



TRANSCRIPT

Seizing the Moment: Race Equity Mindsets, Social and Emotional Well-Being, and Outcomes for Students

NATALIE WALROND

Hello, everyone. Welcome. Welcome. We are so delighted to be in community with you all today. As Laura mentioned, my name is Natalie Walrond and I direct the National Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety at WestEd.

So, we are at this pivotal moment in time in which our nation is confronted with vivid reminders of the ways in which race and caste are major predictors of outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities. And as educators, regardless of our own backgrounds or our roles in schools and school systems, we all play a role in creating equitable conditions in which every single student can thrive.

So on the next slide, you can see that we have two goals for our hour and a half together. So first, Elisha is going to share some insights with you about new research from the Education Trust on the interrelationships and connections among race equity mindsets, social and emotional well-being and outcomes for students.

And then Hugh and Gia will have a conversation in which they share practical examples from their own experiences and expertise about the how of the work. So, in particular, we'll talk about shifting mindsets as well as systems and processes to advance equitable learning environments, to promote positive and responsive relationships among each person in the school community, and to promote specific SEL competencies, such as agency and belonging for all students, but especially black, Latino, and other students of color.

Finally, we're going to make time to hear from all of you so that you can ask questions of the panelists and engage in some conversation. Ross and I are going to co-moderate today, so we'll kick us off. And on the next slide, I just wanted to talk a little bit about the conversation that we've been having at the center about the connection between equity and SEL. It has really gotten clearer and deeper in this context.

We know that there are many different, excellent definitions in the field for equity. And so, I just want to begin by sharing how we use this term at the center. And I always like to quote a brilliant friend and colleague, Erin Trent Johnson. And she simply says, "In order to operationalize and achieve equity, social outcomes must no longer be predicted by race, class, and gender. To do this, we must acknowledge and examine power structures, including systemic advantage and disadvantage that hold inequities in place."

So, we say at the center, inequitable experiences are connected to inequitable outcomes. So, we try to center equity in the technical assistance that we provide by following seven principles. And I'll run through them very quickly. We say that equity and SEL listens first and

acts second. It is strengths-based. It embraces the values, histories, and relationships in the communities we work with. It is co-designed, co-led, and co-implemented with students, families, and communities. It illuminates and disrupts implicit and explicit biases held by those in positions of power. It illuminates and disrupts organizational and structural inequities found in the policies and practices in schools and communities. And it helps students learn to claim their power and lift up their communities.

So, at the center, we think about student outcomes as much more than just proficiency and a set of academic standards, right? We think of excellent outcomes for students as meaning that they have a sense of personal purpose, are able to sustain healthy relationships, have a strong sense of place in their communities, are equipped to be successful in school and in the workplace, and are engaged and active citizens.

We often talk about the work of social and emotional learning and whole-person supports as being about putting the conditions in place for children, youth, and adults, to thrive and achieve this broader understanding of outcomes. And we liken the concept of creating conditions to cultivating a garden in which the strength of your plants comes not from the plants' innate qualities, but rather from our ability to provide them with the nutrients and care to thrive. So in this way, equitable environments are about creating conditions for every single plant to grow and thrive to their fullest potential.

So, I love the image on the slide as an illustration of the connections among equity, well-being, and outcomes. The tree that you see here has clearly grown in conditions that allow it to flourish. It has gotten the care and environment it needs to be healthy and well resulting in this gorgeous outcome, a tree that seems to be stretching toward its limitless potential.

So, in this moment of dual crises, a global pandemic and a national reckoning with legacies of centuries of racial oppression, education practitioners can see what research and science have been telling us for some time. The concepts of equity, well-being, and outcomes are an interrelated sequence of efforts.

We want to invite education leaders at every level to take an unflinching look at what it means to serve students well and to see them thrive like this tree and which students are being left behind. Many schools have never been the sanctuaries for some students that they are for others. They have not been places of belonging or connection, and they have not been places where every student knows that the adults around them believe in them or hold high expectations for their futures.

In short, there are schools that have been places that perpetuate the same systems of oppression often found in other aspects of students' lives. So, working toward excellent outcomes and community well-being in schools must be done hand in hand with the work of actively addressing the mindset systems and structures that privilege some students and hinder others. So with that, Ross, I'll turn it to you for some thoughts.

ROSS WIENER

Thanks, Natalie. I'm really delighted to be invited to be a part of this conversation today. So, thank you to you and your WestEd colleagues, and really excited to see so many people from all over the country who want to be a part of this conversation. So, I will share just a few more framing comments and then we'll turn it over to the folks, really, to bring their field perspectives and experiences into the conversation.

But just in terms of continuing to frame the conversation today, I want to talk a little bit about what we know from research, which is that students' experience of school determines how much they achieve, right? So, experiencing a sense of belonging, a sense of safety, a sense of purposeful challenge in the work they do in school makes a huge difference in how much students engage, how much they invest in their learning, and ultimately how much they achieve.

We know this from seminal research at the University of Chicago and from more recent research from the core districts in California. School climate profoundly influences student outcomes. We also know from the just basic science and the science of learning that relationships are at the heart of learning. Students who have positive, healthy relationships with adults at school and with peers are better able to apply themselves to their schoolwork.

So, in this time of a global pandemic and of widespread economic despair, and of course the racial reckoning that's gripping our country this year, we need to be especially cognizant about the centrality of relationships in creating safety and stability that build resilience and that enable young people to cope with the stresses that they're experiencing outside of school. And then we have to honestly acknowledge that trusting healthy relationships across lines of race are scarce in America overall and too uncommon in our schools where the majority of students are of color, but the overwhelming majority of teachers are white.

So, we need an intentional approach to helping educators recognize and address the biases that come along with growing up and being educated in American culture. And we need to help educators build their own skills around seeing and valuing the innate capacity for brilliance that exists in every child of every race and ethnicity. I referred before to the data from the core districts in California, right?

Researchers have documented large disparities in students' self-reported sense of belonging by racial ethnic group and gender. And they also find that increases in students' self-reported sense of belonging in school are positively related to gains in academic and behavioral outcomes. So, we've got to develop explicit strategies that bolster students' sense of belonging at school, especially among students from marginalized groups.

This is important to improving academic outcomes. It's just important also to helping them develop into the best people they can be to thrive as learners and in life.

So, now on this next slide I want to talk for a minute about what we need to do to create anti-racist schools. And Claude Steele's research on stereotype threat reveals that children pick up on the subtle, sometimes unconscious cues about what's expected of them and that children of color, especially, end up using brain power they need for learning just to suppress the signals they take in from media and in their schools that they aren't expected to succeed, aren't expected to excel academically.

So, all of this reinforces the need for an intentional approach to developing teachers' mindsets and toolkits for affirming each student and the community life and the cultural traditions they bring with them into school. For students to thrive, they need to be able to bring their full selves into school, and they need to know that they're seen and supported as whole people who have meaningful contributions to make.

And I just want to make two more points quickly. One, this is not an indictment of teachers, but rather an acknowledgment that we all have work to do to create an anti-racist experience

for students in public education. Again, this is especially true of white teachers who have responsibility primarily for teaching students of color. We aren't going to overcome over 400 years of systemic racism by ignoring it or by casting blame elsewhere; we need to shift mindsets so that we can clearly see the issues that need to be addressed, locate ourselves and our responsibility in this work, and be fully transparent about the why and the what of creating conditions for students of color to thrive in school.

And then, finally, I just want to acknowledge, these are difficult but necessary conversations. I know that many proponents of social-emotional learning see SEL as an important component of an equity agenda. And it can be, but others have experienced SEL as something that seeks more assimilation than empowerment and something that needs to be actively connected to cultural responsiveness, which wasn't included in the design of many SEL programs.

I want to acknowledge, Castle recently introduced the concept of transformational SEL that has an explicit focus on building students' agency and identity. And that's really important in this work and just underscore that if we truly want to bring SEL and anti-racism together as parts of a whole equity agenda, we need to work on this explicitly.

So, we have great resources to power this conversation and to dig in more deeply into the intersections among race, social-emotional learning, and educator mindsets. It's my honor to introduce Elisha Smith-Arrillaga, executive director of Ed Trust-West. Elisha has been in this work for decades, has taught in K-12 and at higher ed, has a deep academic background, and I'll just share tremendous admiration for the work of the Education Trust-West.

I used to be there, and their just bedrock commitment to equity and to articulating the truths that we all need to orient around is just an incredible strength and a resource for the field. So Elisha, it's my honor to turn it over to you. The Ed Trust-West has a new report out that shares findings from a series of interviews and focus groups that you and other Ed Trust colleagues held with students and their families about how they've experienced social-emotional learning at school.

So, tell us about that project and about the findings, and in particular, how do we connect equity, well-being, and social-emotional learning, and then what is the call to action for educators?

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

Ross, thanks so much for that wonderful introduction. And I'm really thrilled to be here with all of you today. As Ross said, I'm the executive director of the Education Trust-West, and for the last 20 years we have been really laser-focused on bringing educational justice to California students of color and to low-income students.

And we do that through using research data, policy analysis, and advocacy. So, how we do our work is we really think about it in three ways. We pursue our mission through policy, but we know policy is only as good as what the actual practices are. They kind of have that policy. And then we also know that narrative change is really key. So, we serve as a bridge between community and policymakers. We engage with educators directly to help them implement and scale up effective practices. And we work to drive a public conversation about educational equity. We can go to the next slide.

Now, as part of that work, our national office recently released a report examining social, emotional, and academic development through an equity lens. And an important part of that report was speaking directly with students and families about their experiences. After all, they are the ultimate experts on their own experiences in schools.

But one of the report's troubling findings is that the way that we approach social-emotional development in many places may actually do more harm than good, especially with approaches. And here I want to bring in student voices because they make the argument better than I ever could. So that's especially true with approaches that, one, lack an explicit equity lens.

So, of the hundreds of students and parents we talked to across the country, this quote from a parent is heartbreaking, and it explains why this is so important. And the parents say this, "It's important that both the parents and the teachers see that a child is not more than another because they dress differently or because they speak differently or because they walk differently, because that's what I see a lot in schools, that they have a hard time socializing because other students label them and discrimination begins, bullying begins."

So, in addition to what we just heard around lacking this explicit equity lens, we also know that failing to acknowledge the role of students' racial and cultural experiences in social-emotional development is also one of the key issues that came up as well in the research that we did. Well, we heard from one student in Kentucky who really clearly articulated this point with the following, "Being aware of your culture and everybody else's around your community is very important because you can't have somebody tell you, 'Oh, yeah, you came from this background so this means that you're a bad person.'"

So, in addition to failing to acknowledge the role of students' racial and cultural experiences in social-emotional development, we also need to treat social-emotional and academic...what we tend to do is treat them as separate: social, emotional, and academic learning.

So, as one Oakland student put it, and I love this, they said, "At the end of the day, my name is my brand. And I can't separate personal and professional because at the same time, I'm the same person." Clearly, he's a marketing star in the making. But the point he's making is very important. The social, emotional, and academic learning are very intertwined and we have to treat them as such.

The other thing that we tend to do in social-emotional learning that we heard across the country is we ignore the school processes and structures that systematically disadvantage students of color, low-income students, and immigrant youth. Now, in alignment with that point, I want to share one mother's story with you. She said, "My son had always been at the top of his class, but he had a teacher and he started to slip. And the teacher said, 'Oh, don't worry. He's just starting to normalize.' So, I mean, he was marginalized. I lost trust in the school. I lost trust in the administrator. Then no one was going to continue to push him. We have schools that would rather just kind of put kids on a mute button to get through, go through the motions of every day. We know this happens all the time," she told us. "We all have a story."

So, this slide shows that some of the issues that we heard that exists with social-emotional development, there are things that we can do about them. This list ensures that our approach to social-emotional development is actually about supporting students. And to do that, we have

to actually start by changing our own mindsets and beliefs. So, what that looks like is moving from a deficit-based lens to a strengths-based lens; really going from one-size-fits-all models to really trying to account for students' unique cultural and contextual influences.

And then we also have to go from accepting bias to actively working to try and root it out, which we'll hear more about later in this presentation, or later today. And then finally, we have to translate those beliefs into new systems. So on the next slide, what we see is the reason that this matters so much. So, this matters because we know the students' academic success is inextricably linked to their social- emotional and physical health. And we have a long way to go to achieve equity on both fronts.

So in 2019, what you see here is that in California, just one in five black students met or exceeded math standards, and for English learners and students with disabilities it's even worse. We can go to the next slide.

Now, at the rate that we're going currently, my six-year-old son will be old enough to be a grandfather by the time we get all of California students on track to meet math standards. We can go to the next slide.

We won't change that until we understand that this is not about students' inability to learn, but what it's about is understanding that social-emotional development is inherent to every part of the student experience and that systems have to be designed with that in mind. And so, that's one of the reasons that our team at Ed Trust-West recently released a math equity toolkit that's an example of how we can incorporate social-emotional development that centers anti-racism and cultural sensitivity in daily instruction. We can go to the next slide.

So, some of the recommendations in that toolkit are, as you would expect, about access to standards-aligned curriculum and rigorous expectations. But one of the five strides in that toolkit we ask educators to take is we ask them to incorporate social-emotional and academic things because the students don't see themselves in their coursework if they're not learning in relationship with their teachers and each other; they can't possibly be learning to their fullest potential.

So, for example, picture a sixth-grade lesson that asked students to place a series of figures in order from smallest to greatest. It's designed to teach them the fundamental math skill of translating between fractions and decimals and percentages. But if we asked them to do that exercise in a collaborative discussion within a small group, then we're also asking them to practice engagement in group initiatives and to co-create solutions with their peers that are inclusive and mutually supportive.

So, if we go to the next slide and we zoom back out to the big picture, what we see from all the examples I provided is that, really, Ed Trust has six recommendations for school and district leaders when it comes to students' social, emotional, and academic development. The first is to provide meaningful professional development and supports; secondly, to engage parents, students, and communities as full partners in the work. Diversifying the workforce, not just teachers, but leadership is important.

And then, of course, ensuring equitable access and supports for rigorous and culturally sustaining coursework. And then developing inclusive discipline and dress code policies. We heard from a lot of students across the country. And then the sixth and final is having access to integrated wraparound services and supports.

So, in recognition of how much we've learned from students and families, I'd like to close with a quote from two Los Angeles mothers who summed it up beautifully. "Social-emotional learning brings about confidence. If you don't love yourself, you're not confident in who you are. If you're not confident, then you're not really interested in anything, especially learning."

And our fellow mom chimed in to say, "Knowledge of self is so important. Who you are, your culture, allowing students to learn how to love within." Thanks so much, and I'm sure the links have been shared to the report, so you can dig in and get more information on both the report and the math equity toolkit. Thank you.

NATALIE WALROND

Elisha, thank you so much. That was fantastic. I really appreciate your setting the groundwork for this conversation that we're going to move to next with Gia and Hugh, so that Ed Trust report really lifts up student voices, right? Like Elisha's quotes really helped us hear the voices and the perspectives and the experiences of students and family, and just clearly describe the gap between how they experience social and emotional development practices and what they say they need.

So, Gia and Hugh, I'll turn it over to you. And the questions that I would love for you guys to just sit with as you present are, how can we intentionally seize this moment to reimagine and improve schools by cultivating race equity mindsets? And the second is, what are three key ideas, takeaways, or strategies for advancing equity mindset and social and emotional well-being that educators might want to try?

GIA TRUONG

Thank you, Natalie. I am Gia Truong. I'm the proud CEO of Envision Education. I want to give you some context before we give you examples. Envision Education is an organization that has two strategies. We want to make local impact, so we operate schools, secondary schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. And we want national reach, so we have a consulting division—Envision Learning partners—that shares our performance assessment model with districts and schools across the country.

We serve a low-income black and Latinx community, 75% of whom will be the first in their family to graduate from college. A little bit more context is that, in the last three to four years, we've been partnering with the National Equity Project, Leadership for Liberation, and The Equity Lab to become an anti-racist, pro-black organization.

We're distinguishing that racism and anti-blackness are not synonymous, and because we serve a large amount of black students, we want to call that out, that we need to interrupt anti-blackness in our organization as well. So, a little bit of context. When COVID hit and we had to shift from in-person to remote learning, we did the best we could in providing learning for our students and establishing some calm and consistency.

Over the summer, we had an opportunity to look at how to redesign for the fall, knowing that in the fall we would open up in distance learning. So, we really thought about three shifts that would guide us in our redesign. The first shift is that, what Elisha was saying that social-emotional learning is not separate from academics, that we need to actually know the relationship between social-emotional learning, academics, and equity in order to promote student learning and growth.

An example that I saw just a couple of weeks ago in the classroom was our teacher leading a conversation about the election and what it means to be 17 and 18 years old and voting for the first time during equity-centered uprising and protests. And students were expressing how they were feeling, but they linked that to the actual policies that they were voting on and what it means for them. And really moving from a feeling of despair and anger to a feeling of informed and confidence so that they can feel empowered as young people moving into being voters.

Another shift that we're really, really mindful of was not planning for our students and communities, but with our students and communities. And this really goes to our anti-racism, pro-black focus that when we plan for our students and communities, it implies that they need to be saved or that they don't know better and we're planning for them.

When we plan with them, we shift our mindset from students that need to be saved to students that are active problem solvers and have solutions that we may not have. And the third shift is really being conscientious of our mindset of the bootstrap mentality in transforming students. Really neglecting the fact that we live in a structurally racist society and our systems at schools are built towards that.

And, really, we need to transform systems policies and reimagine learning. So I'm going to share with you in the next slide about our distance learning program and how those three mindsets played out in our redesign of our fall distance learning program. So, this is based on what students told us. Our chief academic officer, Javier Cabra Walteros, really engaged a very community-based redesign of our distance learning program over the summer. He engaged a group of students from all our five schools—middle school students, high school students, students with IEPs, students that were just very, very diverse.

He engaged teachers, again, across our five schools that have different experiences and backgrounds. And then our principals engaged parents, over 400 parents every single week in this redesign. So, again, designing with our community and not for our community. And really centered our distance learning model on what students say they were experiencing in distance learning and redesigning to improve and increase more positivity in their experience.

So, they told us that they really wanted community and restorative practices. They wanted differentiation and then they wanted a modular model. So, I'll dig into the modular model. Our students said to us, "How high school is designed is not working." Where high schools take five, six, even more classes every single day. And our system is built that way because in California, the UC and CSU system says you have to take all these classes in order to even qualify to apply to a four-year college. And they're saying it's not working.

So they propose this model where students take three classes at a time, and then they would shift to the other three classes. And the rationale on the next slide tells us this is the why they really believe in it. They say fewer classes because in the spring it was overwhelming. They said that fewer students, which means that the teachers have fewer students, which means that the students will get better feedback. And students wanted feedback. They didn't want to just do work and turn in work. They wanted to learn. And they need feedback in order to grow and learn as learners.

And then they also told us that, well, the one-size-fits-all does not work and that students need differentiation. So, that really helped us design the tier support model where different

students got different support and not everybody was getting the same amount of virtual or synchronous or asynchronous learning. So, they really, really helped us.

And in terms of the community and restorative practices, we definitely have structures in this distance learning model that really emphasize. But I wanted to say that our restorative practices are in every interaction in every class and it's not separate from academics. But they also said that they wanted the daily advisory so that they can connect because there's a lot going on. Black and brown communities are disproportionately impacted by COVID, by racial uprising, by the economic recession, et cetera.

And we also heard from parents that they want weekly communication. They want to know what kids are learning. So, we are committed to communicating with parents every single week. And we, as a network, are learning together healing centered, trauma-informed school practices that are practiced in advisory, but also in all academic classes. And, of course, providing counseling and really getting to know our students really, really well in order to do that.

So, I hope that that gives you an example of, like, there's a lot of shifts we're making, but those are the three that we're really prioritizing. And recognizing that it does a disservice for students when we separate social-emotional learning from academics. And that our students are full and complete human beings, and we need to actually set conditions for them to actually show up as complete and full human beings.

So, hope that gives you an example from at least one network. And there are some resources here. And one of the resource that I provided is from my colleague, Hugh Vasquez, that actually helped us, informed our redesign. So, I'll hand it over to Hugh.

HUGH VASQUEZ

Well, hello. Thanks, Gia. I'm Hugh Vasquez, I'm with the National Equity Project. We're based here in Oakland, although we work all over the country. And if you don't know about the National Equity Project, we are a leadership development and what we call capacity-building organization where we attempt to create leaders who take on systems change, take on change of school systems and communities to bring about equity. So, that's what we're really about.

This first slide that you're looking at, though, I want you to take a notice that what we're talking about is that in this moment that we're in, I want to focus on the moment that we're in, meaning the COVID moment as well as the pandemic of the racial uprisings protest, all of those things that are going on, that we have an opportunity now to not return in the same way that we left schools.

We have that opportunity now. Some talk about it, that we are in a portal, a portal that's going from what the status quo is, what it used to be, to something that's new and something that's different. And we actually have the choice while we're in this portal to move into something that we've wanted forever but we haven't yet been able to make happen.

So, we are looking at how can we move our leaders in our school systems and our communities into a way where equity can become a reality and not return to the normal ways that we're doing things. Let's go to the next slide. I'm going to move fast through a couple of things. So, to do this, some of our work is about creating these equitable learning environments. I love the metaphor of the tree and the cultivation of the land that is necessary for the tree to grow.

So, we're doing that in schools and in other places all over the place. And in order for that to happen, there has to be a shift. And it's a shift in values, it's a shift in belief systems, and it's a shift in mindset of educators. We're finding that if we want to make this happen, there's something we have to shift from and there's something that we have to shift to.

And this slide shows both of those. I want to focus on what we're looking at shifting to, looking at the change that we're trying to make with that. And you can see on the right side that there are a few things to highlight. I'm not going to go through all of this, but we want to shift to center equity and justice in all that we do, as one of the things we're trying to do here. We want to shift to a belief and to a way of being that is about linked fate for real, linked fate. We talk about linked fate often in this country and we are as divided as we've ever been. We've been divided greatly.

And our fates, we don't as a people walk around with the belief that what happens to me happens to you and so on. So, we're looking at, we have to have a shift in being linked in our fates in order to do the work, a shift in de-centering whiteness. And that doesn't mean there's something wrong with whiteness. What it means is that whiteness has been the root of our educational system and that the system has been designed for some to make it and some not. And it's based on a lot of factors, but one of them being race. So, de-centering that.

Knowing that communities have a lot of knowledge and assets within them. And we very often do not look at how we distribute leadership, leadership all across the system, so that we are all attending to the needs of all of our students.

And then co-designing. A shift into co-designing. That mindset shift means that we are together in designing the system that we want to create instead of it being top-down, which is how we typically go. All right. Let's go to the next slide.

So, I want to give you a clear example of one of the ways that we have found very useful and helpful to actually cause these shifts to happen. This is an example of an actual diversity equity statement, imperative statement, from one school system that we're working with. I'm not going to read it. I'll let you read it, but I want to highlight some keywords. If we were working with you experientially, I'd say, why don't you highlight or underline keywords or phrases as you go through reading this particular statement.

So, this is a school system that has said that they want to ensure that all students are at or above grade level; what school system doesn't say that, right? A lot of them do. But they go on to say that this is about reading and social-emotional learning. So they have connected the dots of literacy to social-emotional in their statement here, which is an unusual thing that we see in school systems.

Differently situated, are words in this statement. The recognizing that students are situated differently to the attainment of this goal of literacy and social-emotional learning. They're situated differently, and this system recognizes it and puts it in the statement here. And then they go on to say that our data shows that our black students are farthest away from reaching this goal. And we are going to "unapologetically"—those words in there—focus on black males.

That does not mean they're not focusing on the success of all children or all students, but they recognize who's farthest away from the opportunity. This statement is an anchor. Everything that this school system is doing is anchored with this statement. This statement shows up on lesson plans. It shows up on board agendas. It shows up on professional learning community

agendas, and so on. It's an anchor with everything that they do. So, it's one of the ways that we can actually shift a mindset to doing it in this way. Let's go to the next slide.

So, one of the most powerful things that we're doing with school systems is having school systems plan the learning environment around the experience they want to create. What a novel idea, right? We are all talking about that, that we want to create experiences for students. But guess what? The design of what we do is rarely based on the experience that we're trying to create for students.

So, we're making this shift with school systems to look at, asking the question, what is the experience that you want to create for students? Then here's some of them that we're working on. Let's go to the next slide. So with this, this is an example, coming from work we're doing with the BELE network, Building Equitable Learning Environments. And one of the things that this network has come up with is some of the ways that we can actually look at student experience.

So, I want to ask you these questions in a different way. These are six areas where if we were asking students how they were experiencing their educational experience, how were they experiencing it? And we asked it in these six areas; we would get an idea of how well we're doing with creating the learning environment. This is the soil. This is the way that these students are going to grow.

So, asking things like this about student experience, "Did you learn new things about your culture or your community today? Did you have the opportunity to get to know your classmates today? Did you get specific suggestions about how to improve your skills today? Did you learn skills that will help you succeed later in life today? Was an idea you shared taken seriously by your teacher today? And do you feel like your teacher was glad that you showed up today, that you were in class today?" Right?

So, these are some of the ways that if we look at student experience and we asked students, we go ask the students, "Are you experiencing school like this?" It gives us a clue as to how well we're doing with not just the academic work, but the social-emotional work as well. Let's go to the next slide.

So, three key ideas. Gia and I were asked to come up with three key ideas here. So, the three that I wanted to bring your attention to are these—that we want to focus on what students are learning versus what adults are doing. If you were to shift into that mindset of asking yourselves, "What did our students learn today?" Not asking yourself, "What did our adults do today?" Right? Then it would bring out a different way of looking at what's happening for students.

Identifying the student experience that you're after, and then seeing the system that needs to be interrupted and to build the learning environments around that. We're working with some of our systems and asking this question, "What is the student experience you are after?" Is really interesting when we're asking educators that. Because oftentimes what we're hearing is, "Yes, what I want is something like this," they'll answer like this.

We want our students to have a teacher who teaches them and engages them, right? Which is not an answer to what is a student experience you want, it's an answer to what you want your teachers to be doing, right? So we're asking people to look more deeply at the actual student experience that they are after.

So, what I want to do is summarize, and then Gia and I are going to talk about this in a minute. The real question that we're looking at right now is the question about when we think about shifting in the current environment. What are we seeing and what are we experiencing as, just between her and I, as leaders who are trying to shift our systems, what are the ways that we are finding some of the challenges and some of the successes? So, I'm going to stop, and Gia and I are going to engage in a back and forth for a minute.

GIA TRUONG

We appreciate hearing your presentation again. I think one thing that we talked about was the importance of recognizing that we can't go back to normal. I think that is the first step of redesign is to recognize that normal has not worked for our students. And I would say for our black and brown students, but for a lot of students across the country and how it's important to shift. I also shared with you, Hugh, that your blog posts, what if we don't return to school as normal, really influence Envisions' redesign. Can you talk a little bit about why you wrote that and what drove you to really share that idea to all of us?

HUGH VASQUEZ

Well, yes. I mean, I relate it to the machinery, to a metaphor machinery, that we're in a system that's a machinery, right? That keeps operating. It keeps moving, the switch is turned on and the system is moving and we're all caught in it. And so, I recognized, not just me, but I was one of the ones that said the machinery has stopped. The pandemic hit and we stopped.

We cannot do today what we were doing yesterday once COVID hit, right? And people were recognizing that. That was not a problem with people saying, "Oh yeah, it stopped. We cannot do the same thing today." But what people were not thinking about was how are we going to do it? How are we going to make sure we do it differently?

Instead, there were initially, many of the educators were looking at how can we keep things going the way that it was, right? How can we keep things going? And so, I was motivated to say, "We can't do that. That's not what this is about. If we keep things going, we are keeping going inequality. We're keeping going, some students make it and some students not." And I felt compelled to say, "No, no, we've got to stop here and take a look."

GIA TRUONG

Yeah. That really resonates with me. And I think when the pandemic hit and there was a lot of urgency, and a lot of educators rightfully so want to do well by kids and want to know, what do I do, right? And there's just an instant focus on what adults need to do because the system has shifted. And for us, we had to just step back and say, "Let's not design on what adults need to do, but let's design on what the student experience should be," right?

It takes that extra step to come back and just say, "Okay." We react by default because we're all educators and we're all committed to making this work. And we just need to step back and say, "What do we normally do, and has it worked? And how do we shift to make sure that we actually produce different outcomes?"

And you and I talked about, like this is an opportunity. This is an opportunity because the machinery has stopped to really take some leaps forward and redesign. Are you seeing folks take those leaps forward? And you know, kind of what...

HUGH VASQUEZ

I was going to ask you to go first on that one, Gia. You actually did a redesign process this summer, right?

GIA TRUONG

Yes.

HUGH VASQUEZ

You actually got people together. And from our talk, I was so intrigued with what you discovered as you were getting the adults, right? The educators, the teachers, and others, to actually focus on student experience. I can give you some examples of what I've seen, but you've got some great ones. What have you found has happened?

GIA TRUONG

Well, I think for us, we were really prime to shift because we had been doing equity work as a whole organization, from our board all the way down to every single person in our organization around what it means to be anti-racist and pro-black, and know that if we really wanted to redesign our system and get different outcomes, the people that are closest to the pain should have the most power, right?

And it was an opportunity for us to not do things as normal, because normally as very caring and committed school leaders and district leaders, we get into a room and we try to figure it out. We might get some input, but it really, like, the brain trust is in the room. And we had to really come to the conclusion that we don't have the answer, because if we did, we wouldn't see the outcomes that we see right now across our country, to really lead with humility, slow down, listen, do all those things.

And when we have some practice with listening to our students and our teachers and our community, so we were really set up in that way. It doesn't mean that other organizations that are not as far along on the journey can't do it, but to really move from reacting to really slowing down and really thinking about what is working and what isn't and listening to our students and our families.

I'm hopeful that this racial reckoning is getting folks to really reevaluate our systems and really redesign piece by piece. What have you seen, Hugh?

HUGH VASQUEZ

Yeah. I mean, I want to be hopeful, but let me say a little bit about what's been hard about this, right? And I think as educators, we learn to educate in a certain way, right? We came into the field, we went through school, we did these things that taught us how we're supposed to do education.

And I'm finding that what was not central to much of our training was designing our education around the experience of the student, believe it or not. So, I was with an educational system just yesterday and again this morning and there was a question asked of the principals, and then it's being asked of the teachers now. But the question was, what is the experience that you want? What is the experience you want for your students so that they will feel as though

they belong in the school or belong in the classroom, right? What's the experience that you want with the students?

And many of the educators said, "We don't think about that. We don't think about the experience that our students want, or the experience that we want for them. We just don't think about that." And they couldn't answer the question, what is the experience that you want for your students? It was very, very difficult for them to do that.

We started talking about, well, this is like developing a muscle. You have to exercise to develop a muscle. And if you've come into the field not thinking about the student experience and all of a sudden there's somebody like National Equity Project, or Envision is saying, "Hey, let's talk about the experience of school...let's talk about experience of the students," there's just not muscle to do that yet. So we're finding we're having to slow down and help with people's thinking about that experience.

GIA TRUONG

Yeah. I agree with you. I think we all can just start by listening, right? We're inviting students in, and they're on a panel, they're our experts, and we're just listening and getting a sense of what they're experiencing and trying not to be defensive and things like that. And I agree with you. I think that it is not easy to redesign because, especially during a global pandemic, when there's so much uncertainty and people want answers.

And, really, we don't have answers to what it could look like. And we need to be patient with that and trust our students and communities to guide us to a more liberatory system, which is hard because, we all... And teachers a lot of times are trained to be, yeah, the teacher, right, to instruct and actually not knowing all the answers is hard. And that's why I think it really helps to have a system where leaders are explicitly saying, "It's okay not to have the answers." This is new for all of us. And part of equity work is to try some things out, to listen and to iterate and adapt as we learn more, which is really, really hard.

NATALIE WALROND

So, Gia and Hugh, this is Natalie. I'm going to just chime in here. We've got about five minutes left for this section before we open it up to questions from the participants for all of the panelists. And it's fascinating reading and watching all of the questions come through. So, before we open it up to all of the panelists and the whole conversation, there's a lot that's coming up here. Several different questions that we're going to bring to you guys around the challenges of this work.

And in particular, I'm wondering if you guys can talk a little bit about times when you have experienced resistance to this work from the community, from families, and how you helped move the work forward, how you helped, maybe, bring people along or get through or past any obstacles or challenges to the work. And I'm going to ask you to give us, like, certainly protect the privacy of people, but I would love to hear specific examples to make it a little bit more vivid about your experiences with community or family pushback in this work and how you responded.

GIA TRUONG

I think for us, we have gotten really positive feedback from our students and families. We recently surveyed all our students and families and the vast majority are feeling honored and

heard. And I think because they're not used to our process. And I think that our educators are struggling a bit because it's like all our educators, all of a sudden became first-year teachers and they're learning new things all at once.

And it's hard because our teachers really are committed and really believe in doing work with integrity and so much has changed and they have to learn so many things. So, I think our response to that is really encouraging folks to know that we don't have to be perfect, that we are all learning together. And to remind them that really, a) we don't want to go back to normal and b) we really can't, right? We're still doing remote learning and for us to be okay to be learners and be imperfect.

And I think it's a constant struggle to be in community and to have those conversations, and to be conscientious of the social-emotional needs of our adults as well as we're redesigning.

HUGH VASQUEZ

Yeah. I would add that, I think one of the things that we're asking parents, communities, and the wider school community is to really get clear about what you think will make for successful life. And when people are asked that question, parents are asked that question or community people are asked that question, of course, teachers ask that question and students ask that question, what do you think they say, right? What is it that people say will make a successful life?

And generally, it's things like our kids will be inspired. Our kids will have a feeling of agency of their own life, right? It's those kinds of things that actually help to bring the voices of the community into the school and the school into the parent community, where there is some common ground about what we are after in terms of the student experience that levels the ground.

So, asking those kinds of questions has been very powerful to bring parents and community members to, I would say, to join with the schools when they're attempting to do, especially social-emotional learning, right? Because our kids countering this whole thing about, "Oh, that's just soft stuff," or "Do it on the side," or "Do it after school," or do whatever, right? So, when you put it in the frame of what will make for a successful life, then it becomes part of the school day.

NATALIE WALROND

That's really helpful, thank you. Ross, I'll turn it over to you.

ROSS WIENER

Yeah. So, great. Elisha, please put your video on. I think now we're going to try and have a more open discussion. Lots of questions have been coming in, so I want to start to refine some of them. And this one really builds pretty directly on the last conversation that Gia, you and Hugh were just having. And some of the questions have been about, how do you address these issues really directly and deeply around equity and around issues of racial equity, in particular, when communities are struggling to have productive conversations around issues of race?

And I mean, we should acknowledge that this has become an even more polarized conversation in these last months, and I think something we desperately have to work through. So, Hugh, I might start with you. I mean, just knowing that the National Equity Project has such a deep

experience in trying to foster productive conversations around the issues of race and racism within the education sector.

And so, what have you learned about how do we engage folks who start out either defensive or just not thinking that this is the conversation they need to be having? And then Gia and Elisha, I hope you will chime in as well.

HUGH VASQUEZ

I'll just say one quick thing so that other people have a chance. We really do bring a core belief about linked fate. So if we start from that place, so that's one of the places that we start from, then it opens up the conversation. That's not necessarily an agreement, right? But it's the conversation.

So, having the opportunity to say, "Do you believe that we are linked in fate?" We do. We believe that what happens to anybody affects everybody else. So do you believe that? So we're asking people to really engage in that discussion about linked fate and about what do we have in common that we want for all of our children and for all of our communities? So that's where we start.

And we don't pretend that that's an easy conversation. We know that when you ask that question, you have people saying things like, "Yeah, but look what's happening to me," or "Look what's happening to my community." You say we're linked in fate, yet we're on the bottom line here and the structure and the system is not going to allow us to get any further than where we are now. So, how do you believe that we're linked in fate when I'm experiencing that, right?

That's one part of the conversation that happens. So, we really do strive to get people engaged in a conversation that's about, how are we connected to each other? Let me stop there because I know there's so many of us here.

GIA TRUONG

What I would add is, I think it's important to have conversations as a start. And I also strongly encourage organizations and districts to partner up with organizations like the National Equity Project and the Equity Lab and others that have expertise in structuring conversations so that all people can engage. One of the things that we've done is using a framework from the National Equity Project.

We encourage all of us to work alone in affinity and across difference. So, the alone piece is like, really, we need to look internally on our own, internalize biases and how our past experiences have influenced how we are interacting with our students and families, and really interrupt some of our own biases. And then we also have racial affinity groups that we work in as an organization because there's different work that we need to do, and we need those spaces to really help one another be really anti-racism, pro-black.

And I think those two pieces help us work across difference because ultimately for us to do this work, our differences need to be affirmed. And if we are not affirming our difference as adults, that means we're probably not affirming the variety of differences in our students. I don't have an answer, but I think that it's important to have the conversations, it's important to do our

internal work. And also looking at our systems and looking at student data—who’s learning, who’s not, and doing that work. And it’s a journey that we need to go on.

NATALIE WALROND

Elisha, before I let you chime in, there’s a question in the chat. Someone said, “I missed the name of the framework that Gia mentioned.” Can you say that again, Gia?

GIA TRUONG

I don’t know what the framework is called as such, Hugh might know, but, we believe in working alone in affinity and across difference. And we got that framework from the National Equity Project.

NATALIE WALROND

Elisha, did you want to chime in on this one or shall I move on to the next question?

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

I’ll just say one quick thing. And that is that one of the things I think is always important but especially important in this moment, and I was on a work seminar the other day with one of the head organizers of PICO, California, Reverend Ben McBride. And he talked about the need for and having these kinds of conversations, unrelenting courage, and unjustifiable imagination.

And I think that’s super important because we can’t not have these conversations because they’re hard. We need to have that courage to have them anyway. And then the unjustifiable imagination is, we have to be able to see beyond what is currently in front of us, that we can get to a new and different place that we can imagine. Like we wouldn’t be sitting here on this call today if there wasn’t someone who could have imagined that we could be here in this moment.

And so I’m just calling on the need for both of those things. I feel like it’s especially crucial going into these conversations in this moment, too.

ROSS WIENER

I just want to add one thing. I really appreciate all of these remarks and something that, Gia, you’d made me think of about going back to the data. I do think the more recent focus on school climate data and asking students very directly to narrate their experiences for us. And I think there’s something about differently, even then, some of the achievement gap data when students are saying, “This is not a place where I feel like I belong. I don’t feel like I have people I can turn to when I’m feeling vulnerable or unsafe.”

I think that cuts very differently because so many educators enter with this sense of supporting students, of developing those nurturing relationships, of creating that sense of safety and resilience and just worth. And so, I think those data can be extremely helpful in getting these conversations because we know, even from the core districts in California, that across the different groups, students have very different experiences, even in the same school, even in the same classroom. So how do we open up some of these conversations with that data as well?



TRANSCRIPT

Seizing the Moment: Race Equity Mindsets, Social and Emotional Well-Being, and Outcomes for Students

NATALIE WALROND

Hello, everyone. Welcome. Welcome. We are so delighted to be in community with you all today. As Laura mentioned, my name is Natalie Walrond and I direct the National Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety at WestEd.

So, we are at this pivotal moment in time in which our nation is confronted with vivid reminders of the ways in which race and caste are major predictors of outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities. And as educators, regardless of our own backgrounds or our roles in schools and school systems, we all play a role in creating equitable conditions in which every single student can thrive.

So on the next slide, you can see that we have two goals for our hour and a half together. So first, Elisha is going to share some insights with you about new research from the Education Trust on the interrelationships and connections among race equity mindsets, social and emotional well-being and outcomes for students.

And then Hugh and Gia will have a conversation in which they share practical examples from their own experiences and expertise about the how of the work. So, in particular, we'll talk about shifting mindsets as well as systems and processes to advance equitable learning environments, to promote positive and responsive relationships among each person in the school community, and to promote specific SEL competencies, such as agency and belonging for all students, but especially black, Latino, and other students of color.

Finally, we're going to make time to hear from all of you so that you can ask questions of the panelists and engage in some conversation. Ross and I are going to co-moderate today, so we'll kick us off. And on the next slide, I just wanted to talk a little bit about the conversation that we've been having at the center about the connection between equity and SEL. It has really gotten clearer and deeper in this context.

We know that there are many different, excellent definitions in the field for equity. And so, I just want to begin by sharing how we use this term at the center. And I always like to quote a brilliant friend and colleague, Erin Trent Johnson. And she simply says, "In order to operationalize and achieve equity, social outcomes must no longer be predicted by race, class, and gender. To do this, we must acknowledge and examine power structures, including systemic advantage and disadvantage that hold inequities in place."

So, we say at the center, inequitable experiences are connected to inequitable outcomes. So, we try to center equity in the technical assistance that we provide by following seven principles. And I'll run through them very quickly. We say that equity and SEL listens first and

GIA TRUONG

Yeah. And I would add, what Elisha was saying in terms of, we often separate social-emotional learning from academics. And it almost is like we're competing with time and priority when we talk about the two. And really looking at our social-emotional data; we have a sense of belonging, student-teacher relationships, safety data, and then our academic data. And look at the correlation between those two sets and you can see huge correlation.

Students that don't feel like they belong or have strong relationships are not doing well academically. So really understanding the importance of both and how to incorporate both in our redesign.

NATALIE WALROND

That's awesome. Thank you, guys. Okay. So, I'm going to completely switch gears here. So, there have been a number of questions and comments in the chat about the importance and role of teacher prep programs. So, what is your vision? What would you like to see teacher prep programs offer that would help move the equity and race equity mindsets forward in our educators?

GIA TRUONG

I really love local teacher ed programs, where teachers are being trained locally to work with the district or the network that they're in, and would love to encourage programs to encourage asset mapping of the community and really understanding the community in which they are there to serve and understanding the assets of the community so they're not going in with some of the deficit mindset that we know exists, not just in teachers but in all of us in our society.

And then really engaging them with tools to partner with families in a very, very different way. And shining spotlights on networks and schools that are doing it so that we can have models for our up and rising teachers. At Envision, we have a teacher residency program that we just developed as our second year launching, where almost all of our residents are from the community. And I think that is something that needs to be developed more and more across our country.

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

I'll just add that we actually have a resource coming out in a couple of weeks where we looked at the data of the teacher prep programs in California that were doing the best job preparing candidates of color, especially in the STEM fields since that's where we tend to struggle most. And then we've noted what some of those programs had in common in terms of being able to produce candidates of color.

And to Gia's point, many of them did work with local residency programs. And then there was also an attention in some of those programs to cultural competency. And to the point that Hugh made earlier around centering the student experience versus the adult experience. And so, I'd be happy to share that resource as well. Because a lot of times, some of these questions, we know that we can look at the data and then see what the practices are, but then there are the choices that systems make about how consistently then do we choose to do those things across programs? We could do a lot better job of that.

HUGH VASQUEZ

I would add, if I could wave a magic wand and make it happen in teacher prep programs, there would be a part of it that would be about something that we do at National Equity Project called Liberatory Design Work, right? What does that mean? That means that a teacher would be prepared to see the system that they're walking into for one, right? And that's a system of white supremacy and it's a system that was built for some to make it and some not to make it based on a lot of factors, but race being one of them.

But they'd be able to see that. And then they'd be able to design something that actually counters that old way of doing things, the current way of doing things, but they'd be able to be designers of their classroom, designers of the educational experience versus having to plug and play something or other, right?

They'd be able to design it. But first they have to see it. So, in their prep program, they have to be given opportunities to see the system that they're teaching in and sitting in and walking into and then become knowledgeable about how do you redesign a system that has got power behind it and meant to stay in that way.

One other quick thing. Well, there would be some additional readings and some of what Elisha, some of what you're saying would be required readings, right? Additional readings and teacher prep programs, but one of them would be Bettina Love's book on abolitionist teaching, right? Because it's really a core piece of teaching that our teachers are not prepared to do. So, it really does call out, there's another way to teach.

And if you bring in designing for liberation and you bring in things like abolitionist teaching, then you bring in a teacher who is going to design the experience differently than what they're taught to do now.

ROSS WIENER

So, in some ways it's... Oh, Gia, did you want to add to that?

GIA TRUONG

Yeah, just adding really quickly. I absolutely believe in shared reading, but this is a time in our country where I'm seeing a lot of use of equity-centric language and concepts like white supremacy and others inappropriately or just not comprehensively. So, I also want to say that really to be aware of intellectualizing those concepts and applying them without lived experiences.

I've definitely seen privileged white educators using equity-centric language, and I think inappropriately. So, I would also encourage folks to continue to learn, but not over-intellectualize and being careful about the usage of all those things. And the real work is looking at ourselves and how we're doing it before pointing fingers and blaming how other people are racists or other people are white supremacists. So I just want to encourage that.

ROSS WIENER

Thanks, Gia. And so, again, I'm going to ask a question that in some ways is trying to capture a theme that's come up in a number of questions and it's around, how do we take a systems approach to this? And one of the things that I'm very cognizant of is that we talked about how

much this work needs to be integrated. That it's actually academic and social and emotional development actually all happen at the same time.

And that can start to feel like it's all rolling down to classroom teachers. And what they need to do is just transform their own work, but they do their work within systems and expectations and incentives that either make this work seen and valuable and something that's a shared priority or something that they each need to take on, on their own. So there was also a question about how to bring design thinking into this, how to engage students themselves as co-creators, but I want for each of you or whoever wants to start off to reflect a little bit about what's the system's role in really making this a priority and in making it more of a context where this is the work that's prioritized and invited rather than needing to constantly push against the grain to do this work?

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

Well, one of the things, Ross, that I think is really evident in actually how Gia lays out exactly what Envision does is that, from leadership all the way down, the voices of students and parents were centered from the beginning, right? They weren't running in to give feedback on a plan that somebody else already developed, but the element of co-design is crucial. And there are actually a lot of tools and resources for educators and districts to do that work.

So, for instance, YouthTruth, which is a national nonprofit that specializes in gathering feedback from students, a lot of districts around the country use some of the social-emotional and climate data they gather from YouthTruth along with their academic data, and then at the district level and school level, use that to then start making some of the decisions and bringing parents and educators and students together.

And so, I would just say, it has to start at the leadership level of saying, we're going to unapologetically be about centering students and parents, and then figuring out how their system's in place, not to just provide a checkbox, so somebody's plan has already been designed, but to actually co-design it with them. And that takes time, right? It takes a little bit more resources, but the payoff can have huge rewards.

GIA TRUONG

Yeah, I agree with Elisha. It's like, there's...it's really important to have conversations about race and racism and the impact of it, and that's not sufficient, right? We really need to redesign our system, but those conversations inform mindsets that actually create stronger and more equitable design.

So, I think it goes hand in hand and that it is the leadership's responsibility to really think about redesigning systems. And so, before the pandemic, a system that we really wanted to do, use Liberatory Design to redesign with student discipline. So, just like choosing one piece and really listening to students, especially students that are not successful and what they're experiencing and why. And really redesigning systems so that it actually meets their needs rather than just a system that really perpetuates punishment in a school or prison pipeline.

So, it doesn't have to be a huge system. Just choosing one thing that is not working and trying that out. But it requires a lot of mindset shifts in terms of how we view our students in our communities.

HUGH VASQUEZ

Yeah. And I'll connect to the mindset shift in thinking about one piece of the system, right? There are so many pieces of the system, but I like the idea of taking a piece of the system for redesign. Let's look at how we measure progress as one part of the system, right?

And if we were to measure progress as to, what did our students learn, or how did they develop today, and we measured it today, then we would have a measurement system, an evaluation system that looks at what's happening to our students today, right? Versus something like the standardized test that tell you what happened a few months ago, right? It's not helping you formatively; it's helping you in some other ways, but it's not helping you in that way.

So, there's a way of measuring. I also want to just quickly add that a redesign of the system is a courageous act. It's a very courageous act. So, for example, some of us are really looking at a redesign of the system to eliminate the ACT and the ACT because they are not predictors of success and they actually produce inequality, right, with who gets to go to college and so on.

So, a redesign, if you looked at that as an example, a small part of the system, but it has large influence, how would we go about redesigning what we hold as valuable in terms of measurement, in terms of data, in terms of what predicts success and outcomes?

NATALIE WALROND

So, I just want to congratulate you guys, because that last conversation hit about three different questions that were coming into the chat in terms of systems-level work, in terms of what is the role of a leader, and a school leader in particular, and in terms of equitable assessments and how we think about the role of assessments and equity. So that was very impressive. Thank you, guys.

We've got probably about eight minutes left. So, my guess is that's about one more question before we end. And this is such a great conversation. It's hard for me to just pick one question, so I'm going to toss in two and see if you guys want to combine them or address one, but not the other. So we've, in the category of the challenges of this work and vivid examples of how you manage or navigate those challenges. There have been a few questions that talk about the importance of that inner work that you referenced and of giving educators the space for reflection, but that the systems are not in place to give educators that time and space that they need for that self-exploration.

So, if you have any examples of ways that schools or school systems have created that opportunity and created those incentives, which may be counter to what's happening in the system, that would be helpful. And then maybe final thoughts on what makes you hopeful, right? We spent a lot of times talking about where the challenges are and where the hard conversations are, but what are you seeing that makes you hopeful for the future around race equity, well-being for communities, outcomes for kids?

And, I guess, to give you guys a minute to think, I'll answer the hopeful question, because I was having this conversation with someone previously. What makes me hopeful is that I have seen in this moment, a dramatic shift in the openness and readiness to talk about race and equity. I think, Elisha, you meant, well, I guess we've probably all talked about it. It doesn't always feel comfortable for people. It requires a little bit of courage and it requires some vulnerability. And I have seen a huge difference now versus a year ago or two years ago, the willingness that

people have to say, what is my role and how can I be a part of creating equitable conditions for the students and families that I love?

HUGH VASQUEZ

Well, I'll offer one, and this is in response to the system part where, we all know what is said about the system is designed to produce what it produces as when COVID hit, we had been working with some school systems to really redesign. And what we soon discovered was this—that not only is the system designed to produce what it produces, but the system is designed to not allow you to redesign. It just doesn't give you the time-space, whatever, right, to actually do that.

So, COVID hit and in some of the places where we're working, one in particular, I'll give you an example. And I say talked—we talked the superintendent, the top leaders in the district office, and some of the principals—we talked them into meeting every Friday for a notice and reflect time on what happened this past week when it came to your attempts to bring about equity in education, right?

So that started with an agreement from the superintendent to do two meetings, two Fridays. And I said, "Okay, let's do two Fridays and then tell me if you want to do some more." So we did two Fridays then she said, "Let's keep going." And I said, "How long?" She says, "I'll give you another month."

So we did four more sessions. This was right after COVID hit, right? Long story short, it's been seven months and we haven't missed a Friday, right? Why? Because they decided that what they needed to do was be in the game with each other every Friday to notice and reflect what happened and to readjust what they're looking to do the next week, right?

So, to me, that's both an answer to how you can redesign, do work to redesign for one, but it's also very helpful. It's very helpful to get people together with that level of intensity and intention.

GIA TRUONG

Thank you, Hugh, for that example. I have a similar example with us in terms of the school level is that within, this kind of the machinery has stopped. So how do we redesign our time with teachers, and we are increasing professional development and professional learning community time for our teachers, because we're all learning how to do school differently.

So, we have more synchronous classes Monday through Thursday, and then on Friday, our teachers have a full day of collaboration and planning and they still meet with their advisory so that every single student has a human connection. But I think this is a time to really think about that learning doesn't stop in the teacher prep program, that it continues as we learn from our families and community and as things are evolving and changing all the time.

So, I just really encourage districts and labor unions to work together to think about learning together and having more time to learn and providing quality professional development for all of us, our teachers, our educators, and our leaders.

internal work. And also looking at our systems and looking at student data—who’s learning, who’s not, and doing that work. And it’s a journey that we need to go on.

NATALIE WALROND

Elisha, before I let you chime in, there’s a question in the chat. Someone said, “I missed the name of the framework that Gia mentioned.” Can you say that again, Gia?

GIA TRUONG

I don’t know what the framework is called as such, Hugh might know, but, we believe in working alone in affinity and across difference. And we got that framework from the National Equity Project.

NATALIE WALROND

Elisha, did you want to chime in on this one or shall I move on to the next question?

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

I’ll just say one quick thing. And that is that one of the things I think is always important but especially important in this moment, and I was on a work seminar the other day with one of the head organizers of PICO, California, Reverend Ben McBride. And he talked about the need for and having these kinds of conversations, unrelenting courage, and unjustifiable imagination.

And I think that’s super important because we can’t not have these conversations because they’re hard. We need to have that courage to have them anyway. And then the unjustifiable imagination is, we have to be able to see beyond what is currently in front of us, that we can get to a new and different place that we can imagine. Like we wouldn’t be sitting here on this call today if there wasn’t someone who could have imagined that we could be here in this moment.

And so I’m just calling on the need for both of those things. I feel like it’s especially crucial going into these conversations in this moment, too.

ROSS WIENER

I just want to add one thing. I really appreciate all of these remarks and something that, Gia, you’d made me think of about going back to the data. I do think the more recent focus on school climate data and asking students very directly to narrate their experiences for us. And I think there’s something about differently, even then, some of the achievement gap data when students are saying, “This is not a place where I feel like I belong. I don’t feel like I have people I can turn to when I’m feeling vulnerable or unsafe.”

I think that cuts very differently because so many educators enter with this sense of supporting students, of developing those nurturing relationships, of creating that sense of safety and resilience and just worth. And so, I think those data can be extremely helpful in getting these conversations because we know, even from the core districts in California, that across the different groups, students have very different experiences, even in the same school, even in the same classroom. So how do we open up some of these conversations with that data as well?



TRANSCRIPT

Seizing the Moment: Race Equity Mindsets, Social and Emotional Well-Being, and Outcomes for Students

NATALIE WALROND

Hello, everyone. Welcome. Welcome. We are so delighted to be in community with you all today. As Laura mentioned, my name is Natalie Walrond and I direct the National Center to Improve Social and Emotional Learning and School Safety at WestEd.

So, we are at this pivotal moment in time in which our nation is confronted with vivid reminders of the ways in which race and caste are major predictors of outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities. And as educators, regardless of our own backgrounds or our roles in schools and school systems, we all play a role in creating equitable conditions in which every single student can thrive.

So on the next slide, you can see that we have two goals for our hour and a half together. So first, Elisha is going to share some insights with you about new research from the Education Trust on the interrelationships and connections among race equity mindsets, social and emotional well-being and outcomes for students.

And then Hugh and Gia will have a conversation in which they share practical examples from their own experiences and expertise about the how of the work. So, in particular, we'll talk about shifting mindsets as well as systems and processes to advance equitable learning environments, to promote positive and responsive relationships among each person in the school community, and to promote specific SEL competencies, such as agency and belonging for all students, but especially black, Latino, and other students of color.

Finally, we're going to make time to hear from all of you so that you can ask questions of the panelists and engage in some conversation. Ross and I are going to co-moderate today, so we'll kick us off. And on the next slide, I just wanted to talk a little bit about the conversation that we've been having at the center about the connection between equity and SEL. It has really gotten clearer and deeper in this context.

We know that there are many different, excellent definitions in the field for equity. And so, I just want to begin by sharing how we use this term at the center. And I always like to quote a brilliant friend and colleague, Erin Trent Johnson. And she simply says, "In order to operationalize and achieve equity, social outcomes must no longer be predicted by race, class, and gender. To do this, we must acknowledge and examine power structures, including systemic advantage and disadvantage that hold inequities in place."

So, we say at the center, inequitable experiences are connected to inequitable outcomes. So, we try to center equity in the technical assistance that we provide by following seven principles. And I'll run through them very quickly. We say that equity and SEL listens first and

GIA TRUONG

Yeah. And I would add, what Elisha was saying in terms of, we often separate social-emotional learning from academics. And it almost is like we're competing with time and priority when we talk about the two. And really looking at our social-emotional data; we have a sense of belonging, student-teacher relationships, safety data, and then our academic data. And look at the correlation between those two sets and you can see huge correlation.

Students that don't feel like they belong or have strong relationships are not doing well academically. So really understanding the importance of both and how to incorporate both in our redesign.

NATALIE WALROND

That's awesome. Thank you, guys. Okay. So, I'm going to completely switch gears here. So, there have been a number of questions and comments in the chat about the importance and role of teacher prep programs. So, what is your vision? What would you like to see teacher prep programs offer that would help move the equity and race equity mindsets forward in our educators?

GIA TRUONG

I really love local teacher ed programs, where teachers are being trained locally to work with the district or the network that they're in, and would love to encourage programs to encourage asset mapping of the community and really understanding the community in which they are there to serve and understanding the assets of the community so they're not going in with some of the deficit mindset that we know exists, not just in teachers but in all of us in our society.

And then really engaging them with tools to partner with families in a very, very different way. And shining spotlights on networks and schools that are doing it so that we can have models for our up and rising teachers. At Envision, we have a teacher residency program that we just developed as our second year launching, where almost all of our residents are from the community. And I think that is something that needs to be developed more and more across our country.

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

I'll just add that we actually have a resource coming out in a couple of weeks where we looked at the data of the teacher prep programs in California that were doing the best job preparing candidates of color, especially in the STEM fields since that's where we tend to struggle most. And then we've noted what some of those programs had in common in terms of being able to produce candidates of color.

And to Gia's point, many of them did work with local residency programs. And then there was also an attention in some of those programs to cultural competency. And to the point that Hugh made earlier around centering the student experience versus the adult experience. And so, I'd be happy to share that resource as well. Because a lot of times, some of these questions, we know that we can look at the data and then see what the practices are, but then there are the choices that systems make about how consistently then do we choose to do those things across programs? We could do a lot better job of that.

HUGH VASQUEZ

I would add, if I could wave a magic wand and make it happen in teacher prep programs, there would be a part of it that would be about something that we do at National Equity Project called Liberatory Design Work, right? What does that mean? That means that a teacher would be prepared to see the system that they're walking into for one, right? And that's a system of white supremacy and it's a system that was built for some to make it and some not to make it based on a lot of factors, but race being one of them.

But they'd be able to see that. And then they'd be able to design something that actually counters that old way of doing things, the current way of doing things, but they'd be able to be designers of their classroom, designers of the educational experience versus having to plug and play something or other, right?

They'd be able to design it. But first they have to see it. So, in their prep program, they have to be given opportunities to see the system that they're teaching in and sitting in and walking into and then become knowledgeable about how do you redesign a system that has got power behind it and meant to stay in that way.

One other quick thing. Well, there would be some additional readings and some of what Elisha, some of what you're saying would be required readings, right? Additional readings and teacher prep programs, but one of them would be Bettina Love's book on abolitionist teaching, right? Because it's really a core piece of teaching that our teachers are not prepared to do. So, it really does call out, there's another way to teach.

And if you bring in designing for liberation and you bring in things like abolitionist teaching, then you bring in a teacher who is going to design the experience differently than what they're taught to do now.

ROSS WIENER

So, in some ways it's... Oh, Gia, did you want to add to that?

GIA TRUONG

Yeah, just adding really quickly. I absolutely believe in shared reading, but this is a time in our country where I'm seeing a lot of use of equity-centric language and concepts like white supremacy and others inappropriately or just not comprehensively. So, I also want to say that really to be aware of intellectualizing those concepts and applying them without lived experiences.

I've definitely seen privileged white educators using equity-centric language, and I think inappropriately. So, I would also encourage folks to continue to learn, but not over-intellectualize and being careful about the usage of all those things. And the real work is looking at ourselves and how we're doing it before pointing fingers and blaming how other people are racists or other people are white supremacists. So I just want to encourage that.

ROSS WIENER

Thanks, Gia. And so, again, I'm going to ask a question that in some ways is trying to capture a theme that's come up in a number of questions and it's around, how do we take a systems approach to this? And one of the things that I'm very cognizant of is that we talked about how

much this work needs to be integrated. That it's actually academic and social and emotional development actually all happen at the same time.

And that can start to feel like it's all rolling down to classroom teachers. And what they need to do is just transform their own work, but they do their work within systems and expectations and incentives that either make this work seen and valuable and something that's a shared priority or something that they each need to take on, on their own. So there was also a question about how to bring design thinking into this, how to engage students themselves as co-creators, but I want for each of you or whoever wants to start off to reflect a little bit about what's the system's role in really making this a priority and in making it more of a context where this is the work that's prioritized and invited rather than needing to constantly push against the grain to do this work?

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

Well, one of the things, Ross, that I think is really evident in actually how Gia lays out exactly what Envision does is that, from leadership all the way down, the voices of students and parents were centered from the beginning, right? They weren't running in to give feedback on a plan that somebody else already developed, but the element of co-design is crucial. And there are actually a lot of tools and resources for educators and districts to do that work.

So, for instance, YouthTruth, which is a national nonprofit that specializes in gathering feedback from students, a lot of districts around the country use some of the social-emotional and climate data they gather from YouthTruth along with their academic data, and then at the district level and school level, use that to then start making some of the decisions and bringing parents and educators and students together.

And so, I would just say, it has to start at the leadership level of saying, we're going to unapologetically be about centering students and parents, and then figuring out how their system's in place, not to just provide a checkbox, so somebody's plan has already been designed, but to actually co-design it with them. And that takes time, right? It takes a little bit more resources, but the payoff can have huge rewards.

GIA TRUONG

Yeah, I agree with Elisha. It's like, there's...it's really important to have conversations about race and racism and the impact of it, and that's not sufficient, right? We really need to redesign our system, but those conversations inform mindsets that actually create stronger and more equitable design.

So, I think it goes hand in hand and that it is the leadership's responsibility to really think about redesigning systems. And so, before the pandemic, a system that we really wanted to do, use Liberatory Design to redesign with student discipline. So, just like choosing one piece and really listening to students, especially students that are not successful and what they're experiencing and why. And really redesigning systems so that it actually meets their needs rather than just a system that really perpetuates punishment in a school or prison pipeline.

So, it doesn't have to be a huge system. Just choosing one thing that is not working and trying that out. But it requires a lot of mindset shifts in terms of how we view our students in our communities.

HUGH VASQUEZ

Yeah. And I'll connect to the mindset shift in thinking about one piece of the system, right? There are so many pieces of the system, but I like the idea of taking a piece of the system for redesign. Let's look at how we measure progress as one part of the system, right?

And if we were to measure progress as to, what did our students learn, or how did they develop today, and we measured it today, then we would have a measurement system, an evaluation system that looks at what's happening to our students today, right? Versus something like the standardized test that tell you what happened a few months ago, right? It's not helping you formatively; it's helping you in some other ways, but it's not helping you in that way.

So, there's a way of measuring. I also want to just quickly add that a redesign of the system is a courageous act. It's a very courageous act. So, for example, some of us are really looking at a redesign of the system to eliminate the ACT and the ACT because they are not predictors of success and they actually produce inequality, right, with who gets to go to college and so on.

So, a redesign, if you looked at that as an example, a small part of the system, but it has large influence, how would we go about redesigning what we hold as valuable in terms of measurement, in terms of data, in terms of what predicts success and outcomes?

NATALIE WALROND

So, I just want to congratulate you guys, because that last conversation hit about three different questions that were coming into the chat in terms of systems-level work, in terms of what is the role of a leader, and a school leader in particular, and in terms of equitable assessments and how we think about the role of assessments and equity. So that was very impressive. Thank you, guys.

We've got probably about eight minutes left. So, my guess is that's about one more question before we end. And this is such a great conversation. It's hard for me to just pick one question, so I'm going to toss in two and see if you guys want to combine them or address one, but not the other. So we've, in the category of the challenges of this work and vivid examples of how you manage or navigate those challenges. There have been a few questions that talk about the importance of that inner work that you referenced and of giving educators the space for reflection, but that the systems are not in place to give educators that time and space that they need for that self-exploration.

So, if you have any examples of ways that schools or school systems have created that opportunity and created those incentives, which may be counter to what's happening in the system, that would be helpful. And then maybe final thoughts on what makes you hopeful, right? We spent a lot of times talking about where the challenges are and where the hard conversations are, but what are you seeing that makes you hopeful for the future around race equity, well-being for communities, outcomes for kids?

And, I guess, to give you guys a minute to think, I'll answer the hopeful question, because I was having this conversation with someone previously. What makes me hopeful is that I have seen in this moment, a dramatic shift in the openness and readiness to talk about race and equity. I think, Elisha, you meant, well, I guess we've probably all talked about it. It doesn't always feel comfortable for people. It requires a little bit of courage and it requires some vulnerability. And I have seen a huge difference now versus a year ago or two years ago, the willingness that

people have to say, what is my role and how can I be a part of creating equitable conditions for the students and families that I love?

HUGH VASQUEZ

Well, I'll offer one, and this is in response to the system part where, we all know what is said about the system is designed to produce what it produces as when COVID hit, we had been working with some school systems to really redesign. And what we soon discovered was this—that not only is the system designed to produce what it produces, but the system is designed to not allow you to redesign. It just doesn't give you the time-space, whatever, right, to actually do that.

So, COVID hit and in some of the places where we're working, one in particular, I'll give you an example. And I say talked—we talked the superintendent, the top leaders in the district office, and some of the principals—we talked them into meeting every Friday for a notice and reflect time on what happened this past week when it came to your attempts to bring about equity in education, right?

So that started with an agreement from the superintendent to do two meetings, two Fridays. And I said, "Okay, let's do two Fridays and then tell me if you want to do some more." So we did two Fridays then she said, "Let's keep going." And I said, "How long?" She says, "I'll give you another month."

So we did four more sessions. This was right after COVID hit, right? Long story short, it's been seven months and we haven't missed a Friday, right? Why? Because they decided that what they needed to do was be in the game with each other every Friday to notice and reflect what happened and to readjust what they're looking to do the next week, right?

So, to me, that's both an answer to how you can redesign, do work to redesign for one, but it's also very helpful. It's very helpful to get people together with that level of intensity and intention.

GIA TRUONG

Thank you, Hugh, for that example. I have a similar example with us in terms of the school level is that within, this kind of the machinery has stopped. So how do we redesign our time with teachers, and we are increasing professional development and professional learning community time for our teachers, because we're all learning how to do school differently.

So, we have more synchronous classes Monday through Thursday, and then on Friday, our teachers have a full day of collaboration and planning and they still meet with their advisory so that every single student has a human connection. But I think this is a time to really think about that learning doesn't stop in the teacher prep program, that it continues as we learn from our families and community and as things are evolving and changing all the time.

So, I just really encourage districts and labor unions to work together to think about learning together and having more time to learn and providing quality professional development for all of us, our teachers, our educators, and our leaders.

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

Yeah. And I would say, I mean, I'm an eternal optimist, and I really believe in the words of the late John Lewis, that ordinary people can make extraordinary change. And here in California, we talked a lot on this call about students and parents and leading with students and parents. And everything also that we talked about in terms of integrating social-emotional and academic development takes resources.

And in California, there were students who have been at the front of the line of saying the schools need more resources to do not only this kind of work, but lots of things. And it's because of them that there are two propositions this year on the ballot in California, Prop 15 and Prop 16. And both of those were because students and parents led the charge to get those on there. And they now have the full support of not only the California Teachers Union, but also the school administrators and many others.

And so, I remain hopeful because when we lead with students and parents and families, we can all end up in a place that's better for everyone. And that's a powerful change the students made happen. And so, I remain all forever hopeful that they'll be successful on Tuesday, too.

NATALIE WALROND

Ross, do you want to share any thoughts?

ROSS WIENER

So, love this conversation and just what I'm sitting with is this idea of centering on students and families. I do feel like families, like parents, caregivers have been in a very different position relative to their children's learning experiences over these last seven months. And I think there's just a huge opportunity to now draw on that deep engagement and not as, I think it was Hugh sharing or others in this conversation, not go try to get "back to normal" as quickly as we can, but actually engage them in redesigning the whole learning experience.

And I do, I just am so inspired by young people who are stepping up and seizing their power and recognizing that their voice can really advance positive change. So, I just think that's a really hopeful note on which to close out this conversation.

GIA TRUONG

Yeah. And I would add, what Elisha was saying in terms of, we often separate social-emotional learning from academics. And it almost is like we're competing with time and priority when we talk about the two. And really looking at our social-emotional data; we have a sense of belonging, student-teacher relationships, safety data, and then our academic data. And look at the correlation between those two sets and you can see huge correlation.

Students that don't feel like they belong or have strong relationships are not doing well academically. So really understanding the importance of both and how to incorporate both in our redesign.

NATALIE WALROND

That's awesome. Thank you, guys. Okay. So, I'm going to completely switch gears here. So, there have been a number of questions and comments in the chat about the importance and role of teacher prep programs. So, what is your vision? What would you like to see teacher prep programs offer that would help move the equity and race equity mindsets forward in our educators?

GIA TRUONG

I really love local teacher ed programs, where teachers are being trained locally to work with the district or the network that they're in, and would love to encourage programs to encourage asset mapping of the community and really understanding the community in which they are there to serve and understanding the assets of the community so they're not going in with some of the deficit mindset that we know exists, not just in teachers but in all of us in our society.

And then really engaging them with tools to partner with families in a very, very different way. And shining spotlights on networks and schools that are doing it so that we can have models for our up and rising teachers. At Envision, we have a teacher residency program that we just developed as our second year launching, where almost all of our residents are from the community. And I think that is something that needs to be developed more and more across our country.

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

I'll just add that we actually have a resource coming out in a couple of weeks where we looked at the data of the teacher prep programs in California that were doing the best job preparing candidates of color, especially in the STEM fields since that's where we tend to struggle most. And then we've noted what some of those programs had in common in terms of being able to produce candidates of color.

And to Gia's point, many of them did work with local residency programs. And then there was also an attention in some of those programs to cultural competency. And to the point that Hugh made earlier around centering the student experience versus the adult experience. And so, I'd be happy to share that resource as well. Because a lot of times, some of these questions, we know that we can look at the data and then see what the practices are, but then there are the choices that systems make about how consistently then do we choose to do those things across programs? We could do a lot better job of that.

HUGH VASQUEZ

I would add, if I could wave a magic wand and make it happen in teacher prep programs, there would be a part of it that would be about something that we do at National Equity Project called Liberatory Design Work, right? What does that mean? That means that a teacher would be prepared to see the system that they're walking into for one, right? And that's a system of white supremacy and it's a system that was built for some to make it and some not to make it based on a lot of factors, but race being one of them.

But they'd be able to see that. And then they'd be able to design something that actually counters that old way of doing things, the current way of doing things, but they'd be able to be designers of their classroom, designers of the educational experience versus having to plug and play something or other, right?

They'd be able to design it. But first they have to see it. So, in their prep program, they have to be given opportunities to see the system that they're teaching in and sitting in and walking into and then become knowledgeable about how do you redesign a system that has got power behind it and meant to stay in that way.

One other quick thing. Well, there would be some additional readings and some of what Elisha, some of what you're saying would be required readings, right? Additional readings and teacher prep programs, but one of them would be Bettina Love's book on abolitionist teaching, right? Because it's really a core piece of teaching that our teachers are not prepared to do. So, it really does call out, there's another way to teach.

And if you bring in designing for liberation and you bring in things like abolitionist teaching, then you bring in a teacher who is going to design the experience differently than what they're taught to do now.

ROSS WIENER

So, in some ways it's... Oh, Gia, did you want to add to that?

GIA TRUONG

Yeah, just adding really quickly. I absolutely believe in shared reading, but this is a time in our country where I'm seeing a lot of use of equity-centric language and concepts like white supremacy and others inappropriately or just not comprehensively. So, I also want to say that really to be aware of intellectualizing those concepts and applying them without lived experiences.

I've definitely seen privileged white educators using equity-centric language, and I think inappropriately. So, I would also encourage folks to continue to learn, but not over-intellectualize and being careful about the usage of all those things. And the real work is looking at ourselves and how we're doing it before pointing fingers and blaming how other people are racists or other people are white supremacists. So I just want to encourage that.

ROSS WIENER

Thanks, Gia. And so, again, I'm going to ask a question that in some ways is trying to capture a theme that's come up in a number of questions and it's around, how do we take a systems approach to this? And one of the things that I'm very cognizant of is that we talked about how

much this work needs to be integrated. That it's actually academic and social and emotional development actually all happen at the same time.

And that can start to feel like it's all rolling down to classroom teachers. And what they need to do is just transform their own work, but they do their work within systems and expectations and incentives that either make this work seen and valuable and something that's a shared priority or something that they each need to take on, on their own. So there was also a question about how to bring design thinking into this, how to engage students themselves as co-creators, but I want for each of you or whoever wants to start off to reflect a little bit about what's the system's role in really making this a priority and in making it more of a context where this is the work that's prioritized and invited rather than needing to constantly push against the grain to do this work?

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

Well, one of the things, Ross, that I think is really evident in actually how Gia lays out exactly what Envision does is that, from leadership all the way down, the voices of students and parents were centered from the beginning, right? They weren't running in to give feedback on a plan that somebody else already developed, but the element of co-design is crucial. And there are actually a lot of tools and resources for educators and districts to do that work.

So, for instance, YouthTruth, which is a national nonprofit that specializes in gathering feedback from students, a lot of districts around the country use some of the social-emotional and climate data they gather from YouthTruth along with their academic data, and then at the district level and school level, use that to then start making some of the decisions and bringing parents and educators and students together.

And so, I would just say, it has to start at the leadership level of saying, we're going to unapologetically be about centering students and parents, and then figuring out how their system's in place, not to just provide a checkbox, so somebody's plan has already been designed, but to actually co-design it with them. And that takes time, right? It takes a little bit more resources, but the payoff can have huge rewards.

GIA TRUONG

Yeah, I agree with Elisha. It's like, there's...it's really important to have conversations about race and racism and the impact of it, and that's not sufficient, right? We really need to redesign our system, but those conversations inform mindsets that actually create stronger and more equitable design.

So, I think it goes hand in hand and that it is the leadership's responsibility to really think about redesigning systems. And so, before the pandemic, a system that we really wanted to do, use Liberatory Design to redesign with student discipline. So, just like choosing one piece and really listening to students, especially students that are not successful and what they're experiencing and why. And really redesigning systems so that it actually meets their needs rather than just a system that really perpetuates punishment in a school or prison pipeline.

So, it doesn't have to be a huge system. Just choosing one thing that is not working and trying that out. But it requires a lot of mindset shifts in terms of how we view our students in our communities.

HUGH VASQUEZ

Yeah. And I'll connect to the mindset shift in thinking about one piece of the system, right? There are so many pieces of the system, but I like the idea of taking a piece of the system for redesign. Let's look at how we measure progress as one part of the system, right?

And if we were to measure progress as to, what did our students learn, or how did they develop today, and we measured it today, then we would have a measurement system, an evaluation system that looks at what's happening to our students today, right? Versus something like the standardized test that tell you what happened a few months ago, right? It's not helping you formatively; it's helping you in some other ways, but it's not helping you in that way.

So, there's a way of measuring. I also want to just quickly add that a redesign of the system is a courageous act. It's a very courageous act. So, for example, some of us are really looking at a redesign of the system to eliminate the ACT and the ACT because they are not predictors of success and they actually produce inequality, right, with who gets to go to college and so on.

So, a redesign, if you looked at that as an example, a small part of the system, but it has large influence, how would we go about redesigning what we hold as valuable in terms of measurement, in terms of data, in terms of what predicts success and outcomes?

NATALIE WALROND

So, I just want to congratulate you guys, because that last conversation hit about three different questions that were coming into the chat in terms of systems-level work, in terms of what is the role of a leader, and a school leader in particular, and in terms of equitable assessments and how we think about the role of assessments and equity. So that was very impressive. Thank you, guys.

We've got probably about eight minutes left. So, my guess is that's about one more question before we end. And this is such a great conversation. It's hard for me to just pick one question, so I'm going to toss in two and see if you guys want to combine them or address one, but not the other. So we've, in the category of the challenges of this work and vivid examples of how you manage or navigate those challenges. There have been a few questions that talk about the importance of that inner work that you referenced and of giving educators the space for reflection, but that the systems are not in place to give educators that time and space that they need for that self-exploration.

So, if you have any examples of ways that schools or school systems have created that opportunity and created those incentives, which may be counter to what's happening in the system, that would be helpful. And then maybe final thoughts on what makes you hopeful, right? We spent a lot of times talking about where the challenges are and where the hard conversations are, but what are you seeing that makes you hopeful for the future around race equity, well-being for communities, outcomes for kids?

And, I guess, to give you guys a minute to think, I'll answer the hopeful question, because I was having this conversation with someone previously. What makes me hopeful is that I have seen in this moment, a dramatic shift in the openness and readiness to talk about race and equity. I think, Elisha, you meant, well, I guess we've probably all talked about it. It doesn't always feel comfortable for people. It requires a little bit of courage and it requires some vulnerability. And I have seen a huge difference now versus a year ago or two years ago, the willingness that

people have to say, what is my role and how can I be a part of creating equitable conditions for the students and families that I love?

HUGH VASQUEZ

Well, I'll offer one, and this is in response to the system part where, we all know what is said about the system is designed to produce what it produces as when COVID hit, we had been working with some school systems to really redesign. And what we soon discovered was this—that not only is the system designed to produce what it produces, but the system is designed to not allow you to redesign. It just doesn't give you the time-space, whatever, right, to actually do that.

So, COVID hit and in some of the places where we're working, one in particular, I'll give you an example. And I say talked—we talked the superintendent, the top leaders in the district office, and some of the principals—we talked them into meeting every Friday for a notice and reflect time on what happened this past week when it came to your attempts to bring about equity in education, right?

So that started with an agreement from the superintendent to do two meetings, two Fridays. And I said, "Okay, let's do two Fridays and then tell me if you want to do some more." So we did two Fridays then she said, "Let's keep going." And I said, "How long?" She says, "I'll give you another month."

So we did four more sessions. This was right after COVID hit, right? Long story short, it's been seven months and we haven't missed a Friday, right? Why? Because they decided that what they needed to do was be in the game with each other every Friday to notice and reflect what happened and to readjust what they're looking to do the next week, right?

So, to me, that's both an answer to how you can redesign, do work to redesign for one, but it's also very helpful. It's very helpful to get people together with that level of intensity and intention.

GIA TRUONG

Thank you, Hugh, for that example. I have a similar example with us in terms of the school level is that within, this kind of the machinery has stopped. So how do we redesign our time with teachers, and we are increasing professional development and professional learning community time for our teachers, because we're all learning how to do school differently.

So, we have more synchronous classes Monday through Thursday, and then on Friday, our teachers have a full day of collaboration and planning and they still meet with their advisory so that every single student has a human connection. But I think this is a time to really think about that learning doesn't stop in the teacher prep program, that it continues as we learn from our families and community and as things are evolving and changing all the time.

So, I just really encourage districts and labor unions to work together to think about learning together and having more time to learn and providing quality professional development for all of us, our teachers, our educators, and our leaders.

ELISHA SMITH-ARRILLAGA

Yeah. And I would say, I mean, I'm an eternal optimist, and I really believe in the words of the late John Lewis, that ordinary people can make extraordinary change. And here in California, we talked a lot on this call about students and parents and leading with students and parents. And everything also that we talked about in terms of integrating social-emotional and academic development takes resources.

And in California, there were students who have been at the front of the line of saying the schools need more resources to do not only this kind of work, but lots of things. And it's because of them that there are two propositions this year on the ballot in California, Prop 15 and Prop 16. And both of those were because students and parents led the charge to get those on there. And they now have the full support of not only the California Teachers Union, but also the school administrators and many others.

And so, I remain hopeful because when we lead with students and parents and families, we can all end up in a place that's better for everyone. And that's a powerful change the students made happen. And so, I remain all forever hopeful that they'll be successful on Tuesday, too.

NATALIE WALROND

Ross, do you want to share any thoughts?

ROSS WIENER

So, love this conversation and just what I'm sitting with is this idea of centering on students and families. I do feel like families, like parents, caregivers have been in a very different position relative to their children's learning experiences over these last seven months. And I think there's just a huge opportunity to now draw on that deep engagement and not as, I think it was Hugh sharing or others in this conversation, not go try to get "back to normal" as quickly as we can, but actually engage them in redesigning the whole learning experience.

And I do, I just am so inspired by young people who are stepping up and seizing their power and recognizing that their voice can really advance positive change. So, I just think that's a really hopeful note on which to close out this conversation.