

Day 02 0130 Family Engagement.mp4

Katherine Reynolds: [00:00:05] and founding member of the powerful parent movement, Kerie Rodriguez, president of the National Parents Union, Vidya Sundaram, co-founder and CEO of Family Engagement Lab. and Rebecca Winthrop, co-director and senior fellow Center for Universal Education at Brookings. The experience of online school has defined the pandemic for families across the country, including ours, whether it's struggling with the kindergartners' Zoom's schedule, high school students sleeping through online class and all the challenges in between. It's also given parents and caregivers a firsthand glimpse of classrooms: the good, bad and ugly. I love for each of you to share what you feel is most urgent for our audience to know about how the pandemic has changed parent advocacy and engagement. And we'll start with Sarah Carpenter.

Sarah Carpenter : [00:00:59] Can you repeat that, Katherine, please?

Katherine Reynolds: [00:01:02] Sure. What's your sort of two minute take on what is the most important thing for our audience to know about what's happened in the pandemic with regard to family engagement and parent advocacy?

Sarah Carpenter : [00:01:16] I think it's now parents scrambling to find a way to help their children. We get, we talked to hundreds of parents a week and parents are struggling with virtual learning. And I also think with the added support that it got a little easier doing it virtual i think. Because our parents come to our meetings on Zoom, and it got a little easier. But it don't make it easier when parents are not educators and have to stay at home with kids. And some parents don't understand the curriculum also. So I think that's what happened.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:01:50] Ok, thank you, and Keri Rodriguez, would love your take on that question.

Keri Rodriguez: [00:01:55] Well, from my perspective, I think a lot of parents have actually been to the Promised Land for a long time. We've been told we're too stupid to make decisions about our own kids, our own babies. And now all of a sudden, we have people who have told us for a long time that we have no right to make any decisions

about our kids educationally, that only we are best suited to make decisions about what's right for our own kids or our own families. And we're here to tell you, well, that that has always been true. That has always been the case. So I don't know how it is you're going to put that toothpaste back in the tube. I don't think that's going to be pretty. I don't think that's going to be easy for you to do that, now that we have gone through this. We have a lot of information to share with you about what we have witnessed in our living rooms during the past 16 to 18 months. We have a lot of ideas, and we have a lot of thoughts about how this should be reconstructed. and how we create an equity-infused educational recovery for our children.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:02:59] Wonderful. And Vidya, what what, from your perspective, has the situation developed into?

Vidya Sundaram: [00:03:07] Yeah, I think just to, you know, echo what, you know, Sarah and Carrie have shared. The work that we do have at Family Engagement Lab has, particularly around bridging classroom curriculum and student learning at home, and building those partnerships between parents and teachers. We've found that, you know, the needs of parents sometimes doesn't always match what schools and teachers' perceptions of parents needs are. And so it's so important to go directly to parents and to recognize them as experts in their needs and their child's needs. So I'll give you an example. You know, very early in the pandemic, we surveyed families that were using our service and asked them, like, what's what's most important to you now? And families really elevated wanting to understand, you know, how to support their child's academic skills, and wanting to partner with their child's teacher. In addition to you know, there was also a significant portion of families who are really concerned about social emotional learning as well, and supporting their child's mental health. But the perception among teachers was very different. And it was almost, you know, an opposite assessment where teachers assessed, you know, parents' priority for supporting social emotional learning as much higher than what parents themselves were assessing and that there was a real outsize concern that teachers weren't picking up on about tips, about checking whether their child is at grade level or slipping behind. And so I think it's just so important and urgent for understanding now that parents - I love that analogy of putting toothpaste back in a tube - like parents now have had more visibility into their child's learning than ever before and are extremely engaged in ways that they hadn't been before. And so it's so important to not go back to, you know, prior

ways and modalities of working with families, but really be much more thinking about learning is happening in a partnership between very various environments in which children are in. And that it's not just happening at school and it's not just governed by schools.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:05:38] Wonderful. I like that maybe the messy toothpaste is good for all of us, even if it's a little bit new and challenging. Rebecca, can you talk about the perspective from Brookings in your research?

Rebecca Winthrop: [00:05:49] Yeah, of course. Well, I certainly agree with Sarah and Karen and Vidya in terms of the sentiment. And just to give folks a little bit of a background, we are leading a family engagement education project and have surveyed about 25,000 parents and across them a number of countries, including in 13 districts in the US from sort of western Pennsylvania to Indiana to southern California. So I think the number one thing that I would want the audience to know builds on what my colleagues just said, which is: It's really, really important to engage parents not only to help their kids in the immediate term, but to get a shared vision between the family, the community, parents, and the school and teachers around what is the purpose of education? What does everyone want for their kids? Like, what's the type of education that parents want and the educators want and get on the same page? And that's really important if you want. One of the things we've found out, if you want to sustain any types of education reform, because one of the problems in education is reforms. They swing in, they swing out, they come and go. And parents need to be at the table in a equal co-creation perspective. And we've done a lot of surveying around parents and teachers, but parents in particular, what is it that they want to see out of their kids education? And a vast majority really want the twin pillars of social, emotional learning and academic development.

And I would say with even more a privilege on social emotional learning. That's what we're seeing from from our data but side by side. And they want pedagogies and learning experiences that are interactive and can feed both. And they want to be partners.

And so that's what I would say is the number one thing in the second thing would be that really to date school systems and I would just say the education community writ

large, I put myself in it. I've been sort of an education researcher, policy person for a while. I've not done a good job of making this a really big priority. There's some estimates that only four percent of philanthropic funding in the US goes to parent engagement. We certainly look at like research studies. As we looked at ERIC, which has a bunch of studies, there's over 200,000 studies with teachers and only 57,000 studies with parents. So it's a big gap. And now is I think the message that everybody's saying is the time to really lean into it and take it seriously.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:08:39] That's so interesting and I think the policy gap may also mirror some of the apprehension that schools have about like if we let families in the door, wow, that's going to be complicated, right. So in yesterday's plenary conversation, Secretary Cardona said one of his policy priorities is authentic engagement with families. And he expressed confidence that in the recovery from the pandemic, the states are really revisiting how to engage and get input from families, especially families of color. And when it comes to how to spend those American Rescue Act funds, I'd love to hear thoughts from this panel on is the time ripe for a shift and how does that work? If we do have a conversation between schools and communities and families about where the funds should be allocated, and how to drive a real partnership and whoever would like to tackle it first, feel free to raise your hand or jump right in.

Sarah Carpenter : [00:09:38] I think, first of all, that's a great idea, that he wants real authentic parent engagement. But engagement could mean a lot of things. And I think you need to define what engagement really means. Engagement is not going to the school to make copies all day. That's not parent engagement. Engagement is knowing where your child is when you leave out the school building, every time a parent goes. Engagement is holding people accountable. The people that are in charge, in our districts, holding them accountable to make sure that they are getting real authentic parent engagement. I mean, I think it's great to see he's thinking like that, but who is going to hold these districts, and not just districts, who are going to hold charter schools who is going to hold everybody accountable to make sure they doing that.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:10:25] And Sarah, maybe you could briefly mention what the Memphis left has been doing around that.

Sarah Carpenter : [00:10:31] We actually, we meet with our district about ILP, Individualized Learning Plan, for our children. We surveyed a thousand parents, and that's across the Powerful Parent Movement Network. All of our surveys, that's what kept surfacing into the top that parents need to know. Our kids have stayed at home for a year or more, a year and a couple of months, I would say. And we don't know where they are and nobody is trying to find out where they are. That's what parents need to know. So we can help our children. And I haven't met a parent yet, and I have met thousands of parents, that don't want what's best for their children. And if you engage the parents and the students - me and Vidya talked about this a little bit before we came on, you got to engage the children also to get them to buy in. So that's what all the cities across that network individualized learning. And I'm so happy that Secretary Cardona brought that up. I am so happy because it means something to parents and they want to see that time. We shouldn't have to fight our way to the table. We've been fighting for years and still haven't made to the table. And we shouldn't have to fight our way to the table. We should just be invited to the table and not just a certain group of parents, most of underserved communities, our kids are in district public schools.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:11:57] And the learning plan you mentioned is in the files here if anyone in the audience would like to check it out. Other thoughts from the panel.

Keri Rodriguez: [00:12:03] Carrie, talk about like how bizarre the premise of this actually is, like, oh, you want to talk about whether or not you should allow us in like this? These are our children in our communities. You have to decide whether or not you want us to be a part of it. This is our money. It's our children. These are our schools we're talking about. And you don't know whether or not you want us as a part like that on its head is a very bizarre proposition. In addition to the fact that we don't even acknowledge the fact like a person like me, I was expelled from public school. I'm a parent now. I'm a former student that you threw out. So when I come to engage with you, you know, honestly, I come in with my dukes up. You did me wrong when I was there. You underserved me. You started to underserve my kid, which is why I started to fight. So it's it's a blessing that I have even shown up in this conversation, because when we started out, it was very rough going. It was very, very rough going for a very good reason. And that rough relationship was well earned. And you know what? It was well-earned with my parents and their parents because this is generational institutional racism we're talking about.

So now you want me to show up and engage? We have had no restorative justice. And now all of a sudden we want to have a fresh relationship like, hold on a second. And you want to talk about being a gatekeeper, about whether or not you want to allow me into this? Holy crap! That's a very strange place. So what we should be talking about is that we have had a historic disruption and, by necessity, parents have had to engage because you have not been able to be the teachers. We have had to step up and fill that role. And let's not get it twisted: K through six education has not happened unless parents were the facilitators of that education. So we have been holding hands together and shoulder to shoulder. Do we want to continue down this path? Because now we are in it together. We can decide that we have disrupted previously very bad relationships because we've had to step up for our kids. We can have a collaborative, co-creative relationship where we rebuild something better, and all of our data tells us that we have the opportunity to do that.

[00:14:26] The public says we want to do that. What Sarah's saying: 86 percent of American families want individualized education plan. What she's doing is what they want. We can tell you exactly what we want. Parents want very specific things. The question is, do you want to listen? Do systems want to listen? Does the media want to talk about and cover what parents actually want? Or does the media think parents are stupid, families are stupid, and only want to cover the experts? Are we having a peer to peer discussion? Are we also adults? Are we capable? Are we, you know, actual stakeholders in this conversation? Like how are we actually entering into this discussion? Like that could be a whole separate conversation here. But that's what's very bizarre, I find, about all these conversations. Like why is there a group of people that have all of the power where these are our children we're talking about? These are our communities, our schools, in our neighborhoods. But there's a whole group of people who just get to hold on to all the power, make all the decisions, and we have nothing to say about it? Like, that's insane to me.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:15:42] And you can't tell, but all the rest of us are standing up cheering, Keri, here. And in fact, that kind of leads well into my next question. Unless Vidya or Rebecca, you wanted to add something around the response to what just authentic engagement even look like?

Rebecca Winthrop: [00:15:59] Well, I don't I mean, I think Sarah and Keri have talked about what it looks like, but I wanted to basically reinforce what Keri said about systemic injustice. So your question was like, what would you say to Secretary Cardona about how to spend this money? And one of the things that we found out and I didn't put it in the link, but I will, I will Tweet it out or something, in research we've done on next generation community schools, was that which a pivotal component of a really true community school that's working is deep, authentic parent engagement, along with a few other components. But was that really, if you want to, if Secretary Cardona wants to maximize the funding that's going to be coming out, he should focus it in places that have been systemically underserved for generations. And we did this district locator tool that showed that if you focused on four percent of school districts where the pandemic hit communities the hardest, those are also the areas that have traditionally been underfinanced. The system has not served kids well, and you would get 40 percent of the underserved kids. So just four percent of school districts, you get 40 percent of underserved kids. And to me, that I mean, that's A) morally outrageous in terms of sort of clustering sort of need. And they're very complex reasons for that. And that's where that's where he should invest, invest the money.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:17:43] Vidya, did you want to add to that?

Vidya Sundaram: [00:17:46] Yeah, just also highlighting that it's not just the the systems, but the overall ecosystem of education and the various sort of, you know, the the like edtech or, you know, curriculum, the services that districts rely on to implement their strategy also, like, you know, doesn't really elevate, acknowledge, leave room for the role of families. And so even if, you know, districts, you know, provide that, you know or, you know, they provide, you know, that seat at the table, there's a whole the whole industry is largely, you know, leaving out and just not really acknowledging how important families are. And I think one thing that struck me so much during the pandemic, the transition to remote learning with so much so many of us parents experienced, was how few tools were designed around the parent-student relationship and it happening in a classroom. And so we really need to see a shift of inclusivity around families and caregivers in different settings where students learn across the board, not just in the systems themselves.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:19:22] And I think, you know, I love the fire, Keri, and the passion, and I know that it reflects what I hear from many, many families and communities, which is anger at schools and and a system that is systemically racist and oppressive. And I think that has come to visibility in so many different ways in the last year. As we think about moving forward, do you feel that schools and districts have lost the trust of families? And if so, how do they regain it? Do you have hope that this is even possible and that there is a will to build a new relationship and sort of try to move forward?

Keri Rodriguez: [00:20:07] Well, that's the whole question. Like, if you want to build, trust, do trustworthy things, like I, I don't know about my friend Sarah here, I feel like I'm giving people human being lessons. You know, it's you want to build trust with parents. We're human beings, do trustworthy things, do honest things, engage us as human beings, build relationships, build trust with us, be honest. Listen to us. You know, don't give us lip service. Don't pat us on the head, you know, take action and do the right thing on behalf of our kids. Listen to us. So if we come to you and say here our list of ten things that we think are really important to us, like, for instance, making sure all our kids have laptops, they actually have high speed Internet, like not the ten dollar Internet, but actually high quality, high speed Internet. Every single kid in every single district. Make it a priority, make it happen so that when you come to us and say, we want to hire this consultant with a title that's like a paragraph long that is in edu jargon that we don't understand, but you understand and it's part of your long term strategy. And you you want to sound on board for why you need to spend \$250,000 on it.

[00:21:29] You might win us over. We might be willing to work with you if you're willing to work with us and listen to us and we can create that together. Give a little, get a little. But there's not a lot of that happening. But I got to say this. What folks need to understand is that the time for lip service has passed. Parents are not going to accept the pat on the head and just kind of passively go away. Parents have been organizing. Parents have been showing up. Parents have been taking action all over this country. We did rallies in 45 different states during the pandemic, sometimes over the course of a single weekend to either open up schools or shut them down or to get superintendents to take us seriously or to get Secretary Cardona to take us seriously. And we've made it very clear to Secretary Cardona that we want to be engaged on that

level. And we've made it very clear to principals and school boards that we want to be engaged on that level. So in terms of Secretary Cardona, I got to give the guy credit.

[00:22:35] He has told us that he wants us on policy committees and he's taken action. So the American Rescue Plan, Elementary and secondary school emergency relief policy table gave us a seat there. We're ready. The CCSO National covid-19 Release Relief Advisory Work Group with 30 other organizations. We're there. We're going to be a watchdog. We're going to watch where every single dime of these billions and billions of dollars are going. And we're also going to be at the grassroots. We're coming up with tools for parents in all 50 states to use to make sure you are going to understand how to know whether or not this money is hitting your kid in the classroom, hitting your kids' school or hitting your kids' district, because we're going to be looking for waste. We already know with these guidelines that are coming up in June and July, you have state chiefs right now saying we know, these folks, these superintendents, they don't even know how to spend this much money. And it's just going to be like shoveling money out the window. We've got to be on top of it. Parents are going to be watching.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:23:41] Thank you. And Sarah, Vidya, Rebecca, would love to hear your thoughts on the trust question and also sort of how do we how do schools and families move forward together from here, if that's possible?

Sarah Carpenter : [00:23:53] I think in the midst of COVID, if we think we lost trust in the midst of COVID, you are wrong. We didn't trust from the beginning because we have dealt with so much and our families, I mean, even that it goes back to our parents, our children, my children and now my grandchildren. So, I mean, we didn't trust before. So how do you gain trust? You just got to gain trust. We didn't even trust before the pandemic, you know, so.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:24:22] Vidya, Rebecca, thoughts on that?

Vidya Sundaram: [00:24:25] Yeah, I, I totally agree, I think, you know, when you know, the parents that I've worked with and spoken with about their experiences for, you know, for many years now has been one of like, I rely on the school system, but I don't necessarily have that level of trust where I feel like confident that I'm going to get what I need or get what my child or, you know, either of us need. And so that relationship now I

think is is tenuous, even the reliance because families are exiting the system because they can't, there's a sense that they can't even rely on the system, let alone trust. I think the ways that districts and schools can start to build that again is to really just it's all over again like Keri with the vivid analogies of like just being human and building transparent relationships in our work. We found that for parents and that sense of like, you know, building trust and relationship really has to start with the child's teacher. And I think you mentioned before the call, Katherine, or like during a call with those like that anxiety, teachers have like not been trained on how to collaborate with families and and schools and districts are not set up to support really strong parent teacher relationships. So it's so important, I think, you know, for you know, for the federal at the federal, state and local levels to really think about are those conditions in place for the parent teacher relationship to be strong, given that's how much parents see their relationship, their schools through? And it starts with that teacher relationship.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:26:31] And can you just quickly add what you're doing at the lab around tools for that relationship?

Vidya Sundaram: [00:26:36] Yeah. So Family Engagement Lab has a program tool called Fast Talk. And through Fast Talk, we helped build partnerships between teachers and underserved families and communities by facilitating ongoing communication and collaboration about learning that's happening both in classroom, at home. And through fast talk we send these activities by text message and each family's home language, and we've increased equity in academic achievement through multiple studies. Fast Talk has helped students who are even the furthest behind catch up to peers just by connecting parents and teachers around the learning that's happening in the classroom on a regular basis.

Rebecca Winthrop: [00:27:23] I would just want to add and again, my perspective is as a researcher doing policy-related research, that I think there's been a shift that's positive to hold on to, which is school districts and people inside the education system have had to get out of their normal routines when they think about what does it mean for engagement? I think Keri or Sarah talked about this at the beginning, like, look, if you didn't have parents over the last year during COVID, where where would you be, especially for younger kids for delivering learning? And I've certainly talked to a number of folks inside the education system, decision makers, whether it be heads of school or

superintendents who had a frankly, a false impression that parents didn't want to engage if they didn't show up to the school. Sarah was the one talking about it. Like, what is what does engagement really mean? Is it like volunteer labor force or is it actually really understanding how you work together? And I think a lot of there's been a lot of aha moments amongst, I would say, school administrators, people inside the education system saying, oh, if we go from visualising parent engagement as sort of episodic involvement, come you parents come to me in the school to a dialogue and a discussion and a real-time problem solving, which is how you build relationships and trust, as others have mentioned, and maybe use mobile phones.

[00:29:01] I mean, there's all sorts of creative stuff going on with text messages. Pittsburgh set up a hotline for families to call into who needed help and advice and guidance throughout the pandemic. And they were sort of flooded. And the hotline was basically pointing people to either people inside the education system or nonprofits outside to problem solve and troubleshoot. And parents, of course, they want to be engaged. You just have to find the right way to do it and shift to a much more ongoing dialogue. And so I think that's a positive thing. A lot of people have figured out new ways that it's not been perfect by any means, but it's something to build on. And I would say codify and put into - Vidya mentioned this, put this into principal training, teacher training, school administrator training, superintendent trainings and stuff that like Karen (unintelligible) is doing up at Harvard, really scale that that type of work.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:29:52] And one final question before we get to the audience Q&A, I'd love to hear from each of you. Just 30 to 60 seconds on what are the understood stories around family engagement in general, or at this time in particular, and what kinds of misconceptions might journalists be picking up if we're only, as Keri mentioned, talking to the experts or talking to the districts and not really doing the grassroots reporting to uncover the variety of perspectives out there.

Sarah Carpenter : [00:30:23] Catherine, I'll jump in right quick. I think the untold stories are the stories that journalists get from the district. They never come to people like me and people like parents that these issues that (unintelligible). And I think that you all let the school district tell our story, everybody tell our story except for us. And we need to tell our own story.

Keri Rodriguez: [00:30:52] Now, I think Sarah's got it right, what we've been trying hard to do, especially during the pandemic, is let parents speak for themselves. That's been, I think my most important job during the pandemic is literally let parents tell their own damn stories. And I know I'm talking to the education writers right now. I got to shout out my my ethnic media friends and Telemundo and Univision and everybody else like those were the folks that, like, actually listened to us first. El Mundo in Boston, especially. And when we went to them with parent stories, they they listened. And so it was incredible. And we actually thank all of you who have been listening to us, as we said, like, don't don't listen to our organization, talk to this parent in Detroit, talk to our parents in San Diego. But, you know, again, that's kind of new and emerging. Talk to parents directly. They can speak their truth. They don't need a filter. They like hearing the direct stories from them. And what they've been through is is the most important thing. I think.

Katherine Reynolds: [00:32:00] Vidya, just very quickly, because I know we have some questions.

Vidya Sundaram: [00:32:03] Yeah. I just want to flag we've added a document to the files there with some guiding questions that, you know, we'd like to see more like parent perspectives, but also questions to probe further on how, you know, especially when talking to districts and educators about learning in general and about family engagement, more specifically, that sometimes when you talk about like academic lost learning, you know, over the last year and and also putting that in conjunction with my kids have been at home, it may reinforce that narrative of, you know, that so many have in our society that parents don't care and that the best place for kids should be in school. That may be true for certain kids, but by and large, like families, like we don't need to, you know, further, you know, reinforce the stereotype that poor families, families of color don't care about their kids. And so we offered some suggestions for areas to probe, I think, on some of the things that Rebecca highlighted that like if schools haven't figured out how to work with, collaborate with, be inclusive, it's not because parents don't care, it's because they just haven't figured it out yet. And so wanted to, you know, highlight that we've offered some questions there to help prompt kind of deeper discussion, to probe like, you know, what has been tried and like what may may have been more or less effective for families and elevating their voice and

agency and engagement with different layers of of their child's learning from there at home, all the way to system level.

Rebecca Winthrop: [00:34:01] Just add, and this is I'm not sure if it's an untold story, but I'll just tell people what I'm watching and thinking about as we move ahead from my own sort of research. I think in very broad brush strokes, there is sort of this normative assumption, and I'm being very generalized here, that kids in high-income communities. Yes, of course, they should get academics, but they should also get advanced robotics and they should get digital design. And kids in low-income communities. They need to lean in on literacy and numeracy, which, of course, every kid needs to know how the sort of tools of literacy, numeracy, scientific reading. But they should get advanced robotics, too. And there is, I think, an assumption that parents don't aspire high for their kids if they don't if they don't have a lot of sort of financial resources. And I think that's completely untrue based on our survey findings that parents have equal aspirations for their kids. Kids around the world are equally wonderful and ambitious no matter where you're born. And so I think the story is really how do you close that gap? To me here's that we've done research showing there's this hundred year gap between what the type of quality and learning levels that schools are providing, the poorest kids. This is around the world, including a lot of states in the US, and the type of quality and learning of the richest kids in the US. And it's going to take one hundred years on the current projected trajectory of how we're serving kids for poor kids to catch up to rich kids. So, to me, that is the burning question. And there's parents who are standing up ready to hold their hands out and partner. And how do we do that?

Eric Robelen: [00:35:56] So I have an audience. We do have some audience questions here, and one of the areas in particular that a number of people are asking about is the sense that teachers are not monolithic. I'm sorry, parents and families are not monolithic or cohesive. There's very different agendas and perspectives, frankly, across income levels and race and ethnicity and so forth. There's a real there's a lot of diversity there. And one question, as we all know, parent groups often have conflicting views on issues such as wearing masks and when and how to reopen schools. What is positive engagement and follow through from schools to parents look like in a time when parents' views can be so polarizing.

Keri Rodriguez: [00:36:46] So we actually dealt with that a whole bunch because, you know, having parents literally in all 50 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico, we have folks that really want schools open. We have schools. We have folks that don't want schools open at all. We have folks that hate math. We have folks that love math. A whole host of ideas. The bottom line for us is that parents should be at the table to be part of the discussion. And that if it's about their kids, they should be part of the plan and they should be part of the development of the plan. And that it's going to look different in every community. It's going to look different in every school. It's going to look different for every single kid. And that's OK. But the idea that a group of people is just going to come up with a plan or a policy around some fancy glass conference room table about our kids without us and just do it to us without any input from us and that we just drop our kids off at the door and you just get to do whatever you want.

[00:37:56] And we get to deal with the consequences. And make no mistake, we get to deal with the consequences, because when you're done after 12 years and you hand my kid a piece of paper, a diploma that says you're finished with them, whatever happens after that, you know, I have to help them with. You know, so that idea to us is very bizarre. So our philosophy on all of this is that parents need to be a part of the conversation and need to be collaborators and co-creators of whatever policies are developed. And that's the problem. And that we are not basing any of this in outcomes like we should be sitting down and have a conversation about what are the outcomes that we envision for our kids and be reverse engineering a system that gets us there. Instead, we're trying like hell to hold on to this antiquated system because we love it so much, even though it doesn't get us to very good outcomes. So let's try to have that conversation instead. That's where we're trying to get to.

Sarah Carpenter : [00:38:58] And to jump on talk about where I come from. The black community have been left behind for decades and decades. And research, I'm sure, showed that also. We are brought to the table after the decision's been made. And we should be at the decision-making table when the decisions are being talked about. Don't keep bringing us to the table after you make the decision. Our kids are suffering in a major way. And I'm just going to keep it real here. The kids that suffer the most are Black, poor children. Black, poor children suffer the most. And we we care about our children. And again, I must say, we got to talk. We need you all to get our story out there about what's going on, what's really going on, not just the district. I love Laura Testino.

She always calls me to find a parent. And I appreciate her for that. But we need more of that from everybody that's writing these stories. We need more of that. And that's the only way our parents want to be heard. And they got to be heard at this moment. Right now is the right opportunity to change things. We are always talking about reimagined this, reimagine this. The only way we going to reimagine anything is if parents are at the table. That's the only way. I don't mean to get loud but my passion is coming out like this.

Eric Robelen: [00:40:19] There's a follow up question that builds on this, a little bit. A reporter says, I've noticed as a reporter that sometimes the loudest voices amongst parent groups are not the most representative of the variety of opinions. Are there some checks and balances you would recommend for ensuring accurate representation? A reporter notices that sometimes the loudest voices among parent groups are not necessarily the most representative of the variety of opinions in a school community? Are there some checks and balances that you would recommend for ensuring accurate representation of all these different views?

Rebecca Winthrop: [00:41:08] Well, one thing and I think I would let Keri, Vidya, Sarah, because this is probably what they do day in and day out. But one thing that I think is really important from a sort of policy district school lens is the ways in which you're trying to engage parents if you're expecting your modality of engagement and to get a representative view is five o'clock or six, six o'clock on a weekday. Like, there's only a handful of parents who have the freedom, the time they aren't working double shifts, they're running around picking kids up who can show up to the school. So, again, that goes back to the new modalities of listening. So how do you how can you go to parents? How can you give us a message? How can you use virtual? There's some great examples. Not in the US, in other countries, where they've shifted all PTA meetings. There was one state that had 20 percent participation in parent teacher meetings and school and that sort of back to school nights. And they shifted it to all electronic on including weekends, and it jumped to 90 percent, literally in a couple of weeks. So parents are ready to engage. You just have to find the right way. But I know the others on the panel to this day in and day out, so they'll have a lot more to say.

Sarah Carpenter : [00:42:22] I feel the same way. Parents are in the midst of all this going on. Parents have to do what they have to do. We got to make it convenient for

parents. You have worked all day. Our principals and teachers. They work all day and you want to have a meeting at 12:00 at work. I have to work. So I worked at the school years ago and I did Saturday Parent University. And we had 90 percent of parents to participate. So, I mean, you have to make it convenient for parents. This is your job to make it convenient for parents. So that's my thought on it.

Keri Rodriguez: [00:42:58] And we used that to bribe parents or bribe principals to open a school on Saturday mornings. I'm like, I will buy the donuts. Like, we'll find the money to pay for the janitor to unlock the doors and do the sweeping, if you will do it on a Saturday morning at 10:00, because sometimes, like in particular, elementary school, like parents didn't feel safe coming out at night in that particular neighborhood like it was a thing. But to have it Saturday morning at 10:00 and we'll show up. But I would say this. Easiest thing to do in the world if you are covering a district that is 48 percent Latino and 32 percent black and you're only talking to white parents, you got a problem. OK, take a look at the signs that are showing up to your school board meeting. If they're in Spanish and they've been put in Google Translate and they don't make sense like that and they're being held up by white parents, like that's that's a problem. We see that all the time. So, like there are there are things that you can check to be like, you know, there's something wrong here. And I'm not like getting the straight story. Like, take a look at your demographics of the district that you're covering. Like if you're not talking to parents that are representative of the school or the demo of the district, like dig a little deeper, go out to a soccer field, go to a baseball field, go to a bodega, go to the grocery store. And just like parents are there. And you could like do a little like man on the street like, hey, do you have kids in the neighborhood or whatever? It's probably easier to connect there and you'll get more authentic, like, hey, what's going on than you will showing up at a board meeting where sometimes there's some shady turnout going on, just saying

Eric Robelen: [00:44:37] We're just about out of time. That's I really appreciate that. I think for reporters to take a look at that in their own community, the population and the breakdown by race and ethnicity and other factors to say who am I talking to is really powerful. Does anyone have any last suggestions of you mentioned the soccer field and other places like where to go to find parents besides just the usual channels like the PTA?

Katherine Reynolds: [00:45:03] I mean, I stand outside the school building at arrival time. Arrival time. I used to do that. And then and then when the aftercare lets out. Right. So and you're not going to get all the parents, but you're going to at least start understanding who is in that community. And then you can find in every community there's someone like Sarah or someone like Keri who's the connector. Right. And they can then connect you to

Keri Rodriguez: [00:45:24] Half of you are mommies and daddies anyway. Go to where your people go, like you go. You have soccer, you have baseball, you have the jumpy house players go to Sky Zone wherever you bring in your babies. That's where we're bringing our babies. Go to the grocery store, talk to some people like.... If you're covering a community, you should know something about the community. Go to the grocery store like we're going and doing the same thing. We live the same life. So if this is the beat that you're covering, the community you're covering, it makes sense. You want to know more about us, right? So go like what you, you guys are parents too, half of you. So, like, walk around. Like we'll talk to you. Like we're human beings. Come on y'all.

Sarah Carpenter : [00:46:09] You're right. You're right. I mean we got we got to do what we got to do. I've stood in car lines to meet parents. ... You meet them where they are. We got to educate our parents. The system has kept our parents so locked out of the know and it's our job to educate our parents on what they need to know. And you see that light bulb go off in the parents' head and they'd be ready to roll with you. So, I mean, but we are dependent on journalists to tell our story. Y'all are the ones that tell our story and you go to the wealthy communities, you go to the unions. We want you to tell our story. They can't tell our story like we can.

Keri Rodriguez: [00:46:53] We can I'm an organizer, I talk to people in Ubers at the at the restaurants...I'm always like, hey, so tell me about your kids. Like, where do they go to school?

Eric Robelen: [00:47:05] So I'm so sorry, but I'm so sorry. We're out of time. I wish we had another hour from our engagement with all of you, but thank you so much for your time. This was great. And I hope that our member journalists will follow up with all of you to continue the conversation. And Catherine, thank you for a great job moderating this.

Just a quick note to the participants or that the audience to you'll get an email next week with an evaluation form. Please complete it. We take our member feedback very seriously and use it to improve. And we got still plenty more on the agenda today and tomorrow for our national seminar. Thank you, everyone.