

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

**“RESOURCE ALLOCATION, REINVESTMENT, AND
EDUCATION REFORM”**

**PANEL II: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES:
STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS IN HIGH SCHOOLS**

MODERATED BY:

**MELISSA LAZARÍN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
POLICY, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

FEATURED PANELISTS:

**JOSEPH JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL
CENTER FOR URBAN SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION**

**BETHANY LITTLE, CHIEF EDUCATION COUNSEL,
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, LABOR,
EDUCATION, AND PENSIONS**

**ADRIA STEINBERG, VICE PRESIDENT,
JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

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MS. MELISSA LAZARIN: Good morning. I'm Melissa Lazarin, Associate Director of Education Policy at the Center for American Progress and I'm very excited to be moderating this discussion today. It's an exciting time to be working in education. President Barack Obama and United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have brought about a lot of new discussion around American schools and American high schools. High schools, which haven't always been front and center, are very much a part of this discussion.

As we heard this morning, Secretary Duncan is aiming to turn around 5,000 of the lowest performing schools across the country in the next five years, with a particular focus on 2,000 dropout factories, schools in which graduation from high school is simply not the norm.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act invests \$3 billion into school improvement to turn around our nation's lowest performing schools. On top of that, the president's fiscal year 2010 Budget allocates \$1.5 billion in school improvement to meet these goals. In an effort to help address the dropout crisis, both the economic recovery package and the fiscal year 2010 budget strive to drive at least 40 percent of these funds to middle and high schools. The president's budget also includes a \$50 million high school graduation initiative.

At the Center for American Progress, we've been working very closely with folks around the table on federal policy changes to support dramatic change at the secondary school level. The Graduation Promise Act, for example, is a \$2.5 billion federal proposal that would target resources and reforms to turn around struggling low income high schools, depending on the severity of the challenge in that school.

Also with Senator Kohl, Congressman Kildee, and Jobs for the Future, the Fast Track to College Act was introduced in March. If passed, this legislation would establish 150 million competitive grant programs to support school districts and institutions of higher education to develop early college and dual enrollment programs.

Our panelists may expand on these initiatives and proposals in their remarks, so I'll keep it at that. I'll turn to them now and they can share their perspective of how some of these school improvement dollars can or should be targeted, how they should be used, and what might be needed to make sure these dollars are used most effectively.

We'll start with Adria Steinberg. She's the Vice President of Jobs for the Future and leads the organization's program and policy development efforts to improve educational options for young people who have disengaged or disconnected all together from the educational system. Ms. Steinberg and her team work with state and federal policymakers to improve graduation rates and support creation and scale up of high quality pathways for off-track and disconnected youth.

Joe Johnson is currently Executive Director of the National Center for Urban School Transformation and the QUALCOMM Professor of Urban Education at San

Diego State University. At NCUST, he identifies, studies, and promotes the best practices of high-performing urban schools and districts. He's actually worn a number of different hats in education. Previously he served as a teacher in San Diego, as a district administrator in New Mexico, as a state department official in both Texas and Ohio, as a researcher and service provider at the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas, and as the Director of Student Achievement and School Accountability at the U.S. Department of Education where he directed Title I programs. He's done a lot. He's been around the block.

Bethany Little likely needs no introduction to this room. She is Chief Education Counsel to Senator [Edward] Kennedy (D-MA) for the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. In this role, she works on legislation governing early childhood programs, elementary and secondary education, higher education, and workforce training. Prior to joining the Senate HELP Committee staff, she was vice president for policy and federal advocacy at the Alliance for Excellent Education, where she was responsible for guiding the Alliance's policy work on high school reform issues, including accountability and school improvement, adolescent literacy and college prep.

We'll begin with Adria first, as I mentioned, and why don't we just start right away.

MS. ADRIA STEINBERG: I just wanted to add one thing to my bio, a little known fact about me is that in 1962 I was a high school senior in Washington DC Public Schools and I was a founding member of a group called High School Students for Better Education. And I have not stopped working on high schools since.

There are two things that I'm going to talk about today and hopefully these are things that will help us be both bold enough and strategic enough in the actions that we begin to take around high schools.

Secretary Duncan talked this morning about the need to look at what's working. So the first thing I'm going to talk about is the typology of pathways that Jobs for the Future has been developing based on work we do in districts and states around the country. And the typology groups, models, and designs that seem most promising into three pathways that can go a long way towards moving underrepresented and low income students to improve postsecondary-- this is the question that I'm going to start with. And then I am going to discuss something else the Secretary talked about this morning, which is the need to have the right interventions at the right time. I'm going to share what we're learning and work we're doing right now with Bob Balfanz and the Everybody Graduates Center, looking closely at 17 states that account for 70 percent of the 2,000 high schools—those 2,000 high schools everybody keeps talking about that Bob first identified several years ago as being dropout factories. Those are my two things.

So let me start with the pathways. When Michelle Cahill was asked several years ago why the Kline administration in New York City, with whom she was working at the time, why they were closing down so many low performing high schools in the city, she

said: “We can’t improve our way to something that has not been invented yet.” What she was saying was that she knew that to address the massive dropout problem in New York City, they had to find a way to open things up for innovation and innovators and both inside the system and outside in order to invent new pathways and school designs that would engage and educate students and get them to the finish line of graduation from high school and also preparation for postsecondary.

We can now see some emerging evidence in New York City, and some other cities, of the success of this approach. They’re making real progress in their graduation rates and, in part, this is indeed by pioneering innovative new models.

So when we looked at what New York and other cities like Chicago, Baltimore, and Philadelphia the innovations that we’ve been doing and the school designs, we saw them as sort of falling within three basic pathways. And those three pathways are on the slide.

The first one is blended designs, which is a fancy way of saying secondary and postsecondary, a kind of a new kind of high schools that bridges secondary and postsecondary, accelerates learning early on so students can start college while they’re in high school.

The second pathway, back on track, is exactly what it says it is: a pathway for young people who are off track to graduation from high school. They’re over age. They’re under credited. Once you get into that situation in high school, your chances of graduation are slim to none. So there’s got to be a pathway back for those young people.

And the third one is a GED to college pathway. A large number of all the dropouts find themselves with almost no options for obtaining credentials and they lack the skills sometimes even required for GED. They need a pathway that combines GED prep and college prep and supported transition to postsecondary.

So these are some slightly more detailed slides that talk about the number of different models. And the reasons why these pathways are important are on this slide, which I won’t go over.

There are a number of different actual designs and models within each of these pathways. Within the blended schools pathway, there’s everything from the kind of Cadillac model of the early college high school that compresses the time to an AA degree or to two years of college credit. So that’s at one end of the spectrum and then there are dual enrollment type programs that at least, at the very least, allow students a leg up to earning college credits. Wherever the model lands on that continuum, what links the blended schools is that they are untracked and yet they’re fully aligned to college-ready standards, but they use instructional practices, differentiated instructional practices, to get diverse learners to those standards and in doing so improve the college success rate.

We've been strong results from the first early college high schools across the country to graduate students. There's—so far have been 2,500 graduates at those schools, there will be many more in a few more years and, of that group, 88 percent of the graduates earn college credit and 40 percent earn more than a year of college credit, which is a key predictor of college success.

The second pathway, the back on track pathway – these designs are to accelerate the progression of young people who, as I said, are over age and under credited. And if they combine a college prep academic coursework with the kinds of engagement activities and support that are necessary for this group of young people once they've fallen off track. And often this is offered through a community partnership model that drastically changes the balance of adults and young people in the building.

The goal of these schools is to prepare students to enter postsecondary without remediation. They make use of a number of key practices, some the same as the blended schools, some different. They do frequent and ongoing assessments and feedback. They work hard on getting a kind of effort-based culture going in these schools with advocate counselors who work with no more than 50 students and sometimes as few as 25. They also customized the program to where the students are in their trajectory to graduation; so that they can get the credits they need and get them efficiently, so they move in and out of these schools and anywhere from one year, for students who already have a lot of their credits, to two and a half years.

New York City has been the premier existence proof of this pathway. Their schools for overage and under credited students have been graduating them at three to four times higher rates than the traditional high schools. In the traditional high school, those students in New York had a 19-percent chance of graduation. And then these new schools they've set up, they have a 68 to 78 percent chance.

The third pathway, the GED to college, the idea here, as I said, is to make the GED a springboard to postsecondary degree or credential program, not an end in itself. Many of these are situated in community colleges or they can be community based programs that partner with the community college. They combine a kind of intensive GED and college prep with the supported transition to postsecondary, often including special bridge programming about 12 to 14 weeks that goes over not just the academic skills, but what we call college knowledge, which is a whole other set of non-cognitive skills you need to succeed in college. They also offer a web of services to address students' academic, social, and financial needs as they make this difficult transition from a GED program to college.

And again, this is a very early stage of development on the GED one, and we do have emerging results now from several promising programs. One, called the Youth Development Institute in New York, shows higher college retention rates for the group of the students they've worked with. They got up to a 70-percent college retention rate, which is amazing, since 4 percent of GED holders ever get college degrees of two or four

years in this country. And they're showing that they have higher or equivalent first semester GPAs as well.

So these new designs and pathways, all of which we can now find in a small number of cities and states, provide us with ample existence proofs that we can do better by low income and ethnically diverse students, many of whom are now trapped in the very high schools that Melissa and Arne Duncan and everybody's talking about, these 2,000 or more very dysfunctional high schools. The challenge is how we're going to transform or replace these high schools so that the new models become the norm.

Certainly the policies that states need to put in place to create the conditions for redesign are part of this equation. And among those policies, there are things like the importance of counting graduation rates accurately and making them count in accountability. There are the things that people were just talking about from the city level of meeting the conditions from the state for innovation and redesign to take place, providing for charter-like flexibilities.

So there are a number of policy levers for doing this. I'm going to put in a plug here for several briefs that JFF is about to come out with in June. We did a scan of dropout policies and alternative education policies across the states in this country and we looked at how close or far states are from what might be considered a model set of policies. And let's just say we had a long way to go, but there are policies that states need to pay attention to.

What I'm going to talk about very briefly right now is the report with Bob Balfanz that we're doing that we hope is going to help federal and state leaders drill down beyond these big policy sets to selecting strategies and action steps that they can use in addressing their dropout factory high schools. And as I said a minute ago, we looked at the 17 states that account for 1,600 of the 2,000 high schools that have been named. And we asked ourselves what kind of analysis, what key questions would help policy and practice leaders, whether federal or state, be [sic] as intentional and strategic as possible in where and how they target resources in those states.

We came up with three sets of questions. Everything goes in threes. I'm not exactly sure why—but we came up with three sets of questions, each of which has its own set of analytic tools. I'm only going to talk about one of those today just to give you a flavor of how much is possible in the way we think about this stuff.

We looked to see whether states and districts differ from one another. We looked to see whether the ways in which states and districts differ, because we all know they differ, but whether those ways of differing follow any discernable patterns that could be helpful. And we found a key pattern in the distribution and the spread of low performing high schools. So we found three different—again this is a typology of three, sorry about that – but there's three different patterns that we found within concentration and spread.

The first is a set of states—what we call “intense concentration” in one or two cities. So you might think about New York here or Pennsylvania here, where you’ve got essentially one large city that drives the problem in the state. So there’s a very high number and a large size of these low graduation rate high schools in these cities. So you can only raise the state graduation rate by transforming or replacing these schools in these cities, but it’s really hard thing to do politically because the rest of the state is just not feeling the pain.

Okay, so that’s the first group. Some of the policy implications there is really that the local leaders – the superintendents, the mayors – as one of our speakers this morning said: “The rallying of the city needs to happen.” They’ve got to be lead actors in those states. The State Department of Education is often geographically and even culturally distanced from the impacted cities. And, as I said, the policymakers are reluctant to bring resources there. The state can play some key role also, by removing policy barriers to innovation such as contracting rules that might prevent the inside-outside partnerships that are so important to invention. They can revamp their alternative ed policy, again in ways that we talk about in this forthcoming report, so that it’s more in tune with getting the set of back on track models that I’ve just talked about before.

Federal policymakers also can play a role. They can keep the pressure on these states to raise their graduation rates and to address the dropout factory high schools and they can make resources directly available to some of the local innovators, which is what’s starting to happen in the Innovation Fund.

The second major category is states with geographic spread and low to modest concentration. So these states are in the best position to make some progress on this because the schools, the 2,000 schools – whatever percentage they have of them – are spread out enough to warrant state action, but it’s a small enough number. They may just be one in five or one in six schools in the state to be manageable, so that the governor and other leaders really have an opportunity to make the case for reform. And we can see some examples of this actually in North Carolina, which is the state that Charlotte-Mecklenburg is in. The governor was able to make the case for an imperative of high school redesign to address the dropout crisis and he linked it to the economic viability of the state. This enabled the development of signature model there called Learn and Earn, which is actually a blended school model, secondary-postsecondary, and where they could demonstrate good practice and make use of the community college as a partner. And the state also invested in the creation of a public-private partnership with an independent entity called the North Carolina New Schools Projects that would support Learn and Earn and then use what they were learning in Learn and Earn in the lowest performing high schools.

The third category is states with high concentration and extensive spread. And the way to think about this is states where these schools are basically everywhere. It’s an endemic problem. And not surprisingly, these are some of the states that have the lowest graduation rates in the country, very high imperative to act. However, the scope of the problem and often these states are among the most economically challenged, makes it

really necessary for federal government both presence and investment. Again, they're going to need pressure to focus on low graduation rate high schools, and make sure these schools use data on where students are and their trajectory to graduation and, hence, what's needed in terms of new models for these students. Actions in these kinds of states might also include capital investment to reconfigure these behemoth high schools into smaller autonomous schools, money to increase the number and variety of staff, professional development to retrain the teachers and leaders, and so on.

So these are the states, I think, that in some ways the federal government is going to have to focus investment on the most because they're not going to be able to do it themselves.

So I'm not going to talk much about the federal opportunities because I'm sure we've got Bethany down the road here who's going to do a lot of that. But what I've tried to do in these few minutes is just offer two ways that federal and state leaders can be strategic in making their investments in high school, both through leveraging what's known about effective models and pathways, and then asking the right questions, doing the kind of analysis that's going to provide them with valuable information in selecting and fashioning the right combination of actions and strategies to transform low performing high schools.

And I just want to really end by saying that the stimulus act and what's in the Recovery Bill positions well, I think, a number of high school focused bills that Melissa just mentioned, and that Bethany will probably talk more about, that you might not be as familiar with and I think are important to watch. And these are all moving right now in Congress and hopefully will become part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. And I include in that list the Fast Track Bill that Melissa just talked about, which does begin to make for a federal investment for advancing practices such as the early college high school kinds of practices that accelerate students who are underrepresented in higher education. There's a Secondary School Innovation Fund Bill, which Harry Reid has filed, which I think is important to look at for some innovations in practice and in models that can happen. And then there's the Graduation Promise Act, which is a targeted federal investment in high school, both through formula grants and also some competitive grants particularly focused on off-track students that are going to be an important way to get innovation and invention going in that sector.

MR. JOSEPH JOHNSON: Good morning. I'm from an entity called the National Center for Urban School Transformation. We identify, study, and try to promote the best practices of high performing urban schools and we do that elementary, middle, and high school, but I am going to focus my comments on what we believe we're learning from our examination of high performing high schools, high performing urban high schools.

The question is how can we influence improvement in secondary schools? And I'm going to offer three suggestions about what might be critical. And the first is getting the goals right.

I would argue that one of our challenges currently is that, as the Secretary mentioned this morning, we have set the bar low. I've always thought of myself as a proponent of the notion of standards based reform, the idea that if we're clear about what the standards ought to be and such that that clarity reflects high expectations for all students, then all of us can work toward ensuring that all children attain those standards.

The first place that arguably we have missed when it comes to high school reform is that we haven't set those standards high. It is often a fact that students can meet state standards, as might be articulated through state assessments, and still fail miserably to attain a level of academic strength that would allow them to succeed in college. If we're going to do this right, we need to set the goals such that we stimulate the alignment of high school standards and college success standards. And one way of thinking about this is looking at what is required in order to not need remediation when one enters postsecondary education and then to ask the question why should that be any different from what we expect students to know and be able to do when they leave high school, the alignment of those two notions.

In setting the right goal, it's really important for us to increase the weight we hold on graduation and dropout rates in our accountability formula. The fact is that in a number of states throughout this country, attention to dropout rates or graduation rates as a function of accountability is almost an after thought. We have these notions about the percentage of students who have to attain proficiency, based again on our existing standards, and a lot of attention is directed to that. But in some states all that is necessary to achieve proficiency is a 1-percent increase in the percentage of students who graduate. Such minimal expectations make it such that what schools truly understand is that we, as a public, are not serious about the extent to which we improve graduation rates and decrease dropout rates.

Another important issue in setting the right goals is requiring data collection, reporting, and accountability related to advanced course taking and college credit earning. When I go to high-performing high schools and I ask the question: what percentage of your students is enrolled in advanced courses? What percentage of your students earned college credit last year? I get immediate answers because they collect those data. They look at those data. They talk about those data within community. In contrast, when I go to schools that are struggling, no one is able to answer those questions, except for in those places where the answer is zero because they know that they don't offer those courses or they don't have those partnerships with local colleges. And so if we're going to set the goal right, we need to make it clear that this is part of the formula.

As well, we need to increase focus on issues such as student and teacher attendance. Now, I know that we have student attendance as a part of some of our accountability formulae. Teacher attendance is generally not in the mix, but it is important because in many of our dysfunctional schools teacher attendance is lower than student attendance. If we have some notion that high quality teachers matter, then we need to be concerned that in many of our urban schools it is common for students to be

taught by substitute teachers. As well, it's important for us to examine suspension and expulsion rates and other indicators of school climate. All of that has to be a part of the context of getting the goals right for where we're aiming school reform and all that has to be done in a manner that maintains the focus on closing achievement gaps. So all of these issues, they need to be examined as they relate to all of the diverse populations of children served within those schools.

Then, once we have the right goals, I believe it's important to encourage the right learning environments. This means building the capacity of states to support schools in pursuing those goals. It also means providing resources to support the creation of high-interest paths to learning those new standards—high-interest paths that will enable students to achieve those new standards that align with measures of college success, and providing incentives for aligning courses and programs of study with those college success standards.

In any high school across this country, teachers ought to be able to articulate to students, and to parents, that in a given course, this is what you're going to learn and this is how it relates to what you will need to know in order to succeed in college. As well, programs of study should be able to articulate that connection. This is what you're going to learn here and this is how it relates to what you're going to need in order to succeed in college.

And then we need to provide incentives for collecting, analyzing, and responding to school climate data and learning data. I pair those two, I don't think that we do a good job of collecting, analyzing, and responding to learning data, especially at the high school level. We do a lot of amassing data, but we don't do a good job at helping educators use those data in ways that bring about change.

In some schools, the amassing of those data is like a grant postmortem where people look at it and say, "yes, that's what I could have told you." I knew that those students weren't going to succeed. In contrast, we need educators to have the skill, to have the time, to have the leadership that helps them sit down with those data, pull them apart, and see themselves reflected in that data, to see their teaching reflected in those data. As well, though, we need to help educators be able to do the same with school climate data.

Then we also want to provide incentives for building supports to ensure student success in meeting those new standards. It's not just enough that we have these new standards. We have to think about how do we crate the scaffolds, how do we build the ramps that will ensure that large percentages of students will attain those standards. How do we create the extra supports that will be necessary for those children who need extra help? Middle school has to be an essential part of that formula. We can't start thinking about achieving these new standards when children enter ninth grade. We have to start thinking earlier than that.

It's about setting the right goals. It's creating the environments that will help lead to the attainment of those goals, but then it's about holding the right folks accountable for the right things, which means requiring states to target school improvement resources to the specific issues that underlie low performance.

Now, a big part of what's been talked about in terms of the stimulus money is including \$3 billion for school improvement resources, which sounds wonderful, but it also sounds extremely scary to me. As I look at a lot of urban schools today that are receiving school improvement money, they don't have a clue about what the real issues are that are the cause of underlying low performance. Or, if they have a clue, those school improvement resources aren't being directed in ways that address those underlying needs. Additional resources aren't going to be powerful in turning schools around unless those resources are directed at the real issues. This means that states have to be smarter in how they allocate those resources, so that there are outside folks involved who are objective eyes that ask what the real issues that underlie low performance are.

Then, within current legislation, there's this notion of states providing systems of support. Well, we need to hold states accountable for creating systems of support that actually result in improvement. States have to ask the system of support, "how many low-performing schools did your system help turn around?" If the answer is close to zero, then that means that you really didn't have a system of support.

We need to hold districts accountable for a whole lot more than we are currently holding them accountable for. Much of the current focus is at the school level, but these schools don't exist in isolation. We need to be very cognizant of district roles and school board roles as it comes to allocating resources wisely. Comparability in federal education policy is currently an issue that is so grossly under tapped. Policy wise, we speak with forked tongue when we say that we really care about the notion of improving the distribution of high quality teachers in our low-performing schools, when at the same time we define comparability in ways that don't consider the salary differentials. Our current way of assessing comparability is that one teacher over here is the same as one teacher over here. However, we know that if over here is an affluent neighborhood and over here is a low-income neighborhood, the teacher unit in the affluent neighborhood is usually costing a lot more than the teacher unit in the low-income neighborhood. When we define comparability in ways that make these two look equal, we basically bless that and allow systems to go on.

There are a great number of issues about holding districts accountable for developing those smart HR policies and building stable leadership. When superintendents, like the gentleman from Baltimore, said he was the seventh one in 10 years, holding schools accountable is missing the big picture when we have school boards what allow for that kind of instability. However, we also want to hold schools accountable for evaluating teachers and programs.

This suggests that there is this larger context and all this has to be done in a system that hopefully recognizes and emphasizes strengths. We need to exponentially

increase efforts to acknowledge and celebrate growth. Policy should be designed and administered in ways to treat schools as partners, not enemies. However, we can't shy away from hard decisions about personnel and programs.

MS. BETHANY LITTLE: Looking around the room, I can see some very interesting folks that I think can help us to have a rich conversation here. And I think that Adria and Joe have both done a fabulous job in laying out some of the really important pieces of the systemic picture. Adria's talked a lot about what we know at the state and local level in terms of what change needs to look like and what circumstances exist to drive that. And I really think you're set up around where the expectations need to be and what we need to do to try to push towards meeting them is exactly right.

I'm going to just add a little bit of what I see as the current political and federal context around this question of high schools and high school improvement so that we can talk about it all together.

I think of this as a time of great opportunity and challenge when it comes to the issue of high school improvement and what's going on in this country. When the President made his joint address to Congress, he set a goal for the nation of returning to having the highest proportion of college degrees by 2020. That goal is unbelievably important. It's critical to our economic and, frankly national success on bunch of levels, not just on the economy. But it's not going to happen if we just focus on the question of college. It's about defining what it is going to take to get a proportion of students, a new proportion of students ready for that success and then through to that success. And his first opportunity to take a swing at that was through the stimulus bill, the ARRA.

I think one of the biggest challenges to keep in mind when discussing how the stimulus that can drive high school improvement, is the unbelievable challenge we were faced with when it was decided that only programs that currently exist were going to be funded by the stimulus. This is one of the biggest problems we have in discussing secondary policy in a federal context, because we have almost no programs that are designed to improve America's secondary schools. That's quite shocking when you think about it.

We have the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that spends almost no funding on secondary schools. When you think about what it would take to leverage the kind of change that we need in these places across the country, you're looking at a significant new federal investment. The stimulus was an opportunity to try to do that and the decision was made that we're not going to fund programs that don't exist. We didn't have programs out there to say, put money here and that will get to high schools. We were fighting at a huge disadvantage in trying to deal with the question of secondary school reform.

One key example of this is that we have \$3 billion from the school improvement money, which is very exciting because it has a bit of report language that says it would be great if 40 percent of these funds were to be used for middle and high schools. This has

caused folks around the country who work on middle and high schools to say, terrific, we're finally getting some Title I funds. Well, PS in the implementation of this is that they've quickly come to the conclusion that to get these funds, you actually already have to be receiving Title I funds. As we know, less than 8 percent of schools receiving Title I funds, or kids receiving Title I funds, are high school kids. There is very, very little money in our high schools from Title I, and so now there's a real question whether they could even put 40 percent of this \$3 billion into Title I middle and high schools.

Schools eligible for Title I, absolutely. But receiving Title I funds, no. You have schools in Baltimore, for example, that are 99 percent free and reduced lunch and are not receiving Title I funds. So clearly that's yet another of these challenges we're up against.

There was also an effort made in the stimulus to try to do things around school improvement, and high school improvement specifically. But I think we need to be really cognizant of the limitations that it provides us and that the school improvement fund is only one area.

One area where I think there is a lot of possibility around high school, and school improvement in high school is around the question of the Race to the Top initiative and what that will entail. I think one of the most exciting parts of it is the question of standards, because you were exactly right in pointing out that we don't actually know what it means to graduate college-ready, and if we're not actually aiming towards that goal, we can drive forever and ever down that road and we will never get there. So getting those standards right and leveraging a set of higher, clearer, fewer, common, internationally benchmarked standards for the country is a big priority right now nationally. There's a lot of interest in Congress and elsewhere on how to let the states continue to lead that conversation, but lead it to the right place. That would, in fact, ground the conversation about high school reform in something meaningful, in an outcome that we can all get around.

The second piece that is not really the stimulus, but some of you pointed it out as well, is that if we don't have a real accountability for graduation rates, then we're only looking at half the picture. The goal of having every kid that graduates from high school college- and work-ready, when we're not graduating a third of the kids from high school, would clearly not be enough to get the United States to a level of international prominence in our postsecondary degrees.

So the Race to the Top does offer some opportunity around the standards piece and they will be leveraging lots of other exciting things. The other place in stimulus that I think there is some interesting work as it relates to the secondary school improvement work is around the data systems. The data systems that are now required through the ARRA are perhaps one of the most revolutionary parts of the conversation going on today. I often say to people that it strikes me that we are at a really interesting collusion of two things in history. Traditionally in this country, we have not actually thought that we should graduate all students prepared for college. That has not been the mandate of America's high schools. Both economically and from a moral and democracy

perspective, we are moving to a place where the entire country is beginning to embrace the concept of all students graduating college-ready.

Now, don't get me wrong, it's not like that is a given. You'd be amazed at the number of places where you go to speak and you say we need all kids to graduate college-ready and people say no, we still need kids who are going to mow my lawn. And you think really, in this age you can look at someone and say that's actually still a goal for our education system. We've got some public will work to do on that side, but as more and more of the nation's policy leaders come to the conclusion that we are going to get everyone college and work ready, we have a new opportunity to make that happen. In the past, this was a question of whether we knew enough about college and work readiness, about teaching, about learning, about structuring systems that would get kids there. Combined with the use of data and the use of understanding data to drive policy and practice in totally new ways, this will allow us to drive teaching into places that it has never gone before. It is giving us a chance to think differently about what it might mean to get all students college and work ready. The data systems piece of the stimulus act will try to advance that for us.

The last piece I want to mention on the stimulus is the Teacher Incentive Fund. This is one of the more interesting things when you look at innovation opportunity from a federal perspective. When you look at whether it's the growth models, pilots that were proposed, whether it's the Teacher Incentive Fund or something else, I'm very interested to see what happens with the new innovations funds for the stimulus, especially because people often skip the high school piece. Very few of the TIF grants actually look at how to innovate in high schools. Almost none of the growth model proposals actually propose using growth models in high schools. When looking at the base of high school improvements and trying to think of how to expand nationally, you actually have many fewer federal examples of places where people are doing these types of things. These types of programs need to be built more.

As Adria mentioned, there is a secondary school innovation bill that's been introduced by Senator Harry Reid (D-NV), our majority leader. It is a significant piece of legislation that Senator Kennedy is very excited about. We do expect it to be part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization conversation.

Let's talk a little bit about what is in the President's budget and then what we might look at going forward. There is new school improvement funding in the President's budget and the additional billion dollars where he specifically says he would like to see a designation for middle and high schools. These would come with a legislative fix that would actually allow for that, is an exciting statement of commitment on the part of the President towards this agenda. Also, there is a \$50 million piece that's another statement about intent and priority, more than it is the fix to the problem. Fifty million dollars is not going to buy us a whole lot of secondary school reform, but what it does make clear is that the President sees the need for this. And to his credit, again, absent existing programs, it's very difficult to put a whole lot of budget into things that aren't out there yet. President Obama made a \$50 million down payment and some clear priority

statements within it, including around the use of early warning data systems or early warning indicators as one key strategy around school improvement. I think that early warning indicators, be they attendance, coursework, grades, teacher attendance, lots of data that you , allow you to create a system that can then use to tell you which students are going off track and which schools are going off track. This allows administrators to put in place real systems to do something to improve that.

In Chicago, where the secretary comes from, is a place where they've done some of the best and most interesting and out-front work on that. I do think that that \$50 million tells us some signaling about the direction that the President and Secretary would like to see us go.

The other piece I'm going to mention out of the President's budget that I think is worth noting on the high school reform front is literacy investments. He doubled the Striving Readers program, which is an extremely small program, but it is a statement again about a cornerstone.

I have yet to visit a single low performing secondary school, where the first thing they tell me is that none of their kids can read. Everybody tells me that their kids can't read well and therefore they can't get them through to secondary. Additionally, I have never visited a really high performing school that doesn't tell me that to get there, they had to address the reading problem. We need to get through the literacy challenge for our students. We need to build systems that understand that third grade is not the end of reading. Can you imagine we were all still reading on a third-grade level? Really there needs to be a shift to this reading to learn piece, which still involves a significant amount of literacy. And the President acknowledged that and the Secretary acknowledged that in this budget.

The last piece I'm going to point out is one that a lot of people may not think of as a secondary school piece. But we do. It is the President's proposal for \$500 million annual mandatory spending college access and completion fund. One of the things that we know about high school is that there needs to be a clear link in students' minds of what the goal of it is, where it is that they're going to continue that learning, and how it is that they're going to get from a high school degree to something that actually will mean long term success for them. Let's be clear, a high school degree does not mean that-- it's just the first stop on that train. If you can't make the see the college access and completion opportunity, you cannot help them succeed. They have to have clarity on that. This college access and completion fund can offer really neat opportunities for there to be more thoughtful work around how do you transition students into college and get them through successfully.

Those are some of the pieces in the President's budget that we think are exciting around the question of high school reform. This leads me right into the last point I'll make, which is about reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It is, in fact, time to put the "S" back in the ESEA.

Every time I'm on a panel, which is multiple times a week since that's what we do in this town, I'm often on the panel with folks who are in the Minority Office in the House or the Senate. And interestingly, if you ask any of the big four offices about their priorities for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, they'll list off about five things, most of which overlap. But the one that you will definitely hear all four say is high school reform. That is that idea of getting high school reform right and of getting college and work readiness to be a center piece of the way we talk about the transformation of America's school systems. You can't talk about high school reform and college and work readiness without recognizing that it's not going to be something that starts at 9th grade. These are pieces that are going to start to reach first into middle schools, down lower indeed.

The President has an early childhood agenda. We don't see – people don't see that it's competing with a secondary school agenda. Those things have to go hand in hand. This is all part of the continuum. With reauthorization we have every expectation of taking secondary school reform on in a very significant way.

The Graduation Promise Act was introduced in the last Congress. Senator Kennedy is meeting regularly with Senator Bingaman and Senator Burr to talk about the reintroduction of that bill, \$2.5 billion worth of system change for our low performing high schools. The Secondary School Innovation Fund will help, as we've mentioned multiple times. As far as the issues around literacy, we are expecting the introduction of a comprehensive literacy bill that would have a meaningful investment in secondary literacy. And then the Success in the Middle Act will also be a part of the conversation. That was actually President Obama's bill, when he was Senator Obama in the last Congress. And we expect that to be back this time. Finally, we would like to address the issue of accountability around secondary schools. In general, accountability and what we hold people accountable for will obviously be one of the most interesting conversations around reauthorization. It'll be one of the areas where we try to do the most learning from what went wrong and right with the last bill and adjust accordingly. But, one thing that is absolutely clear is that not caring whether or not kids graduate from high school, not assuming that high school graduation is a fundamental measure of whether or not our schools are doing what they are designed to do, is clearly an error. We must go back and do something about high school graduation as it relates to the accountability system.

So those are some of the pieces that we see front and center around reauthorization. They'll fit into a larger conversation around standards and assessments, which is very front and center in reauthorization, as well as part of the Race to the Top. The Secretary is leading in that conversation right now with those Race to the Top funds. We look forward to working with him to see where that takes us. It'll also work with larger questions around school improvement at every level and what that system will look like. What are the right levers? And I think you made some very important points about state and district accountability. We cannot continue to think that schools that fail their students day in and day out actually know how to be better than they are currently. It is quite clear that if the schools had the ability to change within their walls, they probably would. Almost nobody goes to work on a daily basis thinking "today I'm going to teach

my students nothing". They try and they don't have systems and opportunities to do better. So clearly we need to start at a different leverage point.

We cannot assume that the responsibility and ability to change always sits squarely at the school level. We really have to talk clearly about district responsibility, state responsibility in the school improvement conversation. And we have to be clear about the fact in a lot of situations that is going to have to mean new schools. That is going to mean tough district decisions around how to create pathways that Adria was laying out. And creating new pathways means getting rid of some of the old pathways, but those pathways are dead ends. They are leading students to nothing. And so clearly this is the time to have this conversation. There is some great opportunity in front of us, and I look forward to hearing from you all on some of the ideas and questions you have as we enter this conversation.

MS. LAZARIN: Great, well thank you. I'm just going to start by asking a few questions before we open it up to the room. And Adria, I wanted to start with you. I wrote down a question here somewhere. (Laughs.) So most of the school improvement dollars will be targeted to some of the – the goal is to target it to the bottom 1 percent. These are probably chronically failing schools that probably would be. What steps do you think are important to take at the school or district or state level or at the federal level? What steps are important? What are the elements that are important to make sure that they are in place? And what kind of assistance is needed outside the school? What roles can external advocacy organizations, for example, play?

MS. STEINBERG: Well, that is a very big question. So, yes, it's hard to know even where to enter that question. I wish it were true that a lot of the money were going to go to those schools, but I think that Bethany's just pointed out, that it may not. But in any event, I think we do have awareness now that something has to be done and then the big question is what.

So one thing that we try to do in the Graduation Promise Act is put a differentiated system of high school improvement and the starting point for that system is much, much better data. We've got to know who the young people are who are coming into those buildings and, therefore, what the set of needs are. Many of those buildings – and Bob Balfanz and his colleagues have done a great job of pointing this out – have 70 to 80 percent of the young people coming in already behind, over age in some way, or needing special education service. There are multiple needs. The staffing is not strong enough in the buildings, either in terms of numbers or quality of the staffing to handle these issues. The resources aren't there to handle these problems. So even putting more money in is not going to help.

We need that kind of analysis of who the young people are and what their needs are. Therefore, we need to address what some of the kinds of models, designs, or pathways are to be needed to be to help that school, either through a closing down and a reopening, or possibly without closing down. Although, I have to tell you, the only time that I've seen this work anywhere is when low performing schools closed down. I know

you would like to think you can take one of these schools and reinvent it while it's operating, but in terms of being able to change drastically the staffing, in terms of being able to bring in those outside players everybody knows are so important, the rules have to change. And usually that means closing the school down. We're going to have to be bolder around closing down schools. New York's been there for a while. Chicago's been there for a while, but a lot of our cities are not yet doing it. I think they're going to need to do that. And then we need to know what we're replacing them with, and doing that in a way that really makes sense. We need to address who the young people are, what kinds of staffing is going to take to really get them to the end goal where they need to be, and so on. If there are multiple roles at all these different layers, then this analysis is important to determine if it is this one school of 30 in the district that have this problem or is it a single high school district that this is the only school? And then you've got a different set of issues that you have to deal with.

There are just a lot of things that could be laid out in some kind of chart. I don't think we're there yet, but we should aim to show a decision tree or something about how this all has to happen. The state has to be thinking about is this a single high school district. Is it multiple? Is this the only district we have with this problem? Are there tons of them? And then the federal government, in their part, also has to be seeing that whole ecosystem and understanding it in order to make the best investments.

MS. LAZARIN: Right now, the No Child Left Behind Act accountability is focused at the school and district level. Joe, you mentioned the need to really think about how states should be held accountable. This is sort of a new idea. We've heard people talk about it, but it is probably a huge political shift. Can you talk a little bit more about that? And Bethany, I would love to get your reaction on whether this type of thinking is occurring in Congress right now.

MR. JOHNSON: I think minimally there should be clarity about what are the expectations of states, what is their role? Just the same, what's the role that districts ought to play? And then there ought to be very public data that show this is how the state did in relationship to this particular role and this particular responsibility. There should be openness and clarity about that. That in and of itself should drive behavior as states and districts look to perform better on those measures. I don't know what else might be constructive in supporting that kind of accountability, but I think that that kind of public clarity about what the expectations are and public measure – public awareness of the results of those measures would be a step in the right direction.

MS. LITTLE: I would say that there's a lot of clarity around the fact that we've got some of the onus for change in the wrong place in this bill. We need accountability and clarity about success at the school level. We need to know how schools, individual schools, are doing. But again, I don't think that we need to expect that the change will always come from individual schools. We need to have more clarity. Right now we have a provision in the No Child Left Behind Act that says that districts can be districts in need of improvement. It's fairly meaningless. States can lose some money again fairly meaningless.

When you think about state and district accountability, the question is less about sanctions and more about how creating systems at the state and district level that actually leverages school improvement. These systems should focus on activities that engage districts and states in an active undertaking of improving their lowest performing schools and to feel a sense of responsibility and a way to do that. We need to build their capacity to do that. We are not going to say school choice and subservices, which everybody considers as these horrible sanctions. Instead, we are going to move from the school level to the district and to the state level. It's not about how do you sanction the district or the state. It's about how do we actually just try create an expectation at the state and district level that is your responsibility in fact to have functional schools. And to the extent that your schools are low performing, you share a responsibility and a requirement to do something about that problem.

I think that's the way we want to think about this step towards district and state accountability.

MS. LAZARIN: Great. Bethany, you pointed out a lot of really good opportunities that I think were important to highlight. Reform shouldn't be just thought about in terms of elementary and middle schools, but also for high schools. And the conversation on the school improvement dollars was really discouraging. Should we just sort of give up? What it is that as advocates or district leaders or states can we do to make sure that the stimulus dollars, and perhaps the dollars in the budget, will be directed in the way that President intended?

MS. LITTLE: A couple of thoughts. I do think that the president's budget request gives us another bite at the apple by asking that there'd be some change in legislation to allow the new billion dollars that he's requested to be more clearly directed toward high schools. But, it's not that the current \$3 billion can't be used that way. It's just that not as much as we had hoped, or clearly as we had hoped for, can be directed that way. I might have been less discouraging before I came up here on this panel, but I just ran into one of the best advocates in America who reminded me of something that can be done. Susan Frost was saying that we need to make sure that people who are in these districts and states start giving Title I schools some Title I money. A dollar of Title I money will make these schools eligible for a whole lot more school improvement money. School administrators need to be thoughtful about the allocation of next year's Title I dollars. Similarly, people who are advocating at the state and local level need to start getting that message heard: if you start giving us just a little tiny bit of all of this new Title I money you're getting your hands on, it will allow us to open the doors to leverage additional investment.

So there are still ways to get at this pot of money, plus pots of money down the road. I always learn something every time I run into Susan Frost, so thank you.

MS. LAZARIN: Well, we're going to go ahead and open it up for questions. And there's a mike over here. If you don't mind introducing yourself and please keep it to a question, as opposed to a comment.

Q: Yes, I'm Chester Hartman. I'm from PRRAC the Poverty & Race Research Action Council here in Washington. This is for Dr. Johnson. This issue for teacher non-attendance is very disturbing obviously. I'm wondering how much we know about it. Is it a small group of malingerers or is it throughout the whole school? What do we know about the demographics – age, race, length of being in the profession? What's its impact on students? What's the relationship to union contracts? Is there no economic disincentive about it? And what can we do about it? This is very disturbing.

MR. JOHNSON: So my knowledge of all of these issues is centered around my two experiences, my two areas of work – studying schools that are very successful, and then working in support of school districts with schools that are not very successful. I know this issue, you might say, in a qualitative way. I don't have system wide, nation wide data around the extent to which this is an issue. I can tell you that in every low performing secondary school that I have worked with, teacher attendance has been a huge issue. I would argue that it has more to do with the culture of that school than anything else, and culture of the school is hugely influenced by the leadership within that school. I believe that one of the panelists earlier today suggested that the quality of the leader makes a huge difference in setting a tone where people want to come to work. Sometimes we'll have schools that we've identified that have very high levels of academic achievement in the very same district, sometimes just a few miles away from a school with similar demographics where there's very low achievement. Within those schools, we see dramatic differences in terms of rates of teacher attendance. When I say dramatic, I mean from 92 to 95 percent teacher attendance at a high performing to 65 to 70 percent attendance at a low performing school. And the rates are even more dramatic if you just look at Mondays and Fridays. It's not necessarily about district policies because there's the same policy environment. It's the same union contract. It is hugely about the culture of those schools. It is the extent to which they've created a climate in which people feel that they are a part of the team, working to do something powerful in the lives of children, or if they perceive that they're struggling to get through one day closer to retirement.

MS. LITTLE: I just want to add one quick thing to that. I think this is one of those cases where we can recognize the power of data, because the fact that that statistic wakes us up, shocks us, makes us think differently about the teachers in that school. One of the bills that Senator Kennedy is a co-sponsor of has a look at teacher retention as well. You have to look at teacher retention from two sides, right? There are places where you could see a wave of teachers leaving a school. That could be a good thing because you just big, reform-minded, new principal who's changing a whole lot of things and making a whole lot of people uncomfortable. But you also have to recognize that schools that have a constant cycle of churn, with their teachers leaving every single year consistently is probably a bad thing. I think we have to be thinking about this use of all these different types of data points to help us identify and fix the problems that exist in our systems.

MS. LAZARIN: Gosh, I don't see Reagan Miller in the room, but his ears must be burning because we've recently put out a report in November, I believe, on teacher absence. I'm just putting in a plug for that paper, which I'm sure, he'd appreciate.

Q: I'm Robert Brannum with Education Committee of the DC Federation of Civic Associations. Dr. Johnson, students drop out of schools for reasons unrelated to academics, and I just wanted to know if your studies, your analysis, reflect the reasons why students are dropping. We want them to stay in school, but they drop out for reasons that may be clearly unrelated to academics. And I just want to know if that's related.

And a question for Ms. Little, in your oversight capacity of district public schools, it should be clearly noted that Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee are not uniformly seen as champions of public education. It's disrespectful to local organizations in this city that they are touted as reformers, when actually they have been destructive and divisive. They are basically union busting and blocking parents and community from being a part of reforming district public education.

MR. JOHNSON: I believe that you wanted me to address the question about reason students drop out. The perspective of our work is from where we are going into schools that serve low income communities and have many challenges. They have very high graduation rates and low dropout rates. Those students are encountering the same challenges that students encounter two miles down the road in the next high school, with the same demographics, where there's a much, much higher dropout rate. I would contend that the difference between the school with the higher graduation rate and the lower dropout rate is that they have created an environment in which A: students feel that they have some support for out-of-school issues that might have led them to think about dropping out of school. B: these schools have instilled within their students a real sense of hope. They perceive that if they stick to it, there's something good in it for them. Part of that hope comes from the systems and supports that are in place within those schools and within those communities to help ensure that those students will succeed.

Q: Just a little bit of comment on the – (off mike).

MS. LITTLE: Actually we don't have oversight of the DCPS. It goes to the District Appropriation Subcommittee, so I'm going to keep it going.

Q: (Off mike.)

MS. LITTLE: Why don't you and I have this conversation offline? Let everybody else go ahead and get in.

Q: My name is Mark Nadal. I'm just here for myself. I have a question about an opportunity for reallocation of resources that seems to be overlooked. If you look at classroom education, it seems there are three aspects – a textbook, a teacher or a lecture portion, and the teacher discussion, moderating, interactive portion, whatever. In

textbooks, we don't allocate money to each school to create its own textbook. We've learned if you centralize that they're economies of scale and there might be 40-50 different calculus textbooks or biology textbooks – yes. The question is why don't we look at that the same way at the teacher delivery presentation, the lecture portion? Why do we have 300,000 pouring more money so that 300,000 different teachers can give the same lecture on chemistry, some aspect of chemistry, or calculus, instead of considering the option of taking advantage to the economies and produce a couple dozen versions of a lecture on – the lecture portion of the course for calculus, for chemistry, for biology?

MS. STEINBERG: There are definitely some efficiencies of scale and in the earlier panel people were discussing class size. We could be more inventive and creative when we group people into larger groups and maybe deliver some content in a different way. When you're in smaller groups, it is also possible to have a discussion in a different way as well. But in general, in high schools, those of us who spend a lot of time walking through them know that there's too much lecture and not enough engagement. I'm not saying there isn't a way to change, there might be. There's certainly some content that is getting delivered one way that maybe should get delivered in another way. Maybe we could do a better job at it. But, in general the problem is that there's far too much blah teaching from the teacher, and not nearly enough interaction and engagement and thinking. You go into a classroom and you're just so relieved when you see young people being asked to think. It's like you want to cry. I had that experience a few weeks ago. I just felt so grateful to be in that room. It just doesn't happen enough.

Q: Hi, good morning. My name is Tia McKinney and the focus of my question is on those struggling school districts. Throughout the discussions the theme of what I'm hearing is we have old frameworks in operation right now. What is being done to assist those struggling districts, to help bring about new frameworks for them to operate successfully? And can you discuss that?

MS. STEINBERG: I'll say one thing, which is that people like having people like Karen Hawley Miles who work very intensively with districts around. The Annenberg Group in New York is another group that goes in and really tries to do smart systems work with districts. I think that kind of capacity has been lacking. We're beginning to build it, but it's been slow because states haven't had the resources to build capacity. It tends to be these kinds of outside intermediary groups. One of the big issues or questions around this education budget, and ARRA, is that there doesn't seem to be a way to support the work of some of those very important intermediaries that are out there doing that work. It's very unclear. The way the federal language is written right now makes it seem like the innovation fund can not go to those kinds of groups. It does seem like we've got to build that capacity. It exists in bits and pieces around the country and intermediaries occasionally in a state and occasionally. As I was talking about North Carolina, there's actually a public-private attempt to create that kind of capacity through something like the New Schools project. We do need much, much more of that kind of infrastructure than we currently have. I'm not sure the policy has figured out a way to get the money there to do that yet.

MS. LAZARIN: Okay, we'll take one more question because I think lunch is waiting for you. I'm sure you're hungry. .

Q: Karl Reid from United Negro College Fund, [or] UNCF. One thing missing in the discussion here is the issue and the topic of black and Latino boys. The graduation rates, as we reported, if disaggregated, show that there's a huge problem as early as 3rd to 4th – the 4th grade syndrome. What in practice, research, or policy had been put in place to turn schools, districts around in this particular area?

MR. JOHNSON: Everything that I've talked about, the learning that I've experienced focused on high performing schools. But they didn't get to where they are, without helping ensure the success of African American and Latino youngsters, particularly African American and Latino males. In talking about setting high standards, it is important that students know that this is not baby work, that this is real. And when they learn in school, they are going to have real opportunities, real choices in life. They'll be able to accomplish real things, that there's a real future out there for them.

Having attention to issues of school climate such that we're asking the question: are we creating an environment in which students feel valued, respected, feel like they want to be there, like the adults want them to be there? In so many of our low performing schools, the culture is such that the prevailing attitude among the adults is that school would be a great place if it wasn't for the kids. And students feel that and they're quite eager to oblige us in many cases by exiting as quickly as they can. In very successful schools, they have created a climate in which students know that they're valued, that they're respected, that they have a future, that it requires work on their part, but there's support for them in doing that work such that they can succeed. Those are the elements that I see in those successful places.

Some of the schools that we find to be successful are schools where there isn't a lot of racial ethnic diversity. It might be a school where is 100 percent African American students or 100 percent Latino students. They are clearly attending to that population because that's who they are. In these schools we see this kind of success. When there is a more diverse population, and it's maybe, in part, because of our criteria for who we study, because we don't accept schools to study unless we see high levels of performance for every demographic group of students, but in those schools we see that that success it is not accidental. Educators are constantly attending to and examining how well their strategies are working for particular groups of students. In fact, sometimes they're looking at the data in ways that don't necessarily reflect our typical disaggregations. They're cutting the data in other ways. They're saying well, okay, what about our kids who're coming from shelters? How are they doing? Is this working for them? And they're asking whatever questions necessary to ensure that school is a success experience regardless of demographic characteristics.

MS. LAZARIN: Thank you. The panelists are here. Please feel free to come up and ask them some questions.