans, and to choose quality over quantity. I think going back to guarding against reproducing the status quo, we have to think about resource distribution and allocation. We can't go back to the same old systems, and formulas, and expect a different outcome. We have to prioritize the students who don't have the things that they need, especially, in a home workspace.

Janice Jackson:

We have spent a lot of time talking about devices, and internet connectivity, which are extremely important. But we're now pivoting to start focusing more on what does the home environment look

like? Because the likelihood of our students being in a remote setting, for this entire academic year, it's not out of the question yet. We don't know what's going to happen with COVID. And for far too many of our students, the circumstances that they're learning in are not conducive to learning. So, we have to address that, and I feel like that's our next step forward. It would be a totally missed opportunity. And I would say to teachers, you are actually making your work harder, if you do not capitalize on the current events.

Janice Jackson:

The kids care about it. They want to talk about it. And we really have an opportunity to engage them in ways, but also capture them, and reinforce the skills embedded in those standards that we talked about earlier that they need in order to be successful. And then the last point that I would say, is we really have to use staff and community-based resources more strategically. And I would challenge school superintendents in this area, myself included. It's the thing that I'm working on the most. We have to be the quarterbacks around that.

Janice Jackson:

We have to decide how do we leverage and marshal these resources in order to help our students? One of the things that I have observed is that everybody's trying to do the same thing. Everybody wants to get the computers. Everybody wants to deal with the internet. Everybody wants to help kids do their work. And I don't think that's the appropriate way to approach this. Who is best situated to support the SEL needs? Who is best situated to help with engagement? Who is best situated to really understand some of these other issues that are happening in the family, in particular, that are related to poverty?

Janice Jackson:

And how do we help solve for some of those things so that the students have less stress in their lives, and parents have less stress in their lives? So, I say that like it's easy. It is incredibly hard. We're lucky here in Chicago. So many people want to help from the philanthropic community to the postsecondary institutions, et cetera. But I would say school systems have to be the quarterbacks in that scenario. And we have to make sure we're leveraging those resources and using them effectively.

Ross Wiener:

We have been talking about how can mayors and governors step up to take some of the load off the shoulders of educators, so educators can focus on some of the things you've talked about? That they are uniquely capable of creating that environment of trust, creating those relationships that unlock a student's really ability to invest in their learning. But schools are the hub. They are the place that have the closest relationship with children, and families. And so, how do we take advantage of that to make sure that the other parts of government agencies are stepping up to provide resources where they're uniquely capable of addressing some of the needs as well?

Ross Wiener:

I want to close this out by asking each of you to envision what will be true about schools, about the student experience, about our public education systems, if we have taken advantage of this teachable moment in the best way we can? In five years, what will we be saying about what's true about our schools then that is something that's better and richer than what we have now? Linda, let me start with you on that.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Well, I'm going to pick up where Janice left off with the way in which resources are coming into the schools. We live in a society where there's a great disparity in family income. And on that, we have typically piled a great disparity in school finance, and school funding, right? Illinois is just beginning to come out of being, I think one of the worst states in that regard. California [crosstalk 00:49:23]. But California's just a few years ahead of you. And we adopted a much more progressive formula where more money goes according to the needs of pupils. And in this moment of the COVID experience, we've doubled down on that. And so, the \$5 billion the governor allocated from the Cares Act funds more to schools than was allocated only for schools. He pulled from the other part of that budget.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

And that was allocated 81% of that money based on student needs. And we are really looking forward at how to even more thoughtfully be sure that the resources go where they are most needed, including strengthening our capacity to offer community school wraparound services in ways that were occasionally present in the past. And we hope to get to be a regular part of the system in the future. I think in addition to that, if we really doubled down on the opportunities that we've got, we will have closed the digital divide.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

I think we may do that this calendar year, in California. We will have students and teachers who are proficient with technology in ways that wasn't true before. So, lots and lots of kids, for example, who didn't have access to computers after school. The 20, 30% of kids, depending on which statistics you use, will now have that capacity to use for all of their life and schoolwork, not only in school, but out of school. They will become the technologists of the future. We have a big push on computer science as well. We're a technology-based economy in California. The kids will now have access to that. Black and brown kids who were really very underrepresented in the past, will now have an equitable playing field.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Teachers who didn't know how to use technology, and their teaching, will have made huge strides in being able to do that in ways that are very innovative. One of the things that excites me in places like long beach is they're using the technology right now, such that any kid who wants to be in the classroom of some of the teachers who are known for their great teaching in certain areas can go into those classrooms. So, they have some classes being taught that 2000 kids are participating in, right? And other teachers can go, and watch those teachers teach.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

And so, they're using the distance learning also as a way to spread knowledge, and to share professional development, and help teachers learn from each other. So, we should hold onto that. We shouldn't lose that. Many places are really trying to double down on connecting what kids are doing to their authentic learning experiences. And we're encouraging that through our guidance from the state agencies. Encouraging formative assessment that moves kids along a learning progression rather than a summative assessment carrying so much weight, that it's really all about labeling rather than growing and progressing.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

I hope we'll hold onto that. We've got amazing work going on on parent relationships because of the requirements that there be this outreach, and the fact that many, many schools had started it before there were any requirements. Let's hold onto that. A lot of parents say that they are more in touch with the schools than they've ever been before. So, we want to continue that kind of relationship, that kind of personalization. And people are finally loosening up on the master schedule.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

The master schedule is the master of all possibilities in the high school. That's why they call it the master schedule. And it's been in this gridlock since literally the 1920s. And people are thinking about how to use time in different ways. How to group kids and adults in different ways. More personalized, relationship-based kinds of organizations where kids are getting mentor groups, and they're getting advisories, and classes are being offered in ways that don't keep teachers in a factory model.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

There's more time for teacher collaboration. There's more time for students pursuing certain kinds of project work, and so on. Now, we haven't figured it out yet, but the fact that we've loosened the cage, and can imagine new ways of using time, and putting people together, we need to hold onto that, and invent the next system of education.

Ross Wiener:

So, I just love how much possibility you see in this moment, whether it's closing the digital divide, picking our teachers who are absolutely the best lecturers at different topics, at different grades. And freeing up more teacher time for small group discussions for really interacting with students, for that kind of personalization and differentiation, or just totally rethinking high school, because we've known that it's too much of a straight jacket for students who are really ready to be out in the world. So, just appreciate all of the different ways that actually responding to this crisis really could renew the promise of public education.

Ross Wiener:

So, thank you, Linda. Janice, I want to give you the last word on what do you see as the hopeful things coming out of this?

Janice Jackson:

Yeah, well, first, I want to double down on many of the things that Linda pointed out. Her insight is right on point. I think the resource piece has to be addressed in the next five years. I hope that people see the value of public education. I think that in some regards that has been renewed with some of the discussion around when schools open, and the connection to the economy. And I think we as educators have to push harder, and extend that so that people really see, we are very much a part of the fabric of this country, and very much a part of the economy, and its effectiveness here in this country.

Janice Jackson:

So, how do we capitalize on that, and ensure that public education is funded, not just at an adequate level, but at a level that really puts the United States ahead of other countries? I think the other thing that I heard is how do we capitalize on parent engagement? I've heard the same things. I know, personally, I'm even more engaged because you have to followup, and there are many more touch

points. And I think, in particular, in some of our communities where parental engagement was difficult, we have to capitalize on that, and extend that into whatever a post-COVID educational system looks like.

Janice Jackson:

So, I see a lot of value in that. I also think this notion of how we assess learning, we have to address that. I think that people have been given a lot of flexibility because of COVID, and the school closures, but not sure what to do with that. So, you brought up the master schedule, but there are countless other examples of places where we're really encouraging people to think outside of the box.

Janice Jackson:

And I think assessment is one of those places. We have to focus more on curriculum, and the what. What kids are actually learning, and doing in classes every day. And stop engaging in designing everything around a summative assessment that they're going to take at some point in time in their high school careers. And so, I think if we do things right, and take advantage of this moment, we will see a stronger, and more balanced assessment system on the other side of this. And then, the last thing that I will say is that social, emotional learning will be seen as essential, and necessary in order to advance the instructional core.

Janice Jackson:

I know that there are still places where people have to make a case for the value of SEL, or people think SEL is just fluffy stuff. And I used to be in that camp. I come from that camp where I didn't know why we need to do this. I think now more than ever, the value of making sure that our students are healthy physically and emotionally is so critically important. And it's critically important to any educational system that is going to thrive, not just during a pandemic but on the other side of this.

Janice Jackson:

So, I think if we get things right, we're going to see a system that not only does a better job educating students, and that'll be appearing in academic outcomes, but where students they feel more whole, and they feel that they have been, I guess, poured into, and that they have developed as a result of their educational experience in our institutions.

Ross Wiener:

Well, what a hopeful, inspiring vision to end this conversation on. I just want to express my deep appreciation to each of you really for your public service, and for joining this conversation today. Janice, you just talked about one thing you hope for is people coming out of this with a greater appreciation of what public education helps us create as a society. And I think for anybody listening to this conversation, they can't help but come away with appreciation for the professionalism, the wisdom, the insight, and just the deep commitment that each of you represent as a resource for public education.

Ross Wiener:

And how you reflect just the millions of adults who have dedicated their lives to children's lives being better, and filled with opportunity, and to creating a better future for our country and our world. So, thank you to both of you for this great conversation.

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Janice Jackson:

Thank you, Ross.

Linda Darling-Hammond:

Enjoyed it greatly.

Tricia Johnson:

Janice Jackson is the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools. She's part of the Institute's Urban Superintendents Network, and has spoken at the Aspen Ideas Festival, and hosted the Aspen Challenge in Chicago. Linda Darling-Hammond is President of the California State Board of Education, and President and CEO of Learning Policy Institute. She was co-chair of the Institute's National Commission on Social Emotional and Academic Development. Ross Wiener is the Vice President at the Aspen Institute, and Executive Director of the Education and Society Program. Their conversation was held August 21st.

Tricia Johnson:

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