



American Enterprise Institute

Web event — A silver lining: Family engagement in a post-pandemic world

Opening remarks:

Katharine B. Stevens, Visiting Scholar, AEI

Discussion

Panelists:

Kathryn Black, Associate Director, Research and Innovation, CAP Tulsa

Altagracia H. Delgado, Executive Director, Multilingual Services, Aldine
Independent School District

Emily Roden, Founder, ReadyRosie

Shonna Werth, Assistant Vice President, Early Childhood Programs, Nebraska
Children and Families Foundation

Moderator:

Katharine B. Stevens, Visiting Scholar, AEI

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Katharine B. Stevens: Welcome, everyone. I'm Katharine Stevens. I'm a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, specializing in early childhood development and learning. And I'm delighted to welcome you to today's discussion of what early childhood programs have learned over the past year, about how they can strengthen their engagement with families going forward. I'm delighted to welcome our four participants in today's event.

First, Kathryn Black is the associate director of research and innovation and early childhood project management teams at CAP Tulsa, which is a community action agency focused on interrupting the cycle of poverty using a two-generation approach that combines high-quality early education programs for young children with a range of programs aiming to help their parents succeed through increasing parenting skills, employability, and earning potential.

Second, Grace Delgado is the executive director of multilingual services for Aldine Independent School District in Texas, where she works both with early childhood and K-12 populations. Grace has been an educator for 26 years working as a bilingual teacher, literacy coach, and school and central office administrator.

Third, Emily Roden is the president of ReadyRosie, which is a research-based family engagement system focused on helping schools and programs partner more effectively with families, including accessible resources for parents, easy communication strategies for teachers, and actionable data with an emphasis on increasing children's learning outcomes.

Finally, Shonna Werth is assistant vice president of early childhood programs at Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, which focuses on building strong families and communities to enable Nebraska's most vulnerable kids to thrive.

So, we'll begin with a 10- to 15-minute presentation from Emily on what ReadyRosie sees as essential for effective family engagement and their lessons learned over the past year about better engaging with families going forward. We'll then hear from the other participants on what they've learned over the past year that will help them strengthen their partnership with families in the months and years to come.

We'll then have a discussion, which we hope will be prompted by your questions. There are two ways to ask questions, you can email them to martha.baker@aei.org or send them via Twitter using #families@aei. Please feel free to send questions as they come to mind. We'll collect them as we go along to answer after hearing from our participants today. So, with that, I am delighted to turn things over to Emily.

Emily Roden: Well, thank you, Katharine. And a huge thank you to all of our participants today who were selected. I think you'll find, as an audience, that these participants in this panel, bring unique perspectives and approaches to the table to this discussion, really because of the uniqueness in the populations that they serve and in the work they're trying to accomplish in their own unique communities. So, I'm excited to start and, kind of, launch us. I know if you're joining us live today or a recording of this, it's because that there's probably some value you already have in thinking about the partnerships between classrooms and homes, between teachers and families. But if, by any chance, you're wondering, why are we here? Why is this discussion so important?

Just as a quick reminder, I thought this recent study, that was actually accomplished by firstbook.org right before the pandemic hit, outlines a few responses that educators, over

4,000 educators, who work in the front lines with some of the most under-resourced children and students in some of the most challenging environments and communities to support children and families in their educational journey. Over 4,000 of these educators were interviewed around what were some of the barriers that they were seeing that were faced by the children that they served.

And once again, just very quickly to frame our discussion of why family engagement was so important, out of these 4,000 educators that were interviewed, 62 percent listed trauma, experiencing trauma, as one of the major barriers to children, especially children in under-resourced communities, were facing trauma extreme stress. So, sorry, 63 percent said that lack of resources that were culturally relevant, that children could relate to, was a challenge to children and students. Sixty-seven percent said that children have barriers related to inadequate access to emotional, behavioral, and mental health support. Seventy-one percent of these 4,000 educators said that children who are facing complicated family structures, that are impacted by things like deportation, absenteeism, incarceration, that these were some of the barriers that their children were facing.

But 72 percent, the highest result of any response on this survey, noted lack of family engagement as the number-one, highest-rated barrier that children are facing in the schools and the communities that these teachers serve and teach in. And I point that out, and I listed five things and if you notice, here the change that these teachers saw in the lives and homes of their children, but the barriers around cultural irrelevant materials. And the other four all related to things that children were experiencing outside of the school walls, right? And then with a pandemic hit, we knew that those outside of school experiences became, at least a number of hours a day, even became more than our in-class experiences for many students. And then, of course, that ratio has ebbed and flowed and changed over the last year for teachers who live to educate in the world of a pandemic.

So, what I'm going to talk about today, just in these first 10 minutes, is really at ReadyRosie, and ReadyRosie is now part of a greater umbrella of early childhood, an organization called Teaching Strategies, who is the leader not only in now family engagement with ReadyRosie but also in curriculum and assessment for the youngest of our learners. What are these essentials? What does research say are the non-negotiables when it comes to healthy and productive, goal-oriented family partnerships between educators and, of course, the families? And so, we looked at very many frameworks, right? As educators, we love standards, we love frameworks, we love that building everything we do upon a platform of research and these thought leaders' frameworks.

So, the first thing we looked at was Dr. Karen Mapp, dual-capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships. If you're not familiar with this, this is an excellent framework. Because it was the first time when Dr. Mapp from Harvard University collaborated with the Department of Ed, it was the first time we really had an outline, not just guidelines for family engagement, but really a dual-capacity framework, indicating that both, that we need to build capacity in both of us, right, as educators and as families. So, once again, at Teaching Strategies and at ReadyRosie, we looked at that framework.

We also went to really one of the federal organizations that have been thinking about equipping, and really a two-gen start outlines as the parent, family, and community engagement framework. And we looked at something called the relationship-based competencies that support these.

These are 10 goals that really support healthy relationships between families and schools, and then, what are those competencies to develop them? So, you can imagine myself, my team, with several educators, even family members, families who support their young children, took all of those frameworks and really tried to see what are those commonalities and adjectives, right? That each one of these frameworks are trying to position this most important partnership. And so what I want to do today is just walk through, and our work of over the last 12 years of actively supporting and partnering with over 8,000 schools and programs across the United States to support their family engagement efforts. That combined experience will be through today. And we call these our essentials for transformative family engagement.

And really something that we talk about in scenarios just like this, but these actually have become our own product road map, that at Teaching Strategies and ReadyRosie they are based on these very essentials that I'm going to walk through. Now, normally — and I shared this with Katharine before we started. Normally, I could spend an hour or two on each of these essentials and do a presentation in and of themselves because each component, each strategy, each essential is so important, it could be fleshed out in a short time today will fly through them very quickly and I'll put them all on one slide, so, that you could kind of see, and I'll walk through them very quickly. But for those mathematicians out there, you might say, wait a second, there's eight of these words listed, there's eight of these bullet points. And that's because, I was told that seven is a much sexier number. So, we're going to call this the seven essentials, plus a bonus. So, if you'll bear with me, I'll walk through these really quickly.

Number one, it seems like it goes without saying, but all family partnerships have to be rooted in value and respect from both sides, right? Not just family members valuing the contributions of the family. One of the ways that we show this to families started ReadyRosie, we actually just thought that we should send things to families, right? We should send resources and videos and ideas and tips. And it was all about a one-way send of information to families. But what we actually realized is that by actually turning the table and really valuing what families actually send to us, even more than what we send to them, that reciprocity actually communicates that we are true partners in this goal of seeing outcomes for young children.

Number two is that everything we do we want to co-create with family side by side. Once again, at ReadyRosie, when we started, we thought we'll create a bunch of tips and ideas and everything for families, and that we'll send out, right? When we flipped that and said, "Wait a second, what if we co-created content? What if we co-created experiences and best practices with families?" And so for ReadyRosie, you'll find out, you'll see in just a minute, one big piece of what we do are these video models for families, which I'll talk about in just a second. But we actually found that instead of scripting those or telling families what they needed to say as they interacted with young children when we actually just gave families an idea of what that could look like, they came with their own language, their own culture, their own vernacular, it was so much more powerful. They literally breathed life into these activities by co-creating with us.

Now, we take the same principle and we share with our programs like you'll hear from Aldine ISD and from Nebraska and from Tulsa CAP, you'll hear that these are programs that aren't just telling families what they should be doing, right? They're literally co-creating

systems and strategies with families. The exciting thing about this is, is that when we see success with a young child, and we see them grow, develop, it's not just us, the educators, that are celebrating, were co-celebrating with families because we co-created and then we co-implemented and then we get to co-celebrate outcomes.

Thirdly, and I'll share this more in just a second, but modeling. We realized that we can't just tell families what we're thinking, we can't assume that everyone is on the same page as far as what expectations and hopes are, we have to show that. Oftentimes, we say read to your child, talk to your child, play with your child. And that means one thing to us. To me based on how I was raised, what that looks like in my own family, that means something totally different. And so I'd like to take just a quick pause and show you a quick example of what we mean by modeled. And what's exciting is this actually one little video exemplifies multiple of these essentials. The fact that it's co-created, the fact that it's modeled, the fact that it's building on home language, the fact that it's linked to learning, you'll see all of these things in this one example.

So, let me take a quick break and show that. What you'll actually see is that it's in Spanish, so those of you who are not Spanish-speaking, I'll set it up for you. This is a family that we actually did not tell them what to say, this wasn't scripted, but what we talked about with this family is just sharing with them the modeling of rhyming and playing rhyming games with young children of all ages, how that is important in our literacy development, in our social-emotional development. And so we co-created with this family and you'll see what that model looks like.

[Clip in Spanish]

Now, whether you understood every word that was spoken in that quick modeled moment, what you probably noticed were some things that are above our ability to understand each and every word, things like bonding, joy, proximity, young children sitting next to their families, right? You saw multiple ages of children, you saw laughter, you saw authentic rhymes in a home language, right, which is a great predictor of literacy success. You saw that it was very linked then to actual outcomes, literacy outcomes, but in a fun and playful way, right, that didn't feel like homework, right? So, you saw quite a few of those things.

You also saw that we didn't just translate "Humpty Dumpty Sat on a Wall" for that family. We didn't tell them what rhymes, those authentically came from their own experiences, their own background. And so, not only were they passing on this great literacy experience and this great rhyme, but they were passing on their culture, their heart, and their very soul to their young children.

And so, all of that, all of these things can be summed up with that one video. So, we talked about this value in respect, we talked about co-creation, which was done in that video, that modeling, right? If we were just to say, go rhyme with your children, that communicates one thing to one family, but to actually see, oh, that means sitting on a bed, that means my baby can be involved, that means my older child and my middle-aged child can both be involved. They're both going to bring different aspects, it's going to be differentiated for those two learners.

Another key aspect essential to family engagement is that link to learning. So, once again, it's not random acts, right? It's very specifically tied to what we know to be predictors of literacy and math success and overall academic success. What we didn't have time to

actually demonstrate and show was that our family engagement, our family partnerships, should also be tied to data, to actual measurement.

And I always say that, in the past, you know, the last 25 years, when we thought about family engagement, we oftentimes thought about just sending home some tools or books or a sheet of tips that gave families ideas. Once again, all valiant, fabulous efforts in our partnerships with families, but for lack of a better word, they're somewhat unmeasurable. What was the impact? How were they used? Were those books cracked open and read time and time again? We know today that we want to make sure that we're setting up appropriate measures, whether it's pre- and post-surveys, whether it's this reciprocity, this feedback from families, or whether it's actually looking on some kind of dashboard to see: What are families' questions? what are they wanting to know more of? Another foundation essential is the building upon the foundation of home language and really supporting that cultural diversity, that cultural ownership.

And second to last, that our family partnerships are not generic, one size fits all, but they are personalized. And so, it's important that we build family engagement structures that are not, like I said, one size fit all or a default approach to family partnerships. But just like we personalize instruction in the classroom to meet every single child where they are, that's exactly the way we need to think about our family partnerships. And like I said, that was seven but a bonus today get our eighth, which is we really found in — and this was more of an experiential finding than necessarily laid out in any of those frameworks I mentioned. We found that when joy and play is at the foundation of family partnerships and family experiences, that is when the transformation really starts to take place. When family's role in their child's education is not an obligation but a joy, and when teachers and families can literally celebrate and enjoy this partnership for the good of children, that is when the magic really happens.

So, like I said, I know that's a lot, a whirlwind. But just so you know, this is what we are thinking about constantly at Teaching Strategies, at ReadyRosie. So, it will be no surprise that when the pandemic hit almost exactly a year ago, we had already developed these seven essentials to guide our practices and to support programs. When the pandemic hit, we immediately went to this list and thought, we need to re-create, we need to rethink all of these essentials, and maybe mark some out or add some new ones. But what we actually found was that these exact essentials not only were timeless through something our country had never experienced before but what we found is, instead of changing any of them, we actually just had the opportunity to go deeper and to think more deeply and in a more innovative way of what each of these essentially could mean in a time where families are more of our partners than ever before.

So, Katharine, with that, I'll pass it on to you because I'm actually anxious to hear more from our partners who are actually in the field doing this great work and what they found over the year and what we'll carry on past this pandemic.

Katharine B. Stevens: Thanks so much, Emily. That was fascinating and a lot of fun to hear about. That video was fantastic. So, I am also eager to hear from our other three participants. A few questions come to mind. One, what you do, what's the populations you're working with? Two, a question struck me when Emily was talking, which is: What your perspective is on the unique challenges and/or opportunities in family engagement in early childhood, in particular, as compared to older kids, to K–12? And what you've found, in general, and over

the last year, what's key, most key, in effective connection partnership with the families you're working with, and what stands out for you as maybe things you've learned that you're hoping to be able to carry forward? So, maybe Shonna, can we start with you?

Shonna Werth: Sure. So, I actually can't take credit for being one of those implementers, I guess I'm going to refer to myself as a ringleader. So, within my position in Nebraska Children and Family Foundation, I oversee about 400 classrooms, which would amount to about 26 districts or 26 different sites across the State of Nebraska with over 60 programs implementing ReadyRosie across the state. So, when I say ringleader, they are programs that are being funded through a preschool development grant that Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is implementing with the importance and emphasis on the family engagement piece. Just knowing how important that is and how we bought into that and felt we should support it and then brought those programs underneath our, I don't know, coordination of implementing ReadyRosie in their program. So, they all look different.

And we do have some programs that are being implemented in the larger cities like Omaha where they would just be a single program that would be identified as a district where we also have communities across the State of Nebraska that may have one or two and may not have more than 200 people in their own communities. It's very rural areas, as well as some urban areas, who are utilizing the ReadyRosie within their programs.

And they would be anything from family childcare home providers to childcare centers, private preschools, public preschools, home-visitation programs, Head Starts, things like that. So, we encompass a lot of different programs underneath our umbrella with the implementation of ReadyRosie. I do think the family engagement piece really resonates when Emily talks about that. When we started the ReadyRosie project, we did have the buy-in as far as I think people thought, OK, the once-a-week videos that come out are enough, this is going to supplement the family engagement piece, we may hold on once a month family engagement activity may or may not utilize a ReadyRosie resource. But I will tell you when the pandemic hit, and we already had over 300 classrooms signed up under ReadyRosie, and people were caught flat-footed because you know, they thought, well, we'll just be out of school for two weeks and then they didn't go back to school. And people were starting to see what do we need to do, what's in place to do virtual instruction, and ReadyRosie was the first thing that came to mind.

We had a University of Nebraska Lincoln, or University of Nebraska Med Center Munroe-Meyer Institute, coordinate with us to do evaluation. And they reached out to us a few months into the pandemic and just said, "Hey, would you like us to look at this, these to do ReadyRosie through this pandemic to see what's happening?" And we were like, "Absolutely." So, when they did that, they did some specific focus groups with the actual teachers in programs who were utilizing it and just asked those questions. Are you using it? How do you see it helpful? And they've right away said, "You know, we didn't know what we were going to do, but we knew we had ReadyRosie in place." This was a trusted resource between teachers and parents, they already know what ReadyRosie was. So, when they needed to start doing some virtual instruction, when they needed to start reaching out to families, to bring them back into learning, ReadyRosie was one of the first things they went to because it was a platform already there.

So, that comforted them in knowing, OK, we might not know what virtual instruction is going to look like in the few months to come, but we do know what ReadyRosie looks like.

So, they started using and implementing that to start reaching out to families. What do you need? How can we help? And in the meantime, continuing to share specific playlists that families would request. So, routines were thrown out of whack, parents were home unexpectedly, kids were home, ages whatever down to birth, families didn't know how to manage it. They didn't know how to manage virtual instruction to their kiddos. Well, they had younger kiddos at home, and they're trying to entertain, they were asking for specific resources on just managing routines. How do we get into this routine? Once they knew school was not going to come back in session and they were looking all the way into August to going back to school, potentially, and maybe not even knowing if that was going to happen. Routines happened to be one of the number one things that kept coming, asking for we need help, and those specific playlists going out.

And not only that, ReadyRosie does have a resource list of professionals who also — they could share those specific videos out with those families about building routines, why they're important. A lot of requests for the social-emotional learning, probably, I would say mostly ages birth to 5 within that processes, families were asking and our teachers were able to provide them what they are asking for. Like Emily said that we want this back and forth, and how does that make that happen and how do we supplement what our families want to know, not what do we want our families to know? So, that was a really good thing that came out of just knowing we had at least 300 classrooms that already had access to a program and they didn't have to try to come up with something that was going to be — you know, they didn't know if it was going to work or not because they already knew it was going to.

Another really important thing I think that is important to know is that we had — when I say we had programs who are just thinking that the once-a-week videos that were sent out to families were enough. And we were meeting with these programs once a month and family engagement — it's important to us, to Nebraska Children, it was identified, of course, for us to continue to grow with the preschool development grant. And family engagement, it's not just something that should be happening in private preschools, public preschools, Head Starts because it's a good goal, right? Family engagement really should be something that's happening if you're a family childcare home provider, if you're a center director. Family engagement is important no matter what setting you're in from birth to 5.

And the ReadyRosie platform really sets you up for that particular quality initiative indicator, is what I'm going to say. And I say that because Nebraska does have a quality program for childcare providers called Step Up to Quality, where family engagement is a quality indicator. So, if you are already in a public school preschool and you're doing those things, you know that that's part of your planning. But when you're a private childcare center, or a family childcare home provider, not quite sure that family engagement is a quality indicator, you probably haven't done a whole lot of that in the past. People were dropping off their child, they were getting childcare, people were picking up the child and that was it. There wasn't that continuation of learning from those settings home where I think the expectation is some of those preschool programs or Head Start programs or home visitation programs that was already established.

So, what this started doing, when we started meeting monthly and started talking about family engagement, really showing them hands-on ways that you could introduce family engagement, virtually, because at that point, virtual was the only option. And giving them the tools and the skills to know family engagement is possible and it's important no matter what setting a child is in. So, empowering those teachers, those home providers, and those center

staff to know that it's not hard, it's very simple, and here's some things you can do. And the more we talked about that, the more specific playlists we're being scheduled to be sent out to families to continue that learning from where that child was in their setting home. And then seeing the reciprocating, like Emily said, as parents were replying back, and those childcare center staff, and those home providers going, "Wow," like, "OK, we're building this relationship here." Something that was not there before, and probably wouldn't have been if we weren't inviting them to those monthly trainings to see. This is family engagement, this is what it looks like, this is how easy it is to do that.

And when you say, you know, the silver lining, Katharine, you know, we talked about the pandemic had a lot of terrible things that came with it. But I will say the silver lining was is that we started to really get that buy-in from all over our programs across the state. When they saw the reciprocating part of it, when they saw that parents were interested in what was being sent to them, practicing it, sending it back with their comments, asking for more resources, resources for maybe kids that weren't necessarily enrolled in that program, but were attending maybe somewhere else, and then for the older siblings. So, the silver lining of that is now the use of ReadyRosie across the State of Nebraska has exploded. It's so wonderful to see, every month I get on there, and I just see that usage keep growing and growing and growing. You can see those comments right away when you click on it, and you're just — your heart is warm, you're thinking, all right, we're making progress, we're doing this, people are seeing it. And I can't wait until our next evaluation from the Munroe-Meyer Institute, just to hear from the focus groups what families have to say and teachers have to say after we've been through this experience, so.

Katharine B. Stevens: Shonna, thank you so much. I have a quick question. Are you guys going to be doing research or evaluation with the parents to hear what their experience has been with this?

Shonna Werth: Yeah. So, we're actually getting ready to do one of our research — so, we are. And Munroe-Meyer is just getting ready to do some of those focus group outreaches. So, when they do that, they will — we have six sites identified out of the 27 that we support right now. They will be doing specific focus groups with the parents, they'll do it with the educators, the center staff, and then they'll do it with the administrators of those locations.

Katharine B. Stevens: Well, will you be able to share findings from that? That sounds fascinating.

Shonna Werth: Yes, absolutely. Typically we share those findings with the ReadyRosie staff so we can continue to send those out and would be happy to do so. And I also do want to kind of build on that what Emily said of meeting parents where they are. We do have several communities that have a high Spanish-speaking population. And I will say those are the communities who probably embrace the ReadyRosie platform the most because it was the most meaningful way to communicate and build those relationships with those hymns because they were able to watch those videos in Spanish. And they were able to reply back in Spanish and have that, and I just know when they have those focus groups, I can't wait to hear what those families have to say about ReadyRosie.

Katharine B. Stevens: And you know, another thing that would be — I don't know if this is beyond your scope — but I think would be so interesting to see. I've seen small-scale studies suggesting that getting parents engaged like this, in early childhood, it makes it more likely

that they'll continue to be engaged when their kids are in K–12, and families often feel quite alienated from K–12. K–12, in my observation, is not as good at engaging with families as early childhood has, you know, pre-pandemic. So, I think that would also be really fascinating if you were able to follow those families and do a comparison to see if, in fact, they are feeling more confident and just engaging more when their kids reach the K–12 system.

Shonna Werth: That would be fascinating, Katharine. I think so, too, because, you know, we're starting those family engagement opportunities now with a lot of these families, especially with our six pins programs, our home visitation programs, you know, those are all birth to 3, let alone our childcare centers and our home providers who are having those babies in their care. So, that would be truly interesting, especially to see a family who had ReadyRosie from birth all the way up through when they started K–12. We're right now in our fourth year. So, we probably haven't quite reached that where we've had someone who started at birth to K–12. But I will definitely bring that up to our researcher team and see what they think and how we can maybe track that.

Katharine B. Stevens: Yeah, I mean, even if it were just a year or two, I mean, that really — it potentially could function as family empowerment, kind of, going through the education system. So, anyway, well, it'll be fantastic to see how that plays out. Because this is new in Nebraska, right? I mean, this past year has really been when it took off.

Shonna Werth: I would say so, we're in our fourth year.

Katharine B. Stevens: Fourth year.

Shonna Werth: We had implemented it three years before, but I would say it was a slow implementation, not quite the buy-in and the usage that we would have liked to see. And I will say, the pandemic really just kind of spring-shot it into full usage more than it ever had, I would say, on the scale that it had been being used. So, we were calling it, kind of, a pilot project at first, it was privately funded, funds were given to Nebraska Children in order to implement it over the last three years. We were able to expand from 300 classrooms to 400 classrooms with the preschool development grant funds that came our way and, hopefully, continuing to support those programs for the next two years. So, I would say yes and no. So, when you're thinking on the large scale that we're thinking of, 300 classrooms, some of those classrooms who are taking it and running with it that already knew family engagement was part of their goals. So, the Head Starts, the public school preschools, those truly have to — they incorporate family engagement into their curriculum.

So, it was no. But trying to get the family childcare home providers, the childcare centers, and those programs on board with why family engagement was important, and how you can utilize it, and how it builds that relationship, that was, you know, slowly coming along, I would say year after year, but this year, just having — bringing the group together, the child care providers, as well as with the home visitors and the preschool educators all in one setting so that they could all see how family engagement can be implemented in the importance of it, I think really brought along those other programs who weren't quite there yet.

Katharine B. Stevens: Right. Very fascinating. So, Grace, do you want to go next? And I guess one question that I was thinking you might be able to address, I believe you work with

both early childhood and K–12 populations. So, any thoughts you have on observations on how working with those two populations is different, I'd love to hear, in addition to other things you want to share. And also, maybe what your thoughts are on how engagement in the early childhood years might be helpful, be empowering for parents going forward.

Altagracia H. Delgado: Absolutely. Thank you so much. Yes, so our experience is a little bit different, and ReadyRosie is one of the pieces we use for family engagement. We are in all the United States, we're one of the largest districts in the Houston area. We have over 6,400 students, in general. As the multilingual services director, my lens is district-wide, and then I have to be very closely paying attention to our English-learners population. And we are at about 40 percent of our students. So, we have over 24,000 students that are English learners. Again, pre-K–12. We have 12 dedicated primary centers, so they house our babies, they house our early childhood and K students. So, that's one population that we have.

But, yes, like you're saying, I have to mind the whole scope. So, when we were shut down last year, there were concerns about, you know, instruction and how to reach the parents. So, I have to say, the district as a whole managed beautifully a transition in which we were able to shut down and prepare trainings for our families as to how they were going to access any digital platforms where we were going to roll out instruction, right, that was like our first layer of communication with our families.

But as these continued to expand and we knew that OK, this is not shutting down for a few weeks, we know things are coming up, then we have to start looking into how can we truly work with our families? Because it is more than just accessing our platform for learning. And also understanding that similar parents needed specific training to help their kids to access those platforms. So, when summer came around, we had an opportunity to slow down for a minute before we did our summer programs. And we knew that we wanted to do some summer programs. Again, we were going to test these remote platforms with our kids. In Texas, it is mandatory to do a summer camp to address English learners and their language acquisition, and it's mandatory time that we have to do to make sure that our kids are accessing the language. This is where we were able to tap into ReadyRosie because we know we're going to do that.

Our district has — so, we have about 7,500 students that are in the primary campuses, but 4,000 of those, are English learners, so we have to offer something for your students. And in the past, we have done our regular summer school where they came. But something we were able to do with their ReadyRosie platform, which we had never been able to do before, was actually reach 100 percent of our students, 100 percent of our EIs. Just because we offer the camp doesn't mean our kids come, and we try to reach out and sometimes they come, and sometimes they don't. With ReadyRosie, we're able to send the platform out, we were able to mail backpacks with materials, so, that way, the parents had the concrete resources to work on those activities. They have communication cards to practice conversations with their students, but they also had the platform that had the videos, and they could engage with.

In addition to that, we did hold our virtual camp. So, we have students that had access to both pieces. And we have parents that would sit with their kids during their classes, during the summer. And we have parents that shared some of the interactions they were having with the platform and how they were liking the activities they were doing. Because like Emily was saying, they're hands-on, they're engaging, they're joyful, they're not your typical worksheet, right? They're not your typical, like, activity that you have to do. And something

that I need to share with everybody is that I worked for 10 years as a pre-K teacher. And seven of those were specifically aimed in the Houston area. So, I used to be the teacher that used to prepare these calendars of activities that were aligned to what I was teaching in the classroom. So, it wasn't just practice, practice, practice, but it was like interactions in the grocery store, interactions when you're driving together, when you're having a reading time, and some questions to ask your kids, which is now what ReadyRosie is providing our parents.

So, what we decided to do, as we were setting up for the school year, we decided to create a strategy for how to roll these out because we knew that we were going to open completely remote and moving to hybrid teaching. So, we invested in the ReadyRosie platform for our pre-K students. After the reviews in the summer, the schools wanted it, the schools knew that they needed a tool like this. While this was going on, we have a department that focuses on family and community engagement. So, that gives us time to work with them to design meetings and classes for parents that go beyond just your instructional pieces. So, we are focusing with them on SEL and best practices and building community and community resources. They have now started doing their story time, so once a month, they have story time for the kids. And we do everything in English and Spanish.

While we also have the platform for the teachers, and because the platform is aligned to our pre-K standards, we can focus on — the teachers can actually find things that align to what they're teaching in the classroom, but it's also — again, we're not talking about your typical curriculum, we're talking about activities that can support that. So, as we have experienced this during the year, we are planning already on how to expand the use of the platform and how can we continue to do some of these remote services for our parents? If something we have learned is that our parents truly want what's best for their kids. But sometimes it's hard to access the campus, sometimes they have little ones at home, sometimes that — you know, there's a few transportation, so they can come to the meeting. So, we have learned that having this remote access and having these remote meetings and lessons with our families have absolutely helped in their engagement with their kids. They're able to communicate with their teachers better, have a better relationship with their teachers on behalf of their kids, advocate for their students.

And we are seeing it across grade levels. That is something that we have actually seen. And it doesn't stop just in elementary, we see this engagement with some of our secondary parents. In addition, in our family engagement activities, we have reached out to our families to see additional classes, like specific classes for English acquisition, or some of our families that have not gotten high school diplomas, so we're able to reach them out. So, there's a high interest in our families in these classes that we're rolling out in collaboration with a college close to us. So, that way is supporting instruction and their children's education as well. So, it's a whole comprehensive plan that we've been able to work in the middle of a pandemic.

Katharine B. Stevens: That sounds — this is a silver lining, and this definitely what it sounds like. So, I think one of the things that's obviously valuable about ReadyRosie, which I didn't know about until a few weeks ago, is that it creates, kind of, a concrete, as you've said, like tools, not physical exactly, but kind of a structure for centers and programs and schools to organize their efforts around. Kathryn, I'm interested in hearing about how you guys are doing it because my guess is that you're operating on some of the same principles without having developed your own strategies rather than the ReadyRosie platform. And I'd

love to hear what you're doing and how you see it as consistent or not consistent with what ReadyRosie has been doing in these places where it's being used.

Kathryn Black: Hi, yes. And we actually — as I was listening to Emily talk — I really resonated with all of those essentials, including the eighth bonus, which I'll get into in a minute. But those essentials are really pivotal in any early childhood program. And at CAP Tulsa being that we are Early Head Start and Head Start funded, we had a unique situation with the pandemic, the onset. We serve roughly 2,100 children through 136 classrooms from birth through pre-K. So, that offers additional opportunities to connect with families, you know, when you're thinking about the youngest children possible and their ability to engage with their teachers, with their families, how we support families, and really engaging at home with the children and what that looks like. So, at the onset of the pandemic, just like everybody else, we had to quickly adjust our offering for families and children. This meant that we had to re-focus our goals and modalities for supporting and, importantly, engaging families. So, we prioritize three things.

First, we wanted to better connect our classroom curriculum to learning-at-home opportunities. So, to achieve that, we purchased the teaching strategies cloud that's a part of the creative curriculum, to support bringing the curriculum into the child's home. Next, we devise learning together with kids that connected the curriculum with the classroom at home. So, together, we brought in our teachers who were then able to methodically connect with families through the use of these resources and other technology to facilitate and support learning at home. So, it took both the digital curriculum access and material kits to ensure families had the right materials to support their child's learning and to ensure families had access to their child's teacher to engage deeper and more meaningfully. Just like Emily mentioned, we seek to base all of our work in play, and so our teachers regularly ensure families had deep understanding opportunities to learn about the importance of play and how play supports children's learning.

Finally, we also thought it was really important that families connect with one another. In a time when our daily lives are turned upside down, we believe it is really vital to ensure we are continuing to support children's learning and also identify means to support the caregiver's wellness. Families had opportunities to engage with other families each week, sometimes those engagements were simple connections to support the mental and emotional health of our parents. But other times, families had opportunities to learn from each other to support their child's learning. So, we really need that one size doesn't fit all. And we couldn't approach family engagement that way as we shifted into pandemic learning, but we really thought to individualize with our families just like we do in the classroom. And we prioritized three things.

First, we thought about home language, just as Emily mentioned during her conversation. Tulsa is unique in that we have welcomed refugees from Myanmar, we have a small but growing group of these families who are seeking refuge in the US. For these families, they're high engagers with our schools when our schools are open. However, they were initially reluctant to engage with us after we had to shift to virtual services. They valued trust. Therefore, our teachers and administrators had to build trust with their families before they would engage.

And just like others had mentioned that this looks really different from our Spanish- and English-speaking families. We've had long-term relationships with those families, which

allowed us to jump in and engage easier and faster. It also necessitated the need for bilingual teachers across the agency to provide robust learning for all children and families.

Second, the silver lining was that we had to really recognize and support our essential workers; our families are essential workers in our communities. We quickly learned that with their diverse jobs and diverse work hours, we had to be flexible and offer diverse modalities and opportunities to engage. It's hard for them to find time to participate when they're working late into the evening or early into the morning, and maybe they're spending different hours sleeping than our typical school day hours. Third, we had to better align and offer more robust engagement opportunities. It just looks so different, right? It looks so different. And so we believe parents and caregivers are their child's first and most important teacher. And so we really thought about how the curriculum could be brought into the home and how communication between the teachers and families could really support more direct and meaningful learning at home engagement opportunities.

Katharine B. Stevens: So, one of the things that just strikes me is, you know, that the pandemic has, for a lack of a better word, kind of forced programs into building these relationships. And it sounds as though it's been — from what you guys are explaining — it's been exceptionally valuable for both the parents and the teachers or the caregivers. We only have about seven minutes left. But I'm very curious to hear, maybe just briefly from each of you how likely is it that the programs you're working with, the schools you're working with, are going to be able to keep this up, right? I mean, it seems as though this is proving that it's really valuable. And that, as I said, both parents and teachers, caregivers appreciate it a lot, and that it can be done. And I can imagine that once the pandemic is over, there could be an inclination for people to kind of settle back into their old routines. And I'm just wondering what your thoughts are just briefly on how to keep that from happening. How can we keep this very positive development up? Shonna, do you want to start?

Shonna Werth: Yeah. Sure. I think that's a great question, Katharine. And I will say ReadyRosie right now in the State of Nebraska is a hot commodity. People are now — you know, we have centers, preschool programs, whatever — talking about how they've been utilizing ReadyRosie, how they're getting their families engaged. And now when families are looking for childcare and when they're looking for spots, they are — you know, if ReadyRosie is part of that — that's starting to be a hot commodity. Through the preschool development grant, we have communities who are implementing programs and supporting private childcare programs, preschool programs, whatever that looks, like, if it's a home program or childcare centers, to provide quality and supporting them financially with their quality initiatives and social-emotional curriculum that they're implementing into their programs. And ReadyRosie is a big piece of that.

ReadyRosie is one of those quality indicators for those programs — I mean, family engagement is a quality indicator for programs — the social-emotional curriculum that can also be supported to the ReadyRosie modeling moments: the videos. So, it's easy to implement and programs are seeing that, and they're seeing how it directly comes back to their relationships with families and want to continue their growth of their quality. So, I would say I do see it actually growing and potentially really just the use of it being expanded in the State of Nebraska just with that support locally from communities demanding that their programs from birth to 5 are quality programs. We don't want just a childcare provider, we want a quality childcare provider. And utilizing ReadyRosie is an easy way to implement that and support whatever curriculum, if it's creative curriculum, the pyramid model

curriculum through social-emotional, and just using those videos and those family engagement opportunities to grow what they already are expecting to provide.

Katharine B. Stevens: Grace, what are your — maybe if you could just, maybe a minute, we only have four minutes left. How school districts that have a tendency to get in ruts and stay in them, right, so what are your thoughts on how to keep this up?

Altagracia H. Delgado: I think, to be honest with you, we have seen how the technology that we have access to, it's actually facilitating these pieces. So, as we're strategically planning for next year, on this side of ReadyRosie, we know that we're keeping it for pre-K classrooms, we are now starting to assess if we're going to expand it to the next classroom over just because of response. In regards of our — like, I said, we have a department that is family and community. So, the meetings, the classes, are they going to go back to face-to-face versus remote? The reality is that we're planning already for the next school year to be a little bit like it is right now, in a more hybrid way. So, these meetings will continue to happen.

Like I said, we've had a great response with our families. And we're seeing that we can access them, especially when they're multigenerational and they're babies and, you know, with some of our parents in transportation issues, this is a way that we can reach them out, and we can have these meaningful conversations with them. So, my hope, especially for my multilingual learners, is to keep these pieces of technology that have helped us facilitate these processes with our families so we can continue to grow and we can continue to see how that affects them throughout their school years.

Katharine B. Stevens: And Kathryn, I know CAP Tulsa has been known for very close family engagement for a long time. Are there things that you guys have been doing more of? Or are they more focused on because of the pandemic that you think you'd want to continue and you think you'll be able to?

Kathryn Black: Definitely. I think the pandemic has really brought in our idea that family engagement really forced us to think of out-of-the-box ideas to really personalize, customize our offerings of family engagement, which are specific words from Emily's seven essentials. I think we are collecting data from our parents right now, this week, which are asking families, which pieces have been the most meaningful, and which pieces would you want us to continue forward? So, we're going to listen to our families and listen to what they feel has been the most supportive. So, we're really excited to think about where we can go with family engagement after this year.

Katharine B. Stevens: Very cool. So, Emily, we have about a minute left. Do you want to summarize with any last thoughts? I also want to mention that we'll have the seven principles plus the bonus principle, there's a publication that Emily has that we'll link to, and if any of you guys have other resources that you think would be relevant, please send those to us because we can link to those on the event page. Emily do you have some last thoughts to share?

Emily Roden: The only last thought I would love to share, Katharine, is just I've reflected so much on just the tenacity and the passion of these panelists, right? Really, I so appreciate some of the success stories around ReadyRosie and also CAP Tulsa using the Creative Curriculum Cloud, which was launched specifically to connect curriculum into the home

environment. So, we mentioned some very specific tools, but really the broader connection of all of this, I think, is just the passion, that tenacity. And then the real reliance on some of these research-based strategies, like I said, we didn't come up with it at ReadyRosie, we just compiled them into that list, and they're really guiding our practices. And I love it when we, as publishers, are aligning our practices and our principles with those practitioners in the field who are literally seeing these success stories like the ones that have been mentioned here today. So, it's thrilling and I hope this silver lining grows to be gold, pure gold, right, as we continue and learn from and grow from this experience. So, thank you.

Katharine B. Stevens: Thank you so much. Well, this has been fascinating, you guys. And it seems as though, there's a pretty much across-the-board realization or reinforcement that parents are really eager to have better ways of staying and partnering with the programs their children are in. And this is maybe the best silver lining from this pandemic I've heard yet. So, thank you very much to all of you for participating, and thank you very much to our audience for joining us. And again, please check out the AEI event page for the resources that came up today. Thanks very much.