

Ikhlas Saleem: Good morning everyone. Just a few notes before we get started. We do ask that you turn your cell phones off. If you don't want to do that, at the very least, could you put your phone on silent? If it's on vibrate, take the vibrate off. Just leave it on silent. That would be great.

As you see, we do have mics on the tables. When you're speaking, you don't have to lean into the mic. It'll just pick up your sound.

Speaker 2: For better or worse.

Ikhlas Saleem: Huh?

Speaker 2: For better or worse.

Ikhlas Saleem: Yeah, exactly. I do see we have video cameras around, so you don't have to feel the need to look directly into the camera. The camera will catch you, so you can just talk and speak and be your regular, normal, beautiful selves. Do we have everyone in, or were we still waiting for some people to come in?

Speaker 3: I can go do a last round-up, if you'd like.

Ikhlas Saleem: Yeah. That'd probably be good to do before we get started. Yeah. While we're making sure we have everyone, I'm Ikhlas Saleem. I think I communicated with a few of you. I'm trying to remember my title. I do digital and social media at Education Post. We're a nonprofit communication shop. We're based out of Wicker Park. We do K through 12 education reform. How we do that is, we do that through communicating, so we have a blog that we run. We have a main education post blog, so we have parents, teachers, students, policy makers just write about how we can improve education across the country. We also have bloggers around the country who blog about education in their cities. That's something that we do.

Hopefully, after this experience, you might be like, "Wait, I didn't get a chance to say everything that I wanted to say." That's fine. If you want to continue to say more, we can follow up with you, and you can write a blog post or we'll try to catch it on camera. There's opportunities to follow-up after.

On that note, I'm going to leave it to ... We're going to introduce our moderators, and then we'll go around the room. If we could just go down the line, and we can go ahead and get started.

Nate Bowling: I'm a guest in the room today. My name is Nate Bowling. I'm the 2016 Washington State teacher of the year. I'm from Tacoma, Washington. I teach at a comprehensive public high school, called Lincoln High School. There I teach AP Government, Politics and Geography. I'm just super excited to be here, sitting and listening to you all. Your experiences are very different from my experiences, but I have a lot to learn from you all.

Chris Stewart: Good morning, everybody.

Audience: Good morning.

Chris Stewart: I'm Chris Stewart. I'm actually here from Minnesota. I'm the senior partner and CEO of the Wayfinder Foundation. We are a foundation that makes direct investments into urban parents to be activists that challenge the education system and challenge the welfare system. We are currently in four cities, growing to 12 cities, within the next year and making our first investments in January.

Sharif El-Mekki: Good morning.

Audience: Good morning.

Sharif El-Mekki: My name is Sharif El-Mekki. I'm I am from Philadelphia. I'm a principal at a turn-around charter school in West Philadelphia, as well, in the same neighborhood I grew up in. I'm the child of activists and a parent of six kids.

Ikhlas Saleem: [inaudible 00:03:18] You go ahead. Alright.

Sharif El-Mekki: Five still in the house, so one grown, five in the house.

Ikhlas Saleem: Let's see if anybody can match you in the room.

Sharif El-Mekki: Yeah. Yeah.

Ikhlas Saleem: Alright. We're going to go around the room. You're like, "No, I cannot match." We're going to go around the room-

Sharif El-Mekki: We're looking for babysitters in Chicago.

Ikhlas Saleem: What'd you say, "Six month visits?"

Sharif El-Mekki: Yeah. Yeah.

Ikhlas Saleem: Yeah, okay. We're going to have you say your name, what you school you have your children at, and then you can say their grade level--that'll probably be helpful--and where you're from in the city. That's a lot I just said, so if you need me to remind you ...

Kim Preston: It's okay. Hi, my name is Kim Preston. I'm from the South Side of Chicago. My son, Nicholas, goes to Gary Comer College Prep. This is his first year, so he's an incoming freshman. They started school last Monday, so so far, this first week has been a transition for him. It's something that he has to get adjusted to, but so far he's doing well. He says that he's looking forward to his high school experience, seeing what high school is all about and everything like that.

It's been a while since I've had a child in high school because my children are 17

years apart, so hopefully his high school experience will be good like mine. Like I told him, I said, "These next four years are going to shape you into being the adult that you want to be. You're going to learn. You're going to meet friends. You're going to experience things. You might have some trials and things like that, but it's all in how you handle it and how you proceed from it is how ... will make you come out of it.

Deitra Matthews: Hi, I'm Deitra Matthews. My son is Demonte Matthews. He attends Gary Comer College Prep Charter School of the Noble network. He is a senior, so he is used to being in charter school. He is the alumni group of Gary Comer's middle school. He's excited, and he's looking forward to going to college this year. He has plenty of options. He's an Eagle scout. He kind of don't know if he want to go away to school, or go to the navy and let the government pay for him going to school. He has a lot of options. We're excited this school year to see where his future leads. Right now, he's just really focusing on prom, even though it's all the way in May. May 25th, he marked it. He's really excited because he'll be 18, and he told me, "28 days and counting."

We're very, very excited. I'm excited. I'm also still in school, so I'll actually have my PhD in exactly a year and a half.

Rebecca M: Good morning. My name's Rebecca McCarter-Hall. I actually have two children in the Noble network. One is a junior at Gary Comer College Prep, and the other one is in the middle school, so I am deeply involved in the Noble system. My oldest is a junior, so this is the interesting time where you develop who you are and where you want to go. We're looking at colleges and everything that entails with that. That's the interesting thing and figuring out college visits to see if you want to go to a big school, small school, and that.

My youngest is in that sixth to eighth grade range. He's eighth grade this year, and that's a very interesting time for a young man. He's not a baby anymore, and he's not a teenager, but he's right in that middle, and that's the very important part, especially for young men. He realized that mommy is not going to cover him and say, "Okay, let's get this homework done." It's now on you to take that responsibility, so that's something that he's learning and hopefully this year, we're going to overcome that, over that bridge.

I have gone to various charter schools within the CPS network and also public schools, so I am a big advocate for our children. That's my biggest thing, and Deitra is my ... We're like right-hand mans for everything we do together, so I am very excited to be here.

Speaker 4: Good morning. I'm Lisa Clark. I have a daughter who's seven years old, and she attends National Teachers Academy. We have a ways to go before we get to college, quite honestly. But, we're getting there, so ...

Courtney E: My name is Courtney Everett. I am a 10-plus year resident of the Woodlawn neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. I have an incoming second grader and

an incoming kindergartner at National Teachers Academy.

Starlette W: My name is Elizabeth Greer. I am from far South Side. I also have a rising second grader at National Teachers Academy, and I also have a four-year old, so he'll start kindergarten in September of '18. He's currently at a Montessori preschool. I am the chair of the local school council at National Teachers Academy, and if anyone's been watching the news lately, we've been going through some things, specifically CPS is trying to close us down. We are a high-performing, level one ... Watch the news, possibly level one plus, coming soon, the highest grading CPS has to offer. We are 80% low-income. We are 80% African-American. We do amazing things at the school, and CPS wants to close us because the South Loop neighborhood in which we reside has decided that they don't like our current neighborhood school, which is Phillips Academy, which is 90% African-American, 90% low-income, level two. It's working on it.

Therefore, that's not good enough, so let's take the building that National Teachers Academy resides in and turn it into a high school. Our children would all be displaced. We would be forced to move to a new building at South Loop Elementary that they are currently going to be constructing in a different site. Many of us, like Courtney and myself, with the plan that CPS is proposing ... Our children would be split because they think it's a great idea to have second grade through eighth grade in the same school with incoming high school students.

I did the math. My fourth grader would be in a building with ninth graders, and then my first grade, at the time, will be in a new building many, many blocks away. We will not let this happen. We are mobilized, we are activists, and we are angry. We will not let wealthy, primarily white constituents win. We won't let them take our school.

Ikhlas Saleem: You were like, "We're going to talk about this on camera today."

Starlette W: Yes. Every opportunity. Sorry.

Ikhlas Saleem: Keep going.

Speaker 3: Angry, organized activists.

Starlette W: That's right. Three of us here and many, many more behind us.

Hasan Al-Ameen: Congratulations.

Starlette W: Thank you.

Hasan Al-Ameen: Good morning. Hasan Al-Ameen. I had a daughter that graduated from Gary Comer College Prep. This will be her second year at the University of Michigan. I have my son, who's a senior, at Baker College Prep. We chose the Noble network of charter schools because I like the fact that they held students accountable in the discipline aspect. The school is my children's mother and I away from home. My son, before

he went to school, to Gary Baker and committed to it, was going to attend South Shore, the International Baccalaureate Program. I asked him, "Which one would you like?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "Okay."

His mother didn't like South Shore, so we put him into Baker, even though I was strictly for South Shore. One day, his first day of school, he forgot his homework. He said, "Dad, I got a [inaudible 00:11:56]." I said, "Okay, so explain." I just wanted to see if I knew what it was. He said, "Well, I forgot my paper in my locker, so I had to stay after school." I said, "Well, do you think if you was at South Shore, it would be [inaudible 00:12:09]." He said, "No."

I said, "Well, it was a good choice for Mom to choose Baker. It's making you accountable." That's one thing that I do like about charter school. They help make a student accountable for their action. Even if they forget homework in their locker, she was untied. "Okay. Well, you staying after school." It helps a student because they get help with their homework and everything.

I talked to some of my son's teachers last year. Come to find he has a knack for math. He loves math. I didn't have a knack for math, so I'm glad for that. I talked to them. One of his teachers is Miss Thomas. She stated that my son is a mentor and role model in class. Every time she asked a question, students don't try to answer. They say, "Ask Hasan. He knows the answer," so they don't even have to answer. So far, I love the Noble network on their discipline. It's making accountable for their actions.

Starlette W:

Good afternoon. My name is Miss Starlette Anne Woolins. I have two children. One is 29 or 30. The other one is 15. I'm currently a parent of a child who attends Gary Comer College Prep. I also am a parent-child advocate through Andrew Carnegie. I'm from the South Side, originally from the West Side of Chicago. I believe every child deserves an opportunity to receive a proper education. I don't care whether it's under the Noble system, the Chicago public schools system. It's about a parent system because a lot of times I also work with children. I'm retired from the UIC after 35 years, and I've worked in education through Roosevelt University for over 20 years.

Now, I'm currently working with children in preschool through eighth grade, and it's a different dynamic that our kids are dealing with these days. Parent system is the best system. Then, you work with system that you're in.

Laverne Thomas:

Good morning. My name's Laverne Thomas, and I also ... Well, I'm a grandparent and guardian of a child at Gary Comer Prep. This is his first year. He's a freshman. He started this year, as well. So far, he's getting it, but this week, he got detention. But, I know, as I talk to him and as he go forward, he's going to be more disciplined and learn to be more prepared or whatever. He also is a part of [inaudible 00:14:55] challenge. That's where he worked this summer. I'm a grandmother of six, and my youngest is nine. Deshawn, he's 15. I'm just looking forward to this year with him.

David Hilliard: Good morning. I'm David Hilliard. I'm a grandfather. I have 11 grandkids that go to school on the South Side, Libby Elementary School. My daughter was an educator there. With all this mess in the school there. She took her career to Jackson, Tennessee. I'm flying solo with these kids, and I'm doing the best I can. I got them from the time they leave in the morning to go to school until they get out of school. But, when they get out of school, they're with their friends, and that's a bad influence. They hang out. They didn't call. They're out there doing bad things. But, it's a work in progress. It's a work in progress. Lack of knowledge, that's the key to life. Thank you.

Speaker 4: Good morning, everyone.

Audience: Good morning.

Speaker 4: I have an eight-year old. He just turned eight Wednesday. He's at Pershing Elementary. He's going to the third grade. I met with the teacher last week, and he has to take his testing this year. I think it'll be okay, but as far as the test go, we're going to have to work to get him to ... Just being able to sit and pay attention to what ... This test is something serious that he has to pay attention to.

Bruce Talbert: Hello. My name is Bruce Tower, and I've listened to everybody's stories. It's so diverse. Me and my wife, we're basically from CPS system, from back in the day. My wife, she's a strong advocate for education, so with my two kids, or three ... I have one daughter. She's in her sophomore. She's into the nursing program to be a traveling nurse. My son, this is his first year. He's at Jackson State.

I'm listening to your stories, and what my wife would push ... We've had them in three or four different schools. She would be constantly pushing. They ended up Lang, Locke, which was good, but this was back in the day when it was strong. I don't know how it is now. But, my son went to Urban Prep High School, graduated, and like I say, he started Jackson State. What she would do, she would find the schools, and then she'd basically be like ... It would be teamwork. "Okay, now it's your turn. Make sure they get through."

The teachers knew. They had my cell phone number, and my kids knew if I get a phone call, I have to leave my job. You know I don't believe in time out. I believe in time is up.

Audience: Yeah. Yeah. Yes.

Bruce Talbert: I've had one teacher. She had me laughing because she said my son ... You know they're kids. They're going to try. They're going to push. She said, "Am I going to have to call your father?" She said he literally begged to the point that he was almost in tears, so I wouldn't get that phone call because they know. We're more of a team than anything, so like I say, she would push, get them through, find the good schools, and then be like, "Okay. It's your turn. Make sure they get through." That's basically our story.

We do have a foster child now. We're basically starting over again. She was in Schmidt, but she tested well, and now she's started the second grade. Is it first or second?

Speaker 5: Second.

Bruce Talbert: Second grade. She's starting Ray Elementary in Hyde Park, so we're kind of happy about that.

Speaker 5: Well, my husband gets things confused sometimes. I love him, but they've been in more than three or four schools.

Bruce Talbert: That's true. Right.

Speaker 5: They've been in more like seven or eight schools.

Audience: Wow.

Speaker 5: Our biological children are now both in college, and the little girl that we have, she's been in three schools, and she's in second grade now.

Bruce Talbert: Yes.

Speaker 5: I constantly look for a better school that fits within our budget because a private school is not always an option for us. She's doing well. This little girl, when she came to us, she was delayed. They thought something was wrong with her. Now, she's going to Ray in Hyde Park, also a one plus school. She's doing excellent, and I think the parents really have to make the teachers accountable. They have to be accountable themselves and hold the kids accountable. That's what we've been doing.

I've commuted our children all the way to the West side every day, and I think it pays off. My son did not want to go to Irving Prep. We had a rough discussion prior to orientation, on our way into the building. But, he's been there. He didn't like it the first year. Now, he loves it. At Irving Prep, they refer to themselves by their last name. Like, my son is Mr. Talbert. They get that respect. They build that male pride that they need, and they build brotherhood. The school has 100% graduation to four-year colleges, and he's able to communicate with his friends. They're all going through the same struggle.

Right now, my son has only been at Jackson State for about a week and a half, and he's been so confined with us because we were like all over him. The first week, he said there were parties, two or three parties a day, so now he's all partied out. He said, "I don't want to go to another party." Now, he's getting more reality and he knows he has to stay in his books. When I called him the other day, he was in the library, so I'm hoping that everything we instilled in him, that he's holding himself accountable. It's very important that parents get involved.

Ikhlas Saleem: Thank you, everyone, for introducing yourselves. I'm going to hand it off to Chris, who's going to help guide our conversation.

Chris Stewart: Great. I'll just say at the top, Mr. and Mrs. Talbert, that if he got all his partying done in one week, we should all be so lucky. Be praying for that. [crosstalk 00:22:58] I have two that made it through, and they didn't get it done in one week, so God bless you.

We talk a lot about education. I used to work with Education Post as an outreach person, and as somebody who listens to stories all the time about education, the parent's story is the one that I think is the most sorely needed to be more amplified. Education is full of a lot of people talking a lot of stuff about a lot of things, but that absent voice, to me, is the voice of the parents. I remind people all the time: the schools don't have kids; parents have kids. As long as we leave that out of the equation of the systems, there's a problem.

You all being here today is very special and important. You are the experts. You are the very people that we need to hear from, so I just want you all to speak freely and honestly to the point that you want to share. Tell us your experiences, and we're not going to do a lot of interjecting. Hopefully, you all can share to mic. I don't know what that means, right?

I want to just start off with a really basic question. Basic question is, all of you, I would bet, have a forward looking vision of what you want for your child, what your dream is. When you go to bed at night, what is it that you're thinking ahead and want for your child? My question to you is, in the school that they're in right now, do you think that they are helping you realize that very particular, private dream that you have for your children? Anyone can speak. You don't have to raise hands. Just don't fight.

Starlette W: This is my first year experience at Gary Comer College Prep. I come from CPS. Born and bred in CPS, went through parochial school with my oldest daughter, and my mission for my children, especially for this last one, was always to give her a good education, to teach her how to be independent, how not to get into fights, not to let her environment or the other people she's around influence her. At Gary Comer, my first year experience was very, very, very testy because there were rules, regulations, and restrictions. It was new ground. She didn't know anyone. I didn't know anyone.

But, I know my daughter is a studious child. I know she doesn't do cliques. I know she's a self-motivator. She's a self-starter. Going through Gary Comer doors, what I expected was--I read the information packet--the restrictions. Some people say they're too strict on the children. The uniform code ... Well, you wear uniform, it cuts down on a lot of violence, number one. Number two, the way she has to enter the school is okay.

The learning environment, the curriculum, I'm good with that. There's some aspects that I know could be improved, if there were better communication, if

there was some way possible to make it better. But, I fought hard to get her into a good high school, and I expect her to be prepared. I expect me to be involved. I expect the teachers to do what they're supposed to do without any bias to the children.

Going to Gary Comer, I had to learn different ... Like, the children have to track the teacher. I mean, literally, wherever that teacher goes, the child has to be there. Their posture, the cleanliness, the order, how they're in order ... It was very challenging for me the first year. My daughter adapted well because of her character and how she is, but as a parent, looking from the outside in, I had a lot of questions that I couldn't get answered, but you had to go through that first year experience to learn how to handle that system, how to work within that system.

Speaker 4: Well-

Hasan Al-Ameen: I-

Speaker 4: You go ahead.

Hasan Al-Ameen: Okay. Thank you. I've had no ... With my daughter, she said Gary Comer was good. When it first started off, they went through three principals while she was there, and then she got out just in time because we didn't like the last principal that was there when my daughter left. Then, my son, he's at Baker. They just changed principals, and his advisor just left to go into the private sector. But, the main thing I like about the Noble network is the teachers' and students' accountability.

If my son needs help, he'll call me before he get out: "Dad, I want to go to office hours." I said, "Okay. Stay as long as you need to. Just call me a few minutes so I can pick you up on time." Come to find out, he was able to get a letter of recommendation from one of the hardest teachers in that school. Everybody tries to get recommendations from her, and she said, "No. I'm not writing no letter of recommendation." But, she reached out to my son and just told him, "If you need a letter of recommendation, I will gladly write it for you. I won't write it for nobody else, but I'll write it for you."

I just love the fact that they have office hours. Last year, when his grades were slipping, he didn't tell me. He didn't tell his mother or I, so when the teacher had said, "You know your son's grade was slipping, but he brought it way up, office hours helped him. Now, he's at an A in my class. He dropped to a C." I asked him, "Son, why didn't you tell me?" He said, "Well, I wanted to show you and Mom that I can carry on a caseload, and I can do it myself. I didn't need your help. I didn't want you all to get disappointed or upset and discipline me, if you will. I wanted to show you all that I know how to carry my own caseload, and I knew it."

The main thing that attracted me to Gary Comer or the Noble network is the accountability factor, and I love when the students get out of school, they can do office hours. I don't know if other public schools allow office hours or have office hours. You have the selective enrollment. Selective enrollment schools in the CPS,

they're not impressive to me because they only take the best. I've spoke with many principals or educators from selective enrollment. I say, "Your school doesn't impress me because you only accept the best. When you take a student that has F's and bring him or her up to a higher grade, then you're going to impress me. For all [inaudible 00:29:25]. But, for now, if I had a billion dollars, I wouldn't give you one red cent because you don't impress me."

The Noble network is doing good thus far.

Rebecca M:

I really want to interject what you were saying about your first year with your child because I have a lot of friends, and they look at my two sons and say, "I want my children to be like yours." I'm like, "Any child can actually go through a charter network, Noble. They can handle it because they're going to adapt. It's the parent. Can they be the buy in?" Because, if you call a Chicago parent and you're like, "What do you think of Noble?" ... "Their rules and everything like that" ... Well, the issue is that whatever you do in a regular job, I ask half the parents and say, "You work as an assistant nurse, right? Can you walk around in jeans, or do you have to wear scrubs?"

"Well, I got to wear scrubs." Uniform. "Do you have to be in a certain behavior? Do you have to talk professional?" "Well, yeah, I have to." Hello. The thing is is that if are a child, and you know your parent ... You've been with your parent for 12, 13 years or whatever. You know your parent, and if you come into the door with an attitude, and then the teacher's like, "Well, I'm going to give you detention or a demerit" ... "My mom's going to be right here in five minutes to tell you it's not happening."

The best story I could tell you about my experience, especially with demerits in the south ... My oldest son, who was in seventh grade ... I was out of town, and so was his dad, so his uncle, our best friend, Uncle Jeffrey's going to pick him up. School's out at 3:35, but Malcolm was still in the building. He knew Uncle Jeff was going to come, and Jeff said, "Well, I'll let you know I'm coming. I'll ring your phone." Malcolm's phone rang. Mobile, that's automatic detention. You're done. You hear the ring; we're done. Malcolm went in the car, and he was mad. Jeff was like, "What's wrong with you?" Malcolm said, "I got a detention. The phone rang. You rang my phone." He's like, "But, you didn't answer."

"I know, but it rang. I got a detention." Jeff gets out of the car. They go to find the teacher to talk. The teacher is listening to Jeff and looking at Malcolm, and then he looks at Jeff, and he looks at Malcolm again. He starts saying, "One, two." About when he gets two, Malcolm realizes, "Oh, he's counting demerits. Oh, it's my fault. I had the phone. It should not have been on. Uncle Jeff, we can go." He's like, "Wait a minute." "Come on. Uncle Jeff, we got to go. We need to go."

Jeff calls me and says, "What kind of school you at? What's going on?" I said, "Well, what happened?" "Malcolm got a demerit because the phone rang." "Was he in the building?" "Well, yeah." "He got a demerit. He got a detention. We're done." The thing is is that if the parent is going to buy into the discipline that they tell you

when they walk in the door. The child is going to adapt. That was my main thing.

Speaker 1: I was listening to what you were saying, you bring up a good point. A lot of parents that I have seen, they send them to school so the school can raise their kid and that's what the problem is, but the parent, be it if you are a single parent, or you have a mother and father both at home, that foundation starts at home. You need to send your kid with instructions, look you are there to learn. You are there to be a sponge. You are not there to be the class clown or the class bully. I mean, when I was... When my kids was in school, the principal knew who I was right from the get-go because I made it my job so they would know. Okay, I'm gonna make sure mine do what they are supposed to do, whether it was my daughter or my son.

Like I said, kids will be kids, but you have to build that foundation at home before they walk out that door so they know it's a job, cause we used to tell our kids both of us are college graduates, so you really basically had two choices. You either go into the service or you get your college education. Those are the only two options that you have. Like I said, the foundation starts at home. As long as you can get that on solid ground, kids will be kids, they will make mistakes just like we all did as we was coming up, but they see by what we do. Even though you think your kids might not be noticing what you are doing, they are watching every step you make, and they are watching other parents come in. When those other parents come in, "Oh, I know my child wouldnt do that," no, yes your child did do that and you have to answer for it.

They are looking at us. Our child is a reflection of who we are. If my child go and act a fool, his teacher is gonna be like, "Okay if this one is acting a fool, what's going on at home?" That's just a natural reaction. So you're right, when that phone rang, you have to deal with the consequences. It is what it is.

Speaker 2: What I think everyday at home about my child's education is my goal is to have him pursue his education, get the highest degree that you can. Pursue your career and be whoever it is that you want to be. My son wants to be a quality assurance engineer, or work for NASA. He's not a straight A student, but he's not a failing student either. He always says, "I'm an average kid," and what we mean as average, he might hit that strong C or that B, but he knows that his school is accountable. He goes to [inaudible 00:03:07] and those teachers at that school know me and when I mean they know me, when I walk in the door I have teachers and students, "Hi, Ms. Matthews," or just everyone on administrative down the CEO of noble network, they know my face. I have their phone number because I know I'm accountable for my child.

A teacher is only a teacher, they're gonna do their job and if I see that my child is slipping in a subject or needs some assistance, I'm going to tell him to advocate for his self, that's the first step. The second step is for me to advocate for him and that's what I do and I'm always at that school, "Hey, my child needs a little more assistance in this or that." He went to a CPS grammar school and my son is a very quiet person. He don't ask for help, so when his grades were slipping in CPS, they figure he's just a good kid, so we're just gonna pass him along.

When he got to a noble network grammar school, they said we are not gonna pass him along. If he's failing, he's failing, and that's when I realized that my child needed a 504 for assistance because he's blind in one eye. With that being said, that did help him/ He cannot do the things the average kid can do, but when he was in a CPS school, they didn't look into that. They didn't research what it is that he needs and his career would not be going the way it is. He will tell you now, I have three jobs as a senior, and the way his school is set up, they prepare you for college, prepare you for your career of choice. They know he wants to be a quality assurance engineer. Look into some engineer schools, look into some grants for engineering, they are not just gonna say. "Oh, just graduate." We don't want him to just graduate. We want him to have a career, have a future and that's why I love his school.

That's why I'm always at his school and like you said, parents have to be accountable at their child's school. The teachers cannot raise your child. Yeah, they have mentors, of course, they have their favorite teachers, they have their teachers they don't like, but I always tell him that's your best friend, the teacher you don't like because that's the person you need to be close to in office hours everyday, so they can know wow I'm not gonna give up on you.

With that being said, more schools need to focus on these kids educations and not overcrowd the classrooms and that's why I love his school, the classrooms are not overcrowded, so the teacher can say, "Well, lil Johnny needs some more assistance," verses, "Well, we've got 30 kids, I don't have time to teach all of them at one time. You're just gonna fail if you fail, that's not my problem." With the smaller class sizes, they can focus more on those kids or see that they need more attention than just the regular person and just passing them along, which had failed them for no reason.

Speaker 3: I think parents... I am in agreement with what she just stated. I asked what was the vision and goal for the school to help my daughter prepare for her future, to be successful in all of her endeavors that she may pursue in her dreams, whatever it may be, but as a parent, working with parents is very disheartening because you have different social economical levels that they are coming from and to me it doesn't matter what level you are on, whether you are here or you are here, whether you are on public aid receiving food stamps or whether you own a multimillion dollar business as a parent, sometimes parents feel locked out.

Parents sometimes feel threatened by just coming into the school because, I'm not saying Gary Coleman, I'm just saying cause I've worked with parents for a long time and you have some parents who don't have a high school diploma, you have parents who are involved in drugs, you have parents who are being abused, you have parents who have my baby daddy, my baby mama, I'm that... whatever that situation is, you have parents who are fearful, you have parents who care, you have parents who you or I may feel don't care, but they care in their own way. I work in an environment now where I'm seeing the mindsets of kindergartners who come in and they are hungry or the parent has smoked a blunt before they let the kid out of the car, and the parent advisory council were giving classes to the parents and them thinking we are gonna click because you look a certain way, or you dress a certain way/ We have to meet our parents where we are we have to invest in them emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and socially, and we

are not going to find a lot of parents, groups who have a large parent involvement because that's the tug of war with CPS and the parents.

You have some principals who knock the parents out the door before they get there, but then you have some principals who welcome the parents into the school, but my thing is as a parent, where are you coming from? What do you need? How can you share this experience with us? How can you make me better? How can I make you better? I've had parents threaten my life because you have parents who feel like you are walking on their ground, like gang members. This is my territory, this is what I do. Who do you think you are?

Then you have a parent that's a woman, this is a woman, this is a mother, then you have dads, we have 65% of the parents in our building are female, but on science night, we have 60% male participation, but where are the dads in the school? I see dads here. Parents, I mean, what kind of influence are we on the parents? As a parent advocate and as someone who had to work, I'm a single parent, had to go drop my daughter off at school at eight o'clock to go to work to be mentally abused, come home and get her. The teachers helped me out. "Mrs. Lewis, you can bring your child to school, we'll watch her," so I always pray and say you know what, if the day ever comes where I'm able to be on this playground to be at the school at a particular time to watch the children who are on the playground, that's what I am going to do and that's what I did when I retired.

Years later, parents are still having the same problem. Where's the support? You gonna talk about me because I get food stamps? You gonna talk about me because I stink? You gonna talk about me because I've got nine babies? Where is the comradery amongst parents [inaudible 00:09:28] being treated as a human being in the system. Don't blame CPS, they really don't care if you're not organized, they don't care. That's an institution and on a school level and in the community, that's what matters that I think a lot of time I have to take off my hat and meet people where they are because our parents are the ones who invest in our children. They are the ones who need the help, they need the voice. CPS has the money, CPS, they are going through their political drama between our governor or whatever, but on a daily basis, I have seen the [inaudible 00:10:05]. I sit back and observe how things work and then I watch and see how people react then I see okay lord is this where you want me to go, or is this meant to be? You have to learn the system. so I had to just get that off my chest.

Speaker 4: I was going to say to your question of, "Does our current school support our dream as parents?" Our dream for our son is that he not lose his voice. Which might sound like this general nebulous type of thing, but we really do believe that as long as he is able to continue to use his voice and feel confident in his voice, everything else will fall into place. When you are a parent looking at engaging with Chicago public schools, you hear almost nothing but negative feedback and that's really challenging if you have made the decision to invest in being a public school parent. What I will say is CPS is an erratic, unpredictable system and its very inconsistent, so I can only really speak to my experience at the school that we are currently at because I know that our experience is not what other people are having.

At our school, I do believe that my son is being encouraged to both maintain his own personal voice, to learn to understand the perspective of others, and to use his voice not just to amplify his own needs and concerns, but those of others as well. Our school has a strong social justice bend, which is important to us as a family too, and my little guy, he's an acquired taste. He can be a bit rigid and he can be a bit... he's gonna push back, not in a negative way, but because he really is just very curious about the world around him. I've been very impressed so far that instead of seeing him as a child who is testing the limits constantly, they have taken that as, "Okay, well what can we do with that idea? How can we progress that, how can we move that?" and that has encouraged him to feel like, "I am a part of the school community I'm a part of something bigger than myself."

We feel strongly that every child in Chicago should have that opportunity to be supported in that way, but we know it's not consistent at all across the board. I do feel that as he goes through the grades at our school that that will continue, that they will continue to make note of each of our children's interests, concerns, and find ways to build that into what they are learning so that its not just $1+1=2$, but move it into talking about community gardens and farmers markets. They literally take all their lessons and apply it to the bigger world that they live in, and help them to understand that this is not just about you and your classmates, but about a bigger system which I think is critical at this point in history.

I do agree, yes, that our school is doing what we hoped that they would do to support our at home lessons with him because by no means are we handing off responsibility at 8:30 every morning, but that their goals and mission statements support who we are as a family and I also believe that if that shifted at some point, if the schools goals and mission statements no longer aligned with us as a family, that we could talk about that, that the administration at our school would be open to hearing that feedback and responsive to that feedback as well, which is critical to us. Nothing stays the same forever. You have to be able and willing to move with the shifts and changes.

Speaker 5: I just want to touch on one thing, it sounds like there is a trend in what is being said about the involvement of parents and parents kind of driving the process. I think there's a long of great stories here about what you have to do to make sure that your child gets their education. Is there any thought that you all have about the children who are near schools that don't have that driving force from home, how your schools handle those kids, work with those kids, and what they are doing well, what they are not doing well with those kids?

Speaker 6: I can speak to that. At the school my daughter and their kids attend, one of the things that we started, I think it was maybe last year, we have a huge library at the school and so what ended up happening is splitting it and creating a smaller library for the kids that are in kindergarten through second grade. Testimonial to that, every other week I would go in to volunteer and there were different classes that would always come in. I would work with two kindergarten and one first grade class, and ran into a dad, I think it was Monday, he was like, "Are you in the library when my daughter comes in on Fridays?" I was like, "Yes, your daughter is..."

Ever since then, because I had never really taken her to a library and knowing that there was a library here at the school, she's always asking to go to the library. When you are working as a parent and going in and sitting with the kids, when they come in and they see all these books, they are like how do I know what book to pick out? You get to know their interests, you get to know that child when you sit with them, so this particular girl, she was able to find out what her particular interests was and they have been spending a lot of time in the library, so I just wanted to speak to those of us that knowing the kids and being a parent and being able to come into a welcoming environment at the particular school that my daughter is at, its critical and parental involvement is not only turned to your child, but it's touching other children that are around you and also their teachers and when they see it, they want you to be a part of something and [inaudible 00:15:54] creating something different, like is there a different avenue you can look at? Can you do trips to the library and things like that? I just wanted to, as a testimony to what we do as parent in school/ It matters and the families see it.

I think that one of the other things that we have done that strongly encourages that reaching out to the children who maybe mom can't be at everything or dad can't come to every event, is that those of us who are at this school all the time, they encourage us to work in other classrooms so that everybody has a mommy on the field trip. Its very much that idea of a community or family that in truth, in any of our family, there is a relative that cannot get a day off. There's some people who can't be available for X, Y, and Z, but in a family, in a community, there is someone there who makes sure your needs are met. Whether that be working in the lunchroom and helping somebody open their little fruit pack that they can't open or whether that be on the playground helping kids to resolve issues, I think that by encouraging us to not only work with our own children or their classroom, they are trying to broaden that reach to the families who it jut may not be realistic for them to send someone to the schools so frequently.

Speaker 2: At my son's school, they have mentor groups. They have a male mentor group and a female mentor group. The students know, we don't know what's going on in their households, but if they don't have that parent or that guardian who is gonna support them, they know that they can always go to their mentor who will advocate for them. Each student has an advisory, so their advisor can advocate for them.

I know plenty of times when I couldn't go to the school, my son would tell his advisor, "Hey, Mrs. Such-and-such gave me a demerit because of this," and the advisor would email them like "Oh, that was a mistake. You shouldn't have done that. I excuse him for this," so they know who to go to, but also we have a parent comity at my sons school and I'm always there. I tell them, I'm a social worker, so I'm always in the field, but I make it my business to stop at that school at least three days a week. When they see me, they will tell me, "Oh, Mrs. Such-and-such did this and I don't feel that's fair," and what we are starting is a student advisory comity so the students can actually advocate with that other student with the principal. We have Q&As where a student body president or student comity member would sit with the other student and that person that gave them a demerit and say, "Well, let's talk about this. How can this be redefined?"

They know what to do, they know the steps and they know they always can email the parent comity. It's been plenty of times I have sat with a child and that teacher and the principal in classrooms. They have an open door policy, so at any time I would email the teach or principal, "Hey, on Monday, can I sit in the AP math class and observe the teacher?" Or, "On Wednesday, can I sit in that physics class and observe the teacher," I will sit there and take my notes and as long as you give her a 24 hour notice, the principal, she will allow you to sit in that classroom.

We have times where students dislike a teacher for several reasons, they felt that the teachers were bullying their kids and what I mean, [inaudible 00:19:20], they know well I can give you a demerit or a detention for this and that, the kids, the principals have taught the kids what to do. This is what you do, you notate everything. This is what happened, this is the result of that, so they know how to take notes and how to advocate for themselves and at the end of, I believe last years school year, the kids did that for a whole two semesters and guess what, that teacher was no longer there the next year and the principal had proof. This is what the kids did, this is how they documented you. You didn't know they was documenting you, but they did. She had to listen to the voice of the kids. You cannot always... I know the principal has a code, it's a teacher code; we have to stick together. It's not always about that because if you are not listening, they will go over your heads to your CEO. The students know how to advocate for themselves and they know which way to go.

If they feel that they are not being heard, we have, like I said, within our parent advisory, we have once a school year, we have student panels and teacher panels where the students, no penalty, can say what you want to say and the principal, the administrators, the CEO, we invite all of them to come in and we want them to take notes and make those changes and those corrections. This school year, a lot of things have changed. Their detentions got cut a whole hour because the kids felt like why am I sitting in detention writing lines? I didn't learn from my mistake because you just had me writing lines. I need to know maybe I shouldn't use foul language in class, don't have me writing a dictionary. They know how to learn from their mistakes and they know what to do and the steps to make improvement in their school.

Speaker 7: The big picture I'm hearing is that you have to allow that principal to be flexible. I think that's the biggest thing is that a lot of principals have so much on their plate that they have tunnel vision and as you mentioned, your principal was saying, "Please, I know you have a child in kindergarten, but can you go to the second grade and help them out?" Or, "We have this many kids who are doing great in math. We need to up our game and create an AP class." It's giving the principal that flexibility, and in a lot of CPS schools, they don't have that.

They are overwhelmed, we all know that. The thing is, what you are hearing from just these two sides, and especially when you have the little [inaudible 00:21:41]. It's love all around and it deteriorates as the age of a child goes where the parent and principal [inaudible 00:21:56].

I think about where you see that child who doesn't have all that support because there are... You have a group that are supportive, that's not the group you are talking to.

You're talking to the ones that don't have it, but I will say that both at the high school and at the middle school. They are [inaudible 00:22:21] advisory. This is your homeroom teacher, even in the 6th and 7th grade in middle school, this is your advisor who you have all three years. You have developed a relationship and if I as a parent, I'm not so sure you're talking to that teacher, I have that advisor to be my middle man, or the advisor talk to the principal that I'm not very sure of, so that's one of the great things I like about the middle school is that my child, of course your middle school child is going to say I love this teacher. Well, I have a homeroom teacher and I have him for 6th, I have him for 7th, and if I have a problem and I can't really go to my parents, I can go to him.

Speaker 5: I have kind of a basic question because a lot of these sound like you have gained experience with your child and his school over time, how they interact with your school. It's really just a basic question about... I'm going to Chicago tomorrow, I don't know if I told you, I live in Minnesota, so let's say I move to Chicago tomorrow, how do I get my information? How do I know [inaudible 00:23:27]. What would y'all advise me to do if I was moving here?

Speaker 8: I'm curious what Gary has to say because you and Grace have gone to seven or eight schools so, I'm curious about what advice you have.

Speaker 7: First, I would talk to my friends and I'd also check out the website and look up each website and see ... Its kind of difficult to understand if you don't, are not familiar with... When we first started entering our kids into school when they went to kindergarten, we went to the closest neighborhood school and we wasn't happy with that. Actually, our oldest went to his grammar school and where his mom lives and we were not happy with the way, how the school was structured. It was so much different than when we were there when we were kids

Speaker 8: I'm sorry, what do you mean by structured?

Speaker 7: Just out of control, I'll just say out of control. I didn't want my daughter being in an environment that was not under control and so I began to... My mother-in-law was watching her so we went that way and then from there we wound up putting her at Drake.

Speaker 9: You forgot the private school.

Speaker 7: Yeah, there was private schools in between, but we ended up at Drake, right here on King Dr, which now they are tearing down and it was an excellent school. I went there and I begged and begged the principal because I had heard good things about it and I had to commute them back and forth and it was an excellent school, a diamond in the rough. It was in a midst of projects during that time and the principal was top-notch. She knew every student. She knew the parents. She held the teachers accountable and it was just a lovely environment, so I will just say basically talk to the people who may know what schools are good and what schools are bad. It also helps that if you know

teachers who is out there teaching in the field. That would be good. The principal sets the topic.

Speaker 5: Word of mouth?

Speaker 7: Word of mouth.

Speaker 6: Research. When my husband and I were first looking for a house, we wanted to do a neighborhood school. That was very important to us and when we moved, we unfortunately in CPS there is a range of good grammar schools, great grammar schools, and some schools you have to test into. At that time I knew my baby wasn't a great tester, so we wouldn't go that direction, but I knew with Dixon, which is one of the great grammar schools in the south side, if we move into the district, it don't matter, we will get in.

The year that he came into kindergarten, the district moved a block. Just one block, and unfortunately that was the year my [inaudible 00:27:15], but that's another story. Of course, I will do the research. I'm out here trying to find another school and then the school that we were in was very sub par. They had kindergarten through eighth grade, but the principal... I went to a parent meeting and I heard the principal had 15,000 for a budget and I'm like, so who is not getting their book? Somebody, a group of kids is gonna get new books and everybody else is gonna be something else. It struggled with my husband, so I said okay you know what, I'll move into... get a little small apartment, we'll use this address and, yes we went that far and we actually moved into, I got a little studio in Beverly so my child can go to Longwood.

Speaker 7: Wow.

Speaker 6: Okay, and every parent conference was with that teacher, I have 33 kids. Okay, but how's mine? I have 33 kids. Okay, but how's mine? That teacher was so hell bent on trying to figure out why she has 33 children that she actually put a map and she asked second graders how many songs does it take from home to school? So but my child is on a bus service, he's like five. Why is your son taking five songs, we only live two or three blocks away? It became an investigation. Oh yeah, this is what I went through.

The principal went and got [inaudible 00:28:50] to go to the rental unit to pull my apartment agreement and my child was still kicked out because my name was on my step mother's title and they claimed that was my address. I'm not gonna go racial, but it hurt me more that the president was an African American woman and the teacher was an African American woman, and you're looking at me with a black son and saying, "We don't believe you live here." That and my husband said, "We will go fight, we can fight," but I don't want my child to go there anyway.

That's what really hurt me because the barriers my son is going to have to go through in life because he is only in the second grade. Of course, now I'm on the record with the CPS records system and I have to go to the school that this house says I live and literally the second day when parents was able to come in, the teacher looked at me and said,

"Get him out," because he broke the class by reading ability. My son going in was the only boy that was reading at grade level in a sea of girls and all of the boys [inaudible 00:30:10] and I knew, she knew he will not learn because he is all by himself.

Speaker 1: That's why I have ... I'm not saying I'm against CPS because there are great opportunities in there. But, as a parent, you have to fight. You have to advocate for your child, especially in this system, because as Miss [inaudible 00:00:17] said, with the select enrollment, it's easy. They got the best of the best on top of the best. That's great, if your child is already taking accelerated classes. They're gonna care about that. But, if your child is, "Okay, yeah, he gets an A. Whoopee, whoopee." He's not that important to those whose gonna get them into Harvard and all that level. That's why it doesn't impress me when someone tells me, "Oh, my child was at Walter Payton." I said, "Great." "Or, my child was at Kenwick." "Wonderful." "Linwood." "Great." But, if your child is not in the AP classes from the jump street, your child is average in their eyes.

For those parents who don't have those abilities, you have to go outside because it is a fight for your child moving up in the CPS system for the high school. You should see the day when they take a test. It's like a match day for a medical school. It is literally ... It's a match day. You have children who has always done great in their school and they get a letter saying, "Oh, yes. You qualify for Linwood. You qualify for Kenwick." My son qualified for all the success schools except for Walter Payton." He couldn't get in any.

moderator: I want to take it back to this side of the room because I know, Grenier, you said your son is in third grade now and he has to test.

Grenier: Yes.

moderator: Did you think about what school he was at, when you were thinking, "Ah, man, he has to test. I want to make sure he's prepared.? Is that something that [crosstalk 00:01:52]?"

Grenier: The test he has to take is a standardized test he has to take this year. It's something within the school, I guess, all third graders may have to take. I know last year it wasn't a requirement. The last test he took, he was in, I want to say, kindergarten. And, he took. And he ... We had to trick him, and tell him that the actual test was a practice test 'cause he did well with the practice test, but he kept telling me he didn't want to take the actual test again. It was, like, we've got to take another practice again, because he was so scared of the test.

And, we, you know, as parents you want to instill that, "Okay, we got to do good on it." Except you gotta pass this test. So, he was so afraid to take it, but I'm just worried now that he still want to have that fear because I want him to excel but I don't want ... I'm scared that this test is going to hinder him. Of, he's not going to well on this test. Rather ... Not that he doesn't know the work. That's not the issue. It's, just, letting him know there's a test that you have to take.

Speaker 5: To the parent ... the third grader: I had a problem ... Well, I had concerns with my older

daughter about that. But, being in the public school system, and knowing how the standardized tests are put in place, the worse thing that a parent can do is we enable our children by instilling that fear in them by putting too much pressure on them at an early age to test well. Because, per se, the worst case scenario is that he has a teacher in that third-year benchmark who is not teaching them what he or she needs to know, but the test is really based on the knowledge that that child has learned from Kindergarten through third grade, the vocabulary, the understanding, the reading. And, nowadays, everything, almost everything ... If your child is at a school that has a lot of modern technology, is done on a computer. So, they should be in preparatory stage once they enter ...

Once you go back to school next week or, if you haven't started, that's what I would gage with the teacher, is to find out the steps that are being taken to prepare the child. And, then, testing day, if you ... I would say, "Well, you know you have to test well. I put a lot of stress. You cannot get a "C." I don't do C's. I don't do F's. I don't care you ... I will half kill you if you come here and tell me you got an F. Don't tell me what the teacher did." Say all of that and I had learn. "Okay. I'm not going to pressure you."

And, then, by me working with primary grades now, I see the parents of the gifted children. "You're gifted. You're this. You're that." Okay, that's all good and fine, but that child's in a classroom with everyone, so take it down a little notch to say, "Okay, baby, this is what we're gonna do." But, your teachers, your principal, should be able to tell you how they're preparing your child for the benchmark.

And, once it's done electronically, now ... CPS used to have a process where [inaudible 00:05:01]grades. So, the calculations were done at random. Now, when your child is at the laptop or at the Chromebook and they enter their answer, it's calculated and it's matched up city wide. So, there's no more centrally located in that school.

But, if your child has testing anxiety you have a right as a parent to ask for assistance in the beginning, in September. I don't care if it's an IEP. I don't care if it's additional reading. I don't care if they have to take your child ... If your child has special needs and is mentally-challenged, or they are having behavior problems, you have a right to ask for additional help in that school. Your principal has it in their budget to provide you with the help.

Chris: I know Nate had a question yet[inaudible 00:05:48]

Nate: So, I've heard lots of discussion about poor structural practice, and poor behavior. Particularly, your story has my heart broken right now. And, also, about good behavior and good structural practice. And, so, just very pragmatically and also specifically, I'm wondering when you walk into a school or you meet a teacher, when do you know that my child is in good hands? What are the indicators? What demonstrates to you? And, then, also, when do you walk in and you go, "Ot-oh." Like, what are the "ot-oh" signals to you?

moderator: I would love to hear from Laverne and David, too, because we haven't heard a lot from you. So, I want to give you some space. If you're comfortable with that, but I just

wanted to give you space if you did have something.

LaVerne: I'm really loving what you yet said about the school system 'cause I have a nine year old. And, unfortunately, he didn't pass third grade this year, and it was because of his ... the testing scores. When I look back at his grades and everything from the school year, report cards. Sure, he got D's, some D's, but he had A's and B's as well.

Because the school didn't notify me of his ... in the beginning that there was gonna be the test that he would have to take, that he would have to pass, I ... He's a good student. He did his homework. He loved doing school. But, he was struggling. He was struggling a lot in school, and I did my best. But, again, the teachers, had they notified me early on in the year that there was a problem with him and I needed to ... I could have gotten him tutoring. I could get a lot of things to help him.

But because they didn't work with me, so to speak, he failed. That was kinda devastating for him, because, like I said, I am his Grandmother. I'm also his foster ... guardian. That was just like another knock down for him. I just think that they need to be more ... They need to work with the parents a little bit more in the beginning and just ... Because this is ... He's failing third grade. This is his third year. So, he's been at that school since he was in Kindergarten, so they knew his record. But they failed to help me, or to help him, to get to the point where he needed to be. I just think that they need to be more patient with the children as well as the parents, and just kinda help us along so we know what to do and how to help our kids to be the best that they can be. You know?

Speaker 9: Can I ask you a question? I come from a unique perspective because I'm a college professor. When I was looking at schools for my child, I took the long view. What's going on in Kindergarten that's going to set up, not just my kid, but all kids in the school for success. Because to be honest, my kids are going to be fine wherever they go. I'm a college professor. I have the tools at home that whatever environment that she and my son are in, their lives are going to be fine. So, I'm not necessarily worried about them ... their educational outcome. But I am worried about social-emotional development, and being in a school that educates all children equally, not just ones like mine who have the benefit of two parents at home with college degrees.

And I did not want also my children also being in an environment that was very exclusionary, that only had children and families that looked like mine. And also I'm cheap and don't want to pay for private education. Because, also, as a college professor, I know that I ... First of all, number one, it's not necessary for you to pay exorbitant amounts of money to send your child to grammar school. And, number two, I'm not paying for my six year old to get something that other parents are paying me to do for their 18 year old. So, that was just off the table.

So, when I was doing my search, I was visiting lots of schools within the radius I was willing to travel. And I knew that ... She was only three or four at the time I was looking; yes, I'm a little psycho. But, she must have been three because my son had been born. And so I knew I had two children. And you never know ... I thought my four year old was brilliant. But my son was a baby and he could be a fool. Right? Which, actually, he is kind of [crosstalk 00:10:51] ... So, I knew that whatever school I was looking for, I was ... First

of all, I was not willing to separate my children. I don't want to do two pick ups and two drop offs. So, I needed a school that would be great for both of them regardless of what their actual intellectual ability turned out to be.

So, I was really looking at schools that had a selective enrollment component and a neighborhood component, so I could sorta just, "Wherever the chips may fall for my two children," let it go that way. So, I visited quite a few of them, and I visited a few of the schools that were solely selective enrollment. And, as many of you were saying, with the solely-selective enrollment schools, I was not impressed because I know that it is very easy to teach smart children. I have taught solely smart children. And, it's fun. And all I have to do is go into work and say, "Hey. So, what did you think about the book?" And then sit back for an hour and 20 minutes and just let them talk.

But, when you have ... And I've been at three college institutions, from a private school ... religious private school, selective, very selective to public university. Now I'm at Harold Washington at the community college. And the hardest job I've ever had, and the most rewarding, is at Harold Washington because my students come to me with very [inaudible 00:12:03]abilities.

So, when I walk into NTA, and the school was level two at that time. So, when you talk about, "How do you know what school to send your child to?" You must visit. You must talk to people. But, also, you must talk to the right people because you could talk to someone and they say, "You know, that NTA, it's level two. They got too many black kids there. They got too many poor kids there. It's not really for you." And, they might be right. Or, they mostly are wrong. Right? You have to go and visit yourself.

So, I went to the school because it's very close to my house. And, as soon as I walked in, I was ... First of all, I was impressed with the facilities and the order and the cleanliness that was going on there. But, then, I started to be ... I listened very closely to the ways that the teachers talked to each other, and the way the teachers talked to staff ... talked to administration. Right? Because any tensions that you may see amongst the teachers, between each other, or with administration, you know is going to boil down, bubble down into the classroom. Right? So, if the principal is a tyrant or a dictator ... On those open houses you know they're all on their best behavior, but you can always feel that tension. And I felt no tension there, and I felt comradery, and I felt respect amongst the teachers. So, for me I said, "Okay. That's a good point."

And, then, I started asking them questions about their educational practice, very specific questions. And I do have the advantage of being an insider, so I knew the kinds of questions to ask. Right? What do you think about differentiated instruction? What do you do when you have a kid who can read in first grade, and a kid who can't recognize the letter A? How do you do that? And their answers impressed me. And then I went into the classroom and I looked around at everything that was in the classroom to help with instruction. What kinds of things do they have on the board? What kinds of questions? How is the alphabet set up? How are the numbers set up? What kind of math work? What kinds of questions were they asking? And I did this at many, many schools including private schools.

And when I went to NTA, what I saw was a level of, first of all, teachers who understood their practice. They understood that regardless of where a child came from, and what level they came from, they knew how to take that child and make that child excel to the best of that child's ability. And, if a school can take a Kindergartner who cannot recognize the letter A and get them to grade level by the time they leave Kindergarten, my child, I know, is going to be fine. And, so, there was just a feeling when I went to NTA and talked to the teachers, and looked at the classroom, and saw what they were doing on the actual, practical level, and then it also felt good as a school. That I said, "Okay. This is the one for me."

And, it has been a sort of amazing experience for us. But, it is complicated because, as I tell many people, Chicago has ... CPS has a lot of problems, but almost, in a way, as parents our biggest problem is we have too many choices. It sounds funny to say that, but many people move to the suburbs to escape the tyranny of choice. Right? Selective enrollment. Neighborhood school. Private college. Catholic school. Non-religious ... Like I just don't know ... charter school. It's too many choices, and so, in a way, we can drive ourselves crazy trying to figure out what's the best one for my child. Where, in the suburbs, in many suburbs, you just don't have that problem. You move. They all go to this school[crosstalk 00:15:58]

Chris: What you were saying ... that this is very important. [crosstalk 00:16:01]

Speaker 9: And you have to ask your own questions because if you ask questions of your friends ... You think their values line up with yours, you may get ... You may ... Because I've had many people to me who I thought had similar values, when they find out that my child is in a public school, they're like ... [crosstalk 00:16:25]

moderator: For a second. We have only about ten more minutes left. Time flies by. And there are two things I want to raise. I know Bruce has been raising his hand for forever. I fear you're going to kill me if I don't let you speak, but, also, David hasn't had a chance to speak. So, let's have David go, and then Bruce you can go. Then, I'll hand it back to Chris.

Chris: Well, and Sherrick hasn't gone[crosstalk 00:16:46]

Speaker 10: Right quick. I have Grandkids, and notice when ... I'm old school. [inaudible 00:16:58] when I've had him his homework, man, he'll take ... I'll say, "Two plus two plus this and that." And, he'll forget. I just told you that. And he'll have ten seconds. And I noticed that when commercials come on, he can sit all [crosstalk 00:17:13]. Like a genius. So, I'm learning. I'm learning. Old school is out, but patience. But patience. But patience. He's a genius.

moderator: Chris, did you want to ask [crosstalk 00:17:34]

Speaker 11: I'm gonna say this story quick. We ... While we was in our search for schools, we ... My son went to this one school and, it was what? Third grade? He went to the school, come home first day, no books. Come home the fourth day, no books.

I had a parent-teacher conference. So, I get there. The principal was there. Staff was

there. And his teacher ... Me and my wife had went to the school. He always had, no disrespect, but always had the mothers there. They smile and lookin' at him 'cause he had long hair, and they talkin' to him, making goggly eyes, and I'm sittin' up there. I'm like, "Okay. Enough of this nonsense."

So, we get in to have the conference. So, everybody's standing around, so I stand up. I say, "My son has been here almost two weeks. How come he doesn't have any books?" Oh, well, our budget ... goinng through the [inaudible 00:18:46]budget. I said, "Well, I tell you this, my son had better have some books when he come home the next day."

My son comes home, has all the books. And, then, I ask him a question. What about your other students? Oh, they just gave me the books. So, my wife is looking at me. I'm looking at her. And my wife is like, I guess I'm going back to my search again. I say, I guess you are.

And this school was in Hyde Park. So, it does ... what she brought up about visiting schools, looking over it. But that was awful. I said that was in Hyde Park, good school. Well, we thought it was. But, I admit. I gave those people in their office grief. I wouldn't let up. I was constantly to the point that the secretary when I walked in the principal office, she just kinda like her face would just get red because I guess, he's about to complain about something. So, we got him out of there.

moderator: And, Sherrick, just wanta ask[crosstalk 00:20:06]

Sherrick: One thing that has been consistent throughout this conversation is just how much black parents, not only love their kids and want the best for them, but they have that same desire and aspirations for other people's kids, like this communal feel, like I've heard it so many times. People like, "Hey. Also, other children ..." And talking about just what respect to other people's children, which is always just heartwarming. So, my questions relates to, again, I heard this theme, also, but I want to ask you point blank and I'd like you to just give me one kind of word or sentence to respond. We're raising kids in a society that's held them or crushing them, their psyche. There's just so many tracks and arrows pointed in their direction. What do you look for in a school? How is your school supporting a positive, strong positive racial identity in your child or children?

moderator: Yeah. And if we could answer that, but also give space so we can have multiple answers. Try to keep it a little short. And I think, Cassan, you raised your hand earlier to answer something[crosstalk 00:21:19], and I had to shut you down. But, if you want to answer this question.

Cassan: Last year, my son had an advisor. He left to go to [inaudible 00:21:32]. Well, a lot of questions of the path I chose for my son, his mother and I chose with the [inaudible 00:21:42], but we still had that common chord, a ... This is the path you walk. You always have two choices, no matter where you go. Obvious choices.

His advisor was ... He accepted him as not only as an advisor, but as a friend and a mentor, as well. And, I said, "Son" Whenever you think about it, I said, I don't take it personally because you're bein' fathered. I said, I'll see you every day and I'll pick you up

every day, and every time I see your advisor, instructors, we see ... I'm glad to have your son. I wish more students were like your son.

And, which is good 'cause any time you have a teacher or any type of administrator in a teaching environment, that's in it for the students because everybody can't, is not gonna catch things just like that. But, for the teacher to step aside and make sure your student or your child gets it, very impressive. Many schools don't do it. You got all these selective-enrollment schools that don't even work with your son and make sure that he paid attention or he grabs the material.

moderator: And can June say something[inaudible 00:23:03]

June: Yeah, when he were asking about how do you feel when you go visit the school and things like that, when I ... When my son got ... He got accepted to quite a few schools, but the Noble Network had a high school fair at EYC. So, that's how I got introduced to the Nobel Network, but then I have my nephew, Monti, her son who is a senior who goes there. So, my son had been to a few things at Gary Como, and I guess he just liked the way they had things set up. They way the teachers interact with the students, the structure. Things like that. He comes from an IB school. So, of course, they wore uniforms. They had structure. They had this. You know, and things like that. So, for him to transform over to a school that had it, it wasn't a big adjustment for him. Now, the only thing that he is worried about as far as the LaSalle, demerits, and things like that[crosstalk 00:24:02]

Chris: What is LaSalle?

moderator: It's after school

June: After school. Homework or something.

Chris: Got it.

June: I think it's like an hour. [crosstalk 00:24:09]

LaVerne: It's an hour. If there's 20 math problems, and you miss one. Well, you go to LaSalle to correct that math problem. So, therefore, you're learning how to do the problem right.

June: Right.

LaVerne: Or, if you didn't turn in the homework assignment. Well, now you have LaSalle and you're gonna finish that homework.

Chris: It's like mandatory office hours. [crosstalk 00:24:27]

LaVerne: It's like mandatory office hours. It's like La Salle Street, the bank. The job is never finished until it's done. [crosstalk 00:24:33]

June: Right. You know. So, [crosstalk 00:24:35] I didn't understand. Like I said, this is my first

year... This is our first year with the Nobel Network. And, so far, it's been the first week of school. I like it. I'm fine with it. I'm with the discipline because I'm not tolerant like a parent. You don't go to school to play. You don't go to school to foolishness because ... Even in his grammar school, if I get this phone call that you're acting up, when I get there, they don't even ask me to sign in. They don't even ask me to [inaudible 00:25:13]. They know where I'm going. And I won't be there long. I'll be walking right back out in about five minutes, and you won't have no problems any more.

So, when I got like the calls like from, I guess, the advisor and the counselor, one lady, Miss Davenport, we talked. She called me so much, we talked on the phone before we even met. It was like when I walked in the door, me never laying eyes on her, we knew exactly who each other was because we had talked so much. And I was telling her that, of course, as a parent, you always want your child to do better than you. Not that I've done bad for myself, but you always want your child to have more.

And I tell my son, he's that type of kid. He will raise his hand in class, you know, if he don't know something or something didn't sit with him at all. But, sometimes, like this gentleman said, all kids don't get it on the first try. You might have to ask two or three more times, and I had to tell my son, the dumbest question you can ask is the one you don't ask. If you don't understand, right, you have to keep your hands up the whole class. Get what you need to get. These teachers here are here to help you. But, still, you make sure that you get and understand. Don't worry about what nobody else has to say because those who are over here, or whatever, they might not know neither, but they tryin' to take that attention off of them, and put it on you.

So, like he said, I'm not a whiz at math. My son loves math. Good for him. Mommy you like ... You tell me you need help with math, I'm going on the search board, too, so you can get this extra help. Gary Coleman, they've got, "After School Matters." They have the office hours. They're got the mentor. They have whatever you need is right here at your ... Don't never be afraid to say. You have the advisor.

The first day of school, they tried to give him LaSalle. Said that he didn't finish his homework packet. I'm sittin' outside waiting for him. Twenty minutes done went past. The school is cleared. All the kids are gone, but my son hasn't come out. So, I go in and they say he has LaSalle. Why? He didn't finish his homework packet. Yes he did, and I gave it to his teacher, his advisor, Mr. Snaw. So they had to call him down. I said, "I gave it to you with his medical form, his lunch form, and everything." It's in the office. He done turned it in to the office instead of keeping it himself. He didn't even want to come out the class 'cause he know I was standing there with all kinds of frowns on my face, like, why do you have LaSalle on the first day of school? And I know he did the homework because I turned it in for him.

The fact that they keep up. They serious. I love the uniform code. They check uniform every day. Anything that's not in place, you get this demerit or whatever it is. Anything that's not ... That shirt better be tucked in. This belt better be on. All that other extra stuff; we don't have no time for that. They have a binder that they gave them. It has to be in order. You got the tags on. It's in order. I love it. [crosstalk 00:28:17] It's the discipline. Like she said, I can't be over you. It's up to you to do your homework. It's up

to you to make sure. This teacher said this work is due Friday and you got it on Monday, there's no reason why it shouldn't be done on Friday. There's no reason.

moderator: I hate to be the time police. I'm so sorry. I hate playing this role. But we've reached out time. But, if you wanted to share what you're going to say, we're gonna do some quick reflections on the camera after. So, if there was some things that you didn't get a chance to say here, you can do that on camera. You can just stay in the room and sit over here. Of course, not gonna' be 30 minutes on camera. Just a couple minutes, two, three minutes to share what it was that you were going to say. But I'm gonna hand it off to Chris, so he can go ahead and close us out.

Chris: Thank you all for coming today. I want to thank you for sharing your voices, sharing your stories. What I want to encourage you all to do is to just know that this a part of the most important part of making change in education is to collect the stories and have people who are experiencing things to share their experience with others. Because if you are telling me the story that you just told me, there's a thousand other people trying to demystify all that you've already learned. And the best that we could possibly do is have folks like you raising your voices. Whether that's writing. Whether that's showing up to things where you get to tell your story about the folks. But there are people behind you that need to hear everything that you just said today: the struggles, when did you figure out, what do you know now that you didn't know two years ago. 'Cause somebody else needs to know exactly that. So, please continue to share your stories. Share through Ed Posts. Talk to E-class. I just really thank you for stepping up. Appreciate you all. Thank you. [crosstalk 00:30:02]