

Lessons from the Field: Family & Community Engagement and Returning to In-Person Instruction

April 28, 2021

Tim Duffy: Welcome to today's webinar, "Lessons from the Field: Family, and Community Engagement and Returning to In-Person Instruction." Good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining today's webinar. On behalf of the US Department of Education, I'd like to welcome you to today's event. Over 1,800 people have registered for today's webinar, so additional folks are likely to be joining us here as we kick off today. Thanks to all of you who have already logged in and now with us.

My name is Tim Duffy, training specialist for the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments or NCSSE, and I'll be moderating today's webinar. NCSSE is funded by the Office of Safe and Supportive Schools within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. On this slide, you'll see an image of our center's website's homepage on the left, along with some of our key products noted on the right. We invite you to visit this site after today's session. All materials that you'll see in today will be archived on the site as well as the recording of today's webinar. The address is also pasted in the chat box for your convenience.

Before we introduce today's first speaker, we'd like to use two polling questions here to get a better sense of who's joined us today and what form of instruction you're seeing used in the schools in your community. There are two polls that are included. You'll see them on your screen now. I invite you to use the radio button. First of all, and the first question, to indicate the role that most appropriately reflects your role and for anyone who's joining us only by audio today, the options are teacher, school staff, school administrator, education agency staff, family or community engagement staff, or other. If you select the other, please do let us know about that role in the chat, which I see people are doing. Great. The second question asks again about in your community, is instruction and support being delivered in-person, in a hybrid form, or virtually? If you're unclear or uncertain about that, you can take the last option, not applicable, and then hit submit. Once you've checked in on both questions, submit will give us your answers. Thank you for taking the time to respond to these. I'll give you just a little bit of time yet to finish responding. I see there's a number of different roles that are being posted in the chat so I know folks are still working at this.

Claire, we will close that poll now. Let's see what the results look like responding. Thank you. So, with that much time to respond, the lead as far as role, education agency staff came in at 30% of you. We're recording that. Followed by other, and that's why the chat box has been so busy, and then family and community engagement staff, next. Excellent, good. This information is really helpful to our presenters to know who's joined us today. Then, in terms of forms of instruction being used in your community schools, we see the hybrid model leading the way with 54% of you and followed by in-person, then virtual, and only 8% not applicable so, excellent, great. Thank you for taking the time to respond to those questions for us. We'll have one poll of time allowance for us at the very end of today's session.

With that, I would like to introduce you to our first speaker today, Levi Bohanan. Levi is a special assistant in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the US Department of Education. As Levi prepares to introduce our other speakers, please note that all bios for our speakers are archived again on that event webpage. It's listed on this slide, but also will be periodically entered into the chat box for you. With that, I turn things over to Levi.

Levi Bohanan: Hi there. Thank you, Tim and thank you, Shoshana, for getting us kicked off today. My name is Levi Bohanan and as Tim said, I'm a special assistant here at the US Department of Education in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and thank you for folks in the audience for joining us today.

We're very excited to welcome you to the webinar. I think we're going to have a very rich conversation around family and community engagement and in-person instruction. Effective and successful family and community engagement practices can be difficult to achieve and relationships that are grounded in genuine and authentic trust certainly don't develop overnight. Effective partnership between schools, families, and communities improved outcomes, and create more cohesive environment in which children can learn. Our hope is that today, following this dialog, audience members will feel better prepared to foster those genuine connections in their own school and communities. We'll first hear from my colleague, Jessica Cardichon. She is the secretary here at Ed, who's going to share about some guidance and strategies on engagement. Then we're going to be joined by some great folks at Baltimore City Public Schools who have been doing this work in community and family engagement very well for a panel discussion and best practices, but before that panel, I'd like to invite Jessica, who will share some strategies on

engaging families and communities to join us. Jessica is Deputy Assistant Secretary for K-12, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development here at the US Department of Education. So, Jessica, I will turn it over to you.

Jessica Cardichon: Right. Thank you, Levi. I want to share just a few ways we have been working to elevate the critical role of family and community engagement in our work in response to an Executive Order by the president. The department released its COVID-19 Handbook. To date, two volumes had been released. The process for developing these volumes included extensive engagements. We received recommendations from close to 70 organizations from across the nation and meet with more than 30 of those organizations and listening sessions to ensure that the information included in the handbook reflected the issues up for what's happening at the state and local level.

Volume 1 of the handbook is a companion to CDC Prevention Strategies and focuses on the safe reopening of schools including ways to implement physical distancing and masking, for example. Volume 1 includes recommendations for engaging with families and community members throughout this reopening process. Both volumes recognize the disproportion of impact of COVID on communities of color and underserved students. As schools reopen, it is critically important that they communicate with parents, students, educators, and community members about the specific safety measures and prevention strategies they are using to reopen schools. We recommend that districts and schools actively and continuously engage parents in this process and create on-going opportunities for parents and caregivers to ask and have their questions answered. We include a number of strategies in Volume 1 of the handbook from surveys to virtual town halls, also partnering with trusted community-based organizations to share information and also making sure that any information that is provided to parents supports English learners and students and adults with disabilities and ensuring their access in any of those materials. Finally, we think that it's important to build trust to communicate data around which students are returning to schools and other data relevant to the safe reopening of schools as well as existing civil rights and related requirements to parents. This includes making data publicly available and easy to access and we know that again, this transparency can help build trust, for example, on who is returning to school.

Next slide please. Right. As in Volume 1, the department recommends in Volume 2 that schools and districts conduct active and specific engagement with underserved students and their families including parents of students of color, English learners,

students with disabilities, American-Indian, Alaska native and native Hawaiian students, students in foster care, students in correctional facilities, and students experiencing homelessness as well as our LGBTQ+ students. Volume 2 provides strategies and examples in this kind of outreach including recognizing the different concerns that some African-Americans and Asian-American students and other students and families may have in returning to school and the importance of creating opportunities, again in an on-going way to hear those concerns and work to be responsive. We know that some of the hesitations and concerns maybe due to the trauma of racial injustice particularly over the last year. The increase we're seeing in harassment and hate crimes against our Asian-American students. We know that schools need to hear from family and community members about what their reservations might be about returning to school and be responsive to those concerns. Another thing is to be aware that the importance of building trust in the implementation a federal program just thinking about family members who may not have documentation. We've seen a number of districts across the country as they're implementing for example their federal meal programs, taking into consideration the paperwork that they do or do not require and again, partnering with trusted community-based organizations to make sure that all families have access to the services that are provided through the school system. We also know that engaging with parents is critical for adjusting mental health.

The discussion in Volume 2 of the handbook on meeting student's mental health means it recognizes the mental health needs of students of color, have historically and often been responded to with discipline rather than treatment and provide strategies for addressing barriers to accessing those services even once they are provided including removing the stigma of mental health and building trust between students, families, and service providers and for example, supporting the native American students with culturally confident responses. We also encourage districts to rethink or revisit their discipline policies. We know that prior to the pandemic, schools may not have been safe places for many students, and we can see this to the disparity and the civil rights data collection in terms of which students are suspended more harshly than others. This is an opportunity to really revisit school policies and how they are experienced by students and families and thinking about how you can create more safe and inclusive spaces.

There's been a lot of attention on the digital divide and even as schools reopen, we think it is really important to think about the role of technology for communicating

with parents and providing information to parents as they work to support their students in home. Again, transparency can build trust and so we encourage as this is required under the ARP, the American Rescue Plans, state and local plans, to work actively with parents and community members around the development of those plans and how the significant federal resources that are being provided are used. Again, the practices that we have highlighted in Volume 1 and 2 of the handbook are happening across many districts across the country. We encourage you to continue with those practices and really see ways that you can amplify the work that you are already doing and with that, I will pass it back to Levi.

Levi Bohanan: Thank you so much, Jessica, for tugging us through some of the great work that we have uplifted. Now, I want to take some time to welcome two of our panelists for today's discussion. Tina Hike-Hubbard is the Chief of Communications, Engagement and Enrollment for Baltimore City Public Schools. Miss Hike-Hubbard began her education career at West Baltimore Middle School, and 2015 and 2017, Miss Hike-Hubbard was named one of Maryland's Top 100 Women by the Daily Record. I'd also like to invite Brandon Pinkney who is the principal with the Baltimore City Public School System currently at Walter P. Carter Elementary and Middle School. Brandon specializes in transformational leadership and is responsible for leading schools in urban district. Thank you so much for joining us. At this point, I would like to turn it over to Tina to tell us a little bit about the district and then we'll jump in with some discussion questions.

Tina Hike-Hubbard: Thank you, Levi, and good afternoon everybody. I'd like to start out by saying I am the Chief of Communications, Engagement, and Enrollment, but I'm also a mom first. I am at home when an asynchronous Wednesday for our district. My kids go to City Schools and so you may hear a little noise in the background. I just want to make sure folks are aware that I have to be a mom and work at the same time as I'm sure many of you in the audience are doing as well. So, we'll go on with the presentation. I'll just leave you a quick snapshot of City Schools, Baltimore City Schools, as we call it City Schools. You'll know who we are, demographics, enrollment, that kind of thing so you'll understand the context for our district. We have an enrollment of about 77,000 students. We can see the great bands divided there between pre-K through 12. We have a very robust pre-K program that is funded by our state to make sure that our kids have a great start to their education. We have a demographic of our students of predominantly African-American, but a significantly rising population of Latinx students as well as others. We have about 9.6% of our students are English

language learners and we have roughly about 10,000 household where Spanish is a primary language for our families. That is new to Baltimore. Now other cities have had a growing population of Spanish-speaking students and ours is very new. So, we're having to grow at the same time, we're going to talk about momentarily. Our budget is around \$1.3 billion. We have approximately 165 schools and programs in the traditional schools. We also have charter schools that are part of our network so they are not separate. They are authorized by our school board. That number is a little bit higher but our charter schools are also there. We have about one to 16 teacher-student ratio. I want to make sure one note, we are a district that is a community eligible probation district. That means that all of our students are provided access to free and reduced-price meals. Our low-income status students are underreported at 58% because frankly, we have an undercounting of some of our students who are not eligible because they are technically undocumented citizens and then we have about 14.6% of student disabilities in our district.

I came to the district as a past school board member at the district and then I was asked to come back after I ended my school work tenure to really think about the community and family engagement work at our district. We have three offices that I managed that were separated at one time and are now under one roof as the public-facing offices of our district office and that is our enrollment office, our family and community engagement office, and our communications office. Understanding that they are the three most public-facing entities that actually work with our families and communities and need to have a common understanding and common message and a call to action about how we do our work. When I first started at the district two years ago, the call to action was to help our parents and families become stronger partners in the academe at the assessment of their children. That is the primary goal of all three departments so all of our communications are designed to make sure that it's family-friendly and focused. Obviously, our family if we think Asian efforts are the same and frankly, our enrollment offices, the one space our district office or families actually frequent every day in-person and so improving that family experience really matters. In addition to that, we need to believe and care about our families. While I think a lot of folks say that, the demonstration about in creating trust is much different than when you put it into action. Then, we want to make sure we create access points of information for all of our families across all of our communities. Our mission and theory of action is basically - I don't like to read slides, I so think it's important to say our mission is to develop and cultivate effective school and family community relationships and leverage those relationships as key

resources that assess the students at schools. We believe that through strategic collaboration with families and partners aligned to our blueprint for success which is our outline for our district's strategic plan. We will have engagement link to student success.

Our family and communication office structures, we have for the core areas of focus here are dual capacity frame. We'll talk about just a moment. Our multilingual family engagement which is a new beefed-up part of our office that we have added. Our Title I parent, family, community engagement with our safe work and our CSI work, Possip implementation and strategy that we'll talk about in a moment as well and then our high school and non-Title I engagement. We think that our work also has to be linked to learning, creating two-way communication between families, schools, community partners, et cetera. Making sure we're really thoughtful about language access and making sure that the same day we put things out in English, we're putting things out in other languages so our families can fully participate in the decision-making and advocacy work at our schools and that families understand their rights and responsibilities as it relates to the district, how they can be engaged and then to make sure we're evaluating and assessing the work that we're doing moving forward. So, quickly here. Some of you may be familiar with this. Our whole team went to Harvard to be trained by Dr. Karen Mapp. We'd actually adopted the dual capacity framework as the way in which we are doing our family and community engagement work as a district. I think it's important to note that historically, while our folks had created tensions about family engagement, it was all focused on how we train families to better come to us not honoring the role that families already play in the education of their children and making sure that we are reaching them where they are instead of feeling like we need to change them to engage with us better. We speak a lot of education lingo, right? We need to make sure families understand that and understand how they could engage at the school level both on decision-making and in supporting their children's education, but then we also need to train our staff and make sure that they have the ability to effectively engage and understand what real authentic engagement looks like. We've actually had Dr. Mapp come directly to our district to do training with our staff. We go to these different areas, understanding the challenge, the essential provisions you have to create, effectively creating policy and program goals in order to do this, and then to really have the building capacity outcomes because we know there are families trust their schools way more than they trust our central office. They have the relationship on the ground with their teachers and their principals, their school community and so,

building the capacity of our school communities to really authentically engage with families and honor that as part of the everyday work at the schools is really a key portion of our build capacity framework activities.

Just quickly, this is a slide that shows it's a matrix of all of our family community engagement work and I won't go through every one of these. As you can see, it's a complex outline of how we understand the work that family communication has to play within our district. The principals and school leaders, teachers and staff, making sure we create parent leaders and connections, organize parent groups like our school family councils, those kinds of activities, PTOs and whatnot. If we're using data to inform our family engagement, where we know families are connected or aren't connecting and what they actually need. Our parents and families when they're creating a two-way communication I mentioned earlier and then having our school-based family community engagement liaisons. For every Title I school, our office actually stipends a family community engagement liaison at that school, whose job it is to help bring back these effective practices and also monitor the family engagement communication work at the school. We believe that all this framework together really helps us create a cloud of relationship between our families and our partners in the education of their children. [Pause] Here are just a couple of highlights of the things we've been doing this year for our family engagement. Having parent cafe is having regular conversations with families based on interests that they actually outlined for us when we have this parent cafes that are regularly hosted. So, parents come and learn more and ask questions and have more of a dialog rather than coming and sitting as we do. We host larger town halls for the entire district, but rather than doing just those larger town halls, it's more small conversations where families can engage intimately and directly.

We've partnered with Panorama to revise our family survey and this school year, we actually launched three surveys. We're actually in the third phase right now. Beginning of the year, middle of the year, and end of the year because of the different phases of our reopening. We had a family university that we stood up. Our family university is an online program that is designed to have live and recorded workshops and engagements for families where they have questions, concerns, and want to know more about our work. They flag something for us. We find the right department and put up a workshop that families actually understand what that is all about from our college for readiness work to our literacy work where our family university has been a great tool to get communication outreach to our families and

then we have learning kits that we're actually sending out to support families that are engaging in learning with their children. As we know in this virtual time and the pandemic, families have been viewing into school way more than they ever have been before. We've created family resource kits so that families can support their children's learning at home. Obviously, the joint decision-making and advocacy with our Baltimore Teachers Union, our PTA, and our PCAB, Parent Community Advisory Board, we meet with regularly to talk through how we support families, how we're honoring policy, and make sure that we're supporting them in the engaging of families. We also have our school family councils that every single one of our schools that are actually active in the decision-making at the local school level.

Our community engagement work, just quickly, we were doing neighborhood outreach. We have a community school strategy. We have a robust offering of 128 of our schools that have community school coordinators that have been paramount in the response to COVID of providing resources to our families at the community level anywhere from food to devices to doing wellness checks on our families. We are so fortunate that we lifted that program up a year and a half ago. During the pandemic, we really rely on those coordinators to do the outreach to families that we are having a hard time connecting with. We also have a robust partnership or volunteer strategy and we are working right now to really elevate our youth engagement strategies as well, creating a youth ambassador program to elevate the voice of young people as they also talk about what they want to have as part of their educational experience. [Pause] Now, I'll close there. Thank you.

Levi Bohanan: Thank you so much, Tina. There's always a struggle to find all the right buttons to come back off mute. Thank you so much for sharing, Tina. At this point, I'd like to introduce my boss, Christian Rhodes, who is the Chief of Staff here in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. He can be moderating the conversation. So, Christian, over to you.

Christian Rhodes: Okay. Thank you, Levi. I just want to thank everybody for their participation. Thank you, Jessica. Yes, my colleague here at the department and thank you, Tina, for that outstanding presentation. I'm interested in learning a little bit more about the work that you're doing. I do have to know that. I apologize for being slightly late. I was called into a meeting with the secretary and when he asked you, you show up. We have some exciting work that we are going to be announcing in a couple of days and I'm looking forward to it, but what I do know from the presentation at some of our

earlier conversations is that, Baltimore City Public Schools had an infrastructure around family and community engagement that was set prior to the pandemic. The pandemic may have allowed you all to demonstrate, add to your repertoire. You had some things already in place, but I do think it's important that we talk a little bit about the work that has related as a result of COVID. I love to hear from you, Tina, and from the panel itself, the work itself is rooted in a robust family engagement strategy, but what are some of those things that have evolved because of COVID-19?

Tina Hike-Hubbard: Thank you for that, Christian. The work has been really so hard. Well, to say that, we had a good rounding in our family community engagement policy and in fact, during COVID, revised our policy to reflect the innovations we've been doing during the pandemic. It was a 10-year-old policy. While I thought it was pretty innovative, it was time to sort of be more robust thinking about how we better engage our families, but I think there some things that surfaced for us that we needed to take care of immediately as a short-term response and then long-term strategy development. I would also offer as I'm engaging this for Principal Pinkney, who's with me today, one of our principals at our outstanding schools to join the conversation as well. One of the immediate things we had to do was get devices and technology into the hands of our families, right? So, knowing that we are never a one-to-one district, we weren't even a four-to-one district. We did not provide devices to our kids in that pre-pandemic. We had to purchase over 55,000 computers to make sure that every single student had a computer. We didn't provide one-to-one, but any student who signal that they needed one, got one. We also had to create internet access for about 30,000 students to make sure that they had access to virtual learning. In figuring that out and quickly in the pandemic and being distributed having that robust offering were just the basic way to be able to connect. Then, as we sort of innovated and moved forward, we had to think about doing online enrollment. We had to do paper enrollments. Our families were not tech savvy when they use phones and that kind of thing. Having families move to an online enrollment system and building that during the pandemic and then offering - we have our choice process that goes over here for middle school and high school students. In that offering, we had to create a virtual choice fair because families couldn't visit schools. They had no idea what they were choosing from so we literally created a space for every school that had choice options to come create a video at our office and then to put that video out in the virtual choice whereas families could come and see the options and then engage with choice liaisons directly to sort of support them in that choice offerings. I will just quickly offer a couple of other ways. We've done

things like we've created our family university that I also mentioned. We also offer town halls that we've never done before in other languages and really beefing up - there was a big hole in our district. It was not having the right transmission/interpretation services for our families and so there were sessions where I was the only person speaking English and everything was translated into Arabic, French, or Spanish to make sure we could really honor family voice. So, they could hear directly what we were doing, but also give us feedback directly what they wanted to see, change, or needed to be able to engage in learning.

I will also offer that we went from - our student learning centers were set up in the fall for our essential workers and our families that had to go to work that had no place for their students to be. We had virtual learning opportunities for those students at those learning centers as well as a gradual increase to now starting in April, we are fully open. That does not mean that every student has to have to come back, but we have created space where every student who wants to be back in person can be, and then we have about 33% of our students that are back in person. We also have virtual learning happening at the same time, but making that condition possible for families. We heard them loud and clear that some of them really needed to have - their students were not being successful in virtual learning. Listening towards, we've done Possip surveys. We do text surveys regularly knowing that families don't regularly engage through surveys robustly. So, we've created our Possip surveys with our partners at Possip. We've got 20,000 responses on our first survey. It was remarkable to see the change on how we reached out, changed the ways families were able to lift up their voice and participate in our decision-making and our planning. Just our end of the year, beginning of the year, many of the surveys were also amazing. Now, Brandon, you want to add to that, but...

Christian Rhodes: Yes, Brandon. I was going to ask you just as a principal, tell us how did you see the work evolved and what are some of the things that you know you just can't go back on it now?

Brandon Pinkney: Good afternoon, again. Yes, absolutely. Tina Hike-Hubbard actually said it all. One thing that I want to actually put out there as well with the Panorama surveys as well as the Possip survey platform, we're allowed to as individual school to take that same platform and do individualized school surveys. Although we're doing, BOY, MOY, EOY, I could say I want to do a survey just to see how my parents are experiencing the virtual learning space from a lens of a middle school work and then

I could take those results and then take it back to my staff and enhance the learning problems of the school students. Although we have the universal tool for the entire district, we can also take those same platforms and make them school specific which was really great and helpful. One other thing that I'd like to add is because of this framework and because of this focus on family community engagement, it really caused me as the school to think about what does this look like from a school if this is the chart from my district, what does it look like on a school level? So, one thing I had to bring back to the team, as Tina Hike-Hubbard say it again, this work was happening before the pandemic and so three years ago when I arrived at Walter P. Carter, I had to look at the mission statement and I had to say this is the blueprint. The blueprint causes for family community engagement. Our current mission statement does not include that. How do we create a mission statement that includes family community engagement? Because then it becomes the focus of the work that we do, and because of that, now we have a global focus even at my school alone on family community engagement. So, because of the platforms that were forwarded to us from the district, we were able to then take them and make them school specific in order to keep the work moving for our family community engagement.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you very much. Jessica, I'm going to move to the second question because I think this is important to kind of frame, but it's really talking a little bit about like how can districts prioritize equity in its community and family engagement strategy? I know a lot of the work in the volumes have looked at that, but I'd love to get your perspective. Then, Tina and Brandon, I'm interested at your level as well, thinking about how the district cannot prioritize equity.

Jessica Cardichon: I was going to say to you a lot of the same things that Tina and Brandon are doing and have described. I think a big consideration is the timing of the engagement. I think that is a really important lever around advancing equity so that engagement isn't the school has developed the policy and then engages parents around learning on what the policy is. It's at the actual design stage of really listening at what are the challenges we're trying to address. How are different students experiencing those challenges and what are the different ways that we can be responsive to it? I think with COVID, it has impacted families differently and create different stresses and needs for flexibility and concerns. That if you find out early on, what are the specific concerns, or specific challenges, you can more tailor the intervention similarly with how we support students. We have to think about how we support families in the same way around that kind of a one-size-fits-all approach will not

work. That doing a virtual town hall in the evening might capture more parents, but that might not be the only way that you can capture or engage parents. You might have to do something on the weekend, or in the morning. So, I think really thinking about what are the different barriers that families might face due to work schedules or childcare obligations, and really trying to give them multiple opportunities to engage in meaningful ways. Sometimes it's one-on-one outreach as well.

The other thing, which Brandon had mentioned on kind of getting a survey and then bringing it back to his team. I think really building in that time for your educators to sit with the data. What are you hearing with parents? Really problem solve together and then identify the right points to bring family and communities into the conversations, but you have to create that space with your educators within the school day to make sure they've got the time to share what they're seeing in the classroom, what they're hearing from their students. Again, the Federal Resources were hoping that districts will continue to do the creative and innovative work that they have been doing over the last year and even before that and continue those practices.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you. A person in the comments wrote succinctly, "Inclusion at the design stage," as they were listening to your comment. I think that is so critically important. Not at the end or not even in the middle, but in the beginning and that makes sense. Tina, I'm interested to just hear your perspective. I was so intrigued when I heard you, a Board Member who decided to join the administration a couple of years later after your service, your tour of duty so to speak. Tell me how equity shows up in your space and then the work in the decisions that you have to make leading this work for the district.

Tina Hike-Hubbard: Yes, it's interesting when I was a board member. We began talking about the district meeting in equity policy. Then when I left the board, two years later, the board actually has an equity policy which I'm so proud to say. It's actually a racial equity policy. I think it distinctly speaks about race and understanding how we need, as you said, inclusion at the time of inception is really important, but we have our equity policy. We've been charged with having training of my team, training of the principals, training that looks across the district to understand how equity really plays out in your day-to-day decision making. We have equity lens and questions that guide us every day from making a small decision about having - when a photographer comes in your school and how you engage a community partner to do

work, all the way to what you teach and how you're teaching or engaging families. So, drilling in on what's the question or issue, what are the potential impacts? What are the unintended consequences for the decisions that you are making that you weren't even thinking about? How we've identified stakeholders in that process and how are they've been engaged in this? Then, if there are barriers, how do you mitigate those barriers towards success? Literally, our entire district has embraced every lens questions as a way that we filter our activities, our strategies and our daily decisions to make sure that equity is at the forefront of everything that we do.

Christian Rhodes: Helpful. Now, Brandon, as a principal where the policy and implementation meets the road, tell me your thoughts around how equity informs your decisions as a leader in your community, not just in your school, but in your community.

Brandon Pinkney: Yes, absolutely. So, equity again is one of the core focuses of the work that we do here. So, everything that we do, we have a very high need special education population here at my school. So, we really have to operate the equity lens especially when we look at curriculum-based materials and things of that sort. So, we, again, utilize the framework questions about equity policy to make sure that we're vetting all the work that we do to that policy to make sure that all students can succeed with it. We also look at - so, some of the frameworks that we use may be specific to family community engagement for example. So, we use the dual capacity building framework, but also, setting those process conditions also work when we talk about equity work. So, definitely, intermingling some of the frameworks that we use in the different operational things that we do. So just making sure that everything stays in the forefront, but the equity work that we do here really, really lives in some of these frameworks that we use. It's been really, really helpful to have a framework or a piece of reference to talk about why this program may be good for this population of students, but not this one. I am a principal who likes to see the black and white. I like to go back to the black and white. So, that's really good to have when we do this work.

Christian Rhodes: That's extremely helpful. I think as I'm listening, it's important not just to talk about equity, kind of the academic, but equity in action. So, it's taking what's on the black and white and implementing it at the district level through frameworks, but then also at the implementation level. I want to move to another topic that I think is critically important in this space and it's really the concept of trust. I'm interested, Tina, from your perspective - well, actually I'm going to say, Brandon, from your

perspective, what does a trusting relationship look like between a school and its community of school and their families? Maybe some tangible examples for those who are listening. Ways that you've been able to build trust in your three years there, particularly during this time of COVID when so much was happening and so many decisions were being made that families have to really rely on schools for information.

Brandon Pinkney: Absolutely. So, it's built on connections. We were just very strategic on making sure that we stay connected throughout this COVID season or pandemic. So, the district also has a focus on reconnections. So, we just want to make sure that we utilize this time to reconnect if need be or we stay connected through home visits, things of that sort. So, just like in a schoolhouse, you have different core teams. So, because of the work we're doing with family community engagement, I now have a core team for family community engagement. That's the focus. We have a core team for math, core team for literacy, a core team for family community engagement. So that core team, they were able to sit down and does include parents as well as students. They were able to sit down virtually to meet and say, "Hey, what is our year calendar going to look like even though we're in a pandemic?" Because of that, we were able to make sure that we are staying connected with families. We were reconnecting ones we weren't able to capture, we were making sure that their needs were met during this time. So, we have schools in Baltimore city that have lead agencies. So, lead agencies are community partners, and so I'll just do [Unintelligible] of Central Maryland. So, we have an excellent director who was able to sit on that core committee of family community engagement and really help us lead this work to make sure that we stay connected during this time to different partnerships.

Christian Rhodes: That's great. What I do know about Baltimore City is you have a pretty robust community schools program that allows for those lead agencies to really sit and be at the decision making table. I know Jessica has some thoughts about community schools broadly. Before we get to that, I do think it's important, Tina, to hear a little bit from your perspective to begin at the district level. There was a lot of trust that had to really be tested and currently is being tested in decision-making that your CEO has made, the board has made and US leaders in your space. Tell me, what some of the work of trust building and trust testing that the district has had to do, and what have you learned about that during this time?

Tina Hike-Hubbard: I think transparency is key, right? We say what we're going to do and we follow through on it first of all. We offer authentic opportunities for folks to engage with us and tell us how they're feeling about it or what they didn't like about something or how we can pivot and make it better. It's really the paramount two-way communication with our constituents, but I will just say, when we did reopening of schools and Principal Pinkney has not bragged upon himself and he should because he has one of the highest attendance rates during this time period of anybody in the district. He should be applauded for that because he's really built relationship with these families and they trust him to come back in person. We know that COVID has rocked our world, right? People, they don't trust medical professionals. They don't trust the science. There's all kinds of things, but we know what they do, they trust that when Brandon Pinkney as a principal or other principals tell them, "I've created health and safety metrics at our school, you can come in and see them and know that your child is going to be safe," then they come back in person. He has one of the highest in-person rates of anybody in our district. That speaks to the trust that was built and relationships that were built on the ground level for our families, but I will also just offer that when we go and make a big decision in the district, we put it out there. We let folks understand what it is. They ask questions. They dig into it. They push back and say, "We need more. We don't agree with this." So right now, I am literally building an entire input and engagement strategy for the city, our 14 county districts, every single one of our schools, our community partners around our recovery work, what it's going to look like, what key strategies are we going to put in place. We need community input in that and then we honor that by showing how the plan reflects their input. That's how you build transparency and that's how you build trust at a district level, but also supporting our principals like Brandon to help build those trusting relationships at the school level.

Christian Rhodes: I knew that. I was trying to give Brandon an opportunity to brag, but he's too humble.

Tina Hike-Hubbard: I know he won't.

Christian Rhodes: He's too humble to do so. So, thank you. You know, Jessica, I do want to pivot to this concept of community and thinking about ways that districts can meet the needs of communities during this time. I know they did a lot of conversation around the role of community schools at a strategy to do this, but I'm interested in gaining your thoughts about how districts can make key important decisions that can really support their community.

Jessica Cardichon: Great. Thank you. Supporting community schools is a priority of the administration. Schools are often the center of the community and really want to treat them as such. Then, research shows that the positive impact of high-quality community schools on students and outcomes and their common similarities around the use of expanded learning time and summer programs around providing support services for students around collaborative leadership for staff, as well as partnering with community-based organizations to provide services for students and families. While the school can serve often as the vehicle for the delivery of those services, that doesn't mean that they are alone responsible for providing all of those services. All our communities across the country have so much to offer our students and our families and how can you develop those partnerships between the schools and community-based organizations, nonprofits, agencies to make sure it's kind of a one-stop shop for where students and family can access the basic needs and services that lead to improve social, emotional and academic outcomes for students. We think that the other piece of this is that there are considerable federal resources available that this work has sustained through the partnership, so that's sustained through the relationships.

Both Tina and Brandon have talked about the importance of trust, and that takes time. You have to also be committed to when you get it wrong, owning it and coming back and doing that work. That work is only benefitted by partnering with other community-based organizations to carry that work forward. One thing I do want to mention and I just want to elevate that's come up is the importance of setting goals. There have been a number of questions in the chat about how are we measuring progress. I think it's important to identify what data will let us know that we're on the right track, but what are our goals? What are we keep working towards? Then, also recognizing the many different resources in your community that can help you work towards those goals for the long term.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you. I was just thinking through some of the facts or ways that Tina dropped earlier around over 20,000 respondents with our Possip survey that sounded like at least in our initial conversation earlier this week, that you were surprised. You were surprised at the level of engagement. Brandon hearing you're saying, "Yes, in my school, we had a whole bunch of engagement that we didn't anticipate," which I think is partly because of COVID, but also because you all have consistently had to beat this drum around the importance of it and demonstrated it. I'm going to close

with this last question they had prepared. I think I want to take a couple of questions from the chat. There's a couple that just bubbled up and I think are important to recognize. The concept, Jessica, you mentioned it, but I'm interested, Brandon, at the principle, the social, emotional, and mental health needs of the students that you serve. I'm interested in knowing in what ways have you had to adjust your practice, the school's practice in embracing those concerns. What support or resources have you received from the district to do so? If I could just probe a little bit deeper on maybe some specific examples of scenarios in which you had to deal. I really believe that the audience is thirsty for hearing how you did it, not just what you did. Brandon.

Brandon Pinkney: Yes, absolutely. Great question. I actually came to Walter P., as I said it before, three years ago. It was an unstable community. So, right then and there, I knew SEL had to happen, right? So, I started SEL work at this school three years ago. So, we actually utilized a tool called the mini DESSA, which is actually an assessment benchmark of student SEL competencies. So, we started that three years ago here, and so we still continue on with this. It gives us BOY, MOY and EOY data. Then, we said, "Okay. So, what's our goals?" Just as Jessica stated, we have to have some type of goals. What our goals? How are we going to benchmark to make sure we're meeting our goals? So then, we've decided that we needed to utilize a program of some sort or curriculum or framework. So, now, we use a second step framework. Every week, our students from Pre-K to 8th grade receive a second set framework which is nothing, but SEL competencies. That's even done by myself, the clinicians in the building, everyone has a different grade level that they focus on where kids are in smaller groups, and we're talking about the social emotional learning piece of the child. Because again, that does impact the academics. So, we continue with that in this COVID space currently.

It is really very helpful to our middle school students. The mini DESSA is actually a training tool where it focuses on the strengths of the student and not the weaknesses, so we know what areas that we need to - the language that they use is called - needs instruction. So instead of saying, "The student is low in this area, they just say the student needs instruction in this particular area." We are able to utilize that data to determine grade level specific on what social emotional learning competencies can be used within that particular grade level. The district has supported me with that work greatly because we have a SEL office in our district. They are able to come out and give me feedback on program implementation. They are able to give me

additional resources to use, and I work very closely with what the SEL office to make sure that this work that we do with SEL is sustainable and has actually given us the results that we're looking for. I've drastically seen the change in climate and culture because of that work we've been doing around SEL.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you so much. Thanks. Clearly, you thought ahead of what was needed in your school and your school community. Tina, I'm interested just to hear from you at a district level as you lead the work around family community engagement. What emphasis does the district place in social emotional learning and how did that manifest itself in some of the decisions that you all are making?

Tina Hike-Hubbard: So, our blueprint for success has three tenants. Leadership development, literacy and the third one is wholeness. When we say that those were our three tenants, that means that we're really heavily invested not only on resources, but in time and energy and making sure that we have wholeness supports for our schools. So, we have wholeness specialists in 54 of our schools that actually create SEL spaces. We have crisis management teams that go to schools when necessary to actually support, if there's a situation that may need a help to do broad counseling. We've expanded schools mental programs and most of our schools now where we actually have mental health conditions at our schools to help support immediate concerns, long term supports, but also coach the schools and making sure that we're dropping in our, as Brandon talked about, daily wholeness activities into our lessons by grade band, right? We have a centralized online resource for our families. Then, I think what Jessica shared so eloquently, we have community-based partners that help us do wrap around supports. It's not enough just to think about trauma and our kids being traumatized, but then also think about self-actualization, and what our kids need to be whole and fantastic learners. That requires a series and multitude of wrap around supports for all of our kids. So, we have a robust partnership initiative where we are bringing in partners to help us really survive clear, supportive wrap up around programs and services for our students and families, so they can actually feel connected in a way that makes them feel whole and valued as students in our school system.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you. Jessica, I would love just to get your closing comments or your thoughts around the social, emotional, mental health and academic needs of students. I know that's an area of focus of the department and one of your offices has been leading, but just some of your thoughts in that space as well.

Jessica Cardichon: Right. I think the way that we've talked about is that meeting students' social, emotional and mental health means it's the foundation to academic success that we need to recognize how integrated those two are, and that they're also not always distinct things. We can design instruction and ways that meet students' SEL needs. It's the way that you structure your classes and how students learn together and engage in the work. I also don't want to lose the point Tina had made around culturally responsive practice, and the importance of students seeing themselves in the work that they're doing and feeling, recognize and connected and being in identity safe classrooms. Students learn when they feel safe and when they feel recognized. So, the idea that we can address the impact of lost instructional time on students without tending to their SEL needs, we just need to make sure that they are very tightly tied together. We're also recognizing that our educators have been through a lot this last year from our teachers to our bus drivers and to our cafeteria workers. It has been a long year and we're not out of it yet. As we are thinking about that, we're thinking that our schools are places that are socially and emotionally safe and welcoming for our educators and our students, then it's just the way that we do things. Again, I will acknowledge the significant funding through the American Rescue Plan and that these resources are meant to support you all in the important work that you are doing over the summer and then what's coming ahead.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you. I think that's a great way to close the formal portion of the panel. I do want to acknowledge, Brandon, I don't know if you're in the comments, man, but "Kudos galore for the work that you're doing at your school." One question that come up a couple of times is, "Can you rename the framework you're using you're building around SEL?" I think that was one that came out specifically.

Brandon Pinkney: Oh, with the current? Oh, I'm sorry. Second Step.

Christian Rhodes: Second Step, great. I know we have about seven more minutes and there's some wrap up that's going to be needed, but I do want to make sure that we acknowledge the great work that the city is doing. Clearly, there's been an investment in time and resources, the frameworks that are there. As a person who lives a little south of the city down at 95, the work that you're doing is recognized nationally and I'm thankful that you all had the opportunity to share. I want to make sure that we're going to be responsive to some of the questions in the chat. So, I'm going to just do a quick run through just to make sure that we've got anything that's sailing in. If you

all did one final question that's burning, feel free to type it in and we would try our hardest to address it. There's one that I think is important that I love probably Brandon, this is going to be for you. You're a rock star, rightfully so. The one question that came up was, "How are you supporting...? What's the training associated for your staff around SEL support? How have you implemented that at the building level?"

Brandon Pinkney: Absolutely. Our staff, they're trained quarterly. We've done it quarterly on SEL works. So, they're trained on the Second Step curriculum as well, although they don't implement it. It's actually being taught by the clinicians of the building, but the clinicians make themselves available to actually consult with staff because we did notice that during the pandemic, we had more staff members showing a need for SEL. So, we literally train them quarterly, but we also offer spaces within our school in a virtual space where they can actually meet with the clinicians to go over some of the things and their struggles and things of that sort. So, that's been very helpful that my clinicians, they have been a force. This whole pandemic, they really been working it out.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you. Tina, I'll close with you on one other question, but this seems like a District Level 1. In what ways has the district thought about the social emotional need of your educators? As Jessica mentioned not only our students have dealt with trauma during this time, but so are our educators. I know the city, along with several other urban areas across the country have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and some of the results from the virus itself. So, just a little bit on the thoughts and the action that the district has taken around supporting your educators and addressing their needs.

Tina Hike-Hubbard: I'm so glad you highlighted that because whole people can teach whole children. If people don't feel like they are whole and supported, that they're not going to have much success. We started the employees since a long time ago to make sure that we had regular wellness activities for our employees. We would do things in the office like yoga and medical things, like check your blood pressure and those kind of things before. During the pandemic, we had to actually create mental health spaces for our staff to feel safe, to come and get support during this time. Also, our wholeness specialists that are working at schools with students, they are also helping our staff and helping them think about how you navigate the pandemic, how you're working in the balance. We have teachers right now who are very honest about this, who are

teaching virtually and in person at the same time. This is really hard stuff for them to do, right? So, making sure we are paying attention to their needs, and listening to what they have. Part of the stakeholder feedback that I spoke about also apply to teachers and principals. Brandon knows, I've surveyed the heck out of him during this pandemic as well as all of our teachers to make sure we understand and we listen. Again, two-way communication. We want to know what it is that's going on with you and what you need to be successful and then figuring out how we can bring it to the conversations. So, it's part of that inception conversation we talked about earlier. So, it's really honoring and listening to the needs of our staff and supporting them as best we can through our mental health and wellness activities, et cetera, through our district.

Christian Rhodes: Thank you. I just want to again, thank the entire panel. I thank Tina, Brandon and Jessica for your engaged discussion around treating important topics while the meat of this discussion was around kind of a robust family and community engagement strategy. I think it would be a disservice if we didn't recognize, as you said Tina, that whole people really support whole children. The social and emotional needs of students often times, we try to separate them into siloes, but it all tends to really work together if we do it correctly. So, thank you again for your participation. Thank you for the robust discussion. Thank you for the great information, Jessica, related to the work of the department. Tina and Brandon, particularly Brandon, I just want to thank you for your leadership at your school. Tina, for joining the call. Actually, you're first of any other board member joining the district and really supporting this work. With that, I'm going to turn it over to our partners at NCSSLE just to wrap things up. Thanks for all the participants who have been on the line and stayed with us. This has really been a great and robust discussion.

Tim Duffy: Thank you, Christian. Yes, I would echo those sentiments that this has been a wonderful hour. It flew by as a participant to hear, listening in. So, thanks to all of you. Thanks, Christian for leadership of the panel and to Jessica, Tina and Brandon for incredibly important information that you shared with us today. As we close, I don't think we have time for the polling questions, so we can skip that slide. I'm going to move to offering you an opportunity to complete a feedback form. I hope you'll take just a minute or so to give us input about today's session and let us know how we can improve opportunities like this for you in the future. In addition, please visit our website. The NCSSLE website for today's presentation will be archived and you can listen to that archived version or share it with colleagues who weren't able

to be with you today as well as finding links to the resources that were mentioned during the session today, and the slides will be there as well. So, please make sure that you check that site out, that's the NCSSE website link, and the Clearinghouse link that you see at the bottom, that's the Department of Education's Best Practices Clearinghouse. I encourage you to visit that, following today's event and frequently.

We know that we weren't able to get to every question today, but we do record them. We share them with the Department of Education, and we will share them with our partners at the CDC who have been collaborators in this series as we have conducted it over the past several months and going into next month. So, again, my sincere thanks to all of you who presented. All of you who participated by listening in in this information. We had nearly 700 to 800 people joining us. So, we had a good crowd here today and I can tell by the chat comments that it was valuable to many of you. All of you have provided us with great information to inform future sessions that we'll be doing. We're going to leave the Zoom link open for another five minutes or so, so you'll have an opportunity to complete that feedback form that's being posted in the chat as well as it was on that previous slide. If you have additional comments or questions you like to leave with us in the chat, please feel free to do that now, too, in the next few minutes. So, again, thank you for your time today and for all you do to provide students with safe, supportive learning environments. Have a great afternoon.