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ADDRESSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP AND
FOSTERING COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Summary of Conference Proceedings

AUG. 26, 2010

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis—Memphis Branch



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Addressing the Achievement Gap and Fostering Community Leadership Videoconference

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Donna Ford—Executive Summary

BIO:

Donna Ford, Ph.D., is professor of education and human development at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Her work focuses on recruiting and retaining culturally diverse students in gifted education; multicultural and urban education; minority student achievement and underachievement; and family involvement. Ford is co-founder of the Scholar Identity Institute for Black Males. She has served two terms as a member of the board of directors of the National Association for Gifted Children, and has served on numerous editorial boards, such as *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *Exceptional Children*, *Journal of Negro Education* and *Roeper Review*. She is the author of *Reversing Underachievement Among Gifted Black Students* (1996) and co-author of *Multicultural Gifted Education* (1999), *In Search of the Dream: Designing Schools and Classrooms that Work for High Potential Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds* (2004), and *Teaching Culturally Diverse Gifted Students*. She received her doctorate in urban education from Cleveland State University in 1991.

SUMMARY:

The educational achievement gap—or more accurately, achievement “gulf”—begins before children enter school; by kindergarten, there is already a one-year gap between white and black students, with black students trailing. By the time students are 17 years old, this gap grows to four years, on a national average. Statistics vary across cities, with some cities historically noting the gap as much as seven years. Much of the achievement gap can be attributed to a lack of access to gifted education and an over-representation to special education within the African American population. Black males, in particular, are two to three times over-represented in four specific categories and labels—mental retardation, emotionally disturbed, behavioral disorders and developmentally delayed. This leads not only to stigma, but a pipeline of special education that is often unproductive in the long term.



On the other hand, black students are significantly under-represented in having access to gifted education, with a quarter of a million students not having access. The number one school variable that contributes to the achievement gap is lack of rigor in the curriculum, followed by a lack of teacher preparation, less teacher experience, increased teacher absenteeism and larger class sizes, all of which are more common in schools that teach predominantly African American children and/or are located in the inner city. As for solutions, society should allocate appropriate resources to address such factors and must improve access to gifted education and health care, specifically to the black community. We must shift away from an academic and social triage of ‘who gets saved,’ and shed the attitude of ‘those kids.’ Instead, we must adopt an attitude of co-destiny.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- We can narrow the achievement gap, but that’s not our goal; we should actually seek to close the achievement gap.
- Restating the quote that was used in the conference advertisement, the achievement gap has the

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Donna Ford—Executive Summary (cont.)

same impact as a permanent national recession. The achievement gap is perhaps the greatest, or one of the greatest, civil rights issues of our times.

- Many students, particularly African American students, enter school excited, interested and inquisitive about learning; they enter school as question marks, as exclamation points, but they leave school as periods—so disengaged, so disconnected from the educational process.
- Across every state, in the approximately 16,000 school districts, there is an achievement gap.
- One issue that plays a part in the achievement gap is the over-representation in special education, especially among black male students, who are over-represented and labeled as mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, those with behavioral disorders and developmentally delayed. These labels, often derived from tests that can be biased against African Americans, Hispanics and low-income individuals, can lead to not only stigma and teacher subjectivity, but a pipeline of special education that is often unproductive in the long term. Black males are at the greatest risk of being over-represented, two to three times their percentage in schools.
- A second issue playing a part in the achievement gap is under-representation in gifted classes. Black students, as of 2006, are significantly under-represented (47 percent) in having access to gifted education and Advanced Placement classes, with black females under-represented at a rate of 38 percent, and black males under-represented at a rate of 55 percent. This equates to a quarter of a million African American students who do not have access to gifted classes. Hispanic students are also under-represented, although not to as great a degree. According to the College Board's *State of the Nation Report*, the blacker, the browner, the poorer the school, the less likely there are to be either gifted programs or Advanced Placement classes, or if they have Advanced Placement classes, you will tend to find them on the suburban side of the suburban vs. urban, or poorest side of the school district—not the inner-city side of the school district.
- According to *Parsing the Achievement Gap Part II* (authors Baron and Coley), the top factors that contribute to the achievement gap can be grouped into three areas—school factors, home/community factors and health factors. As we look for solutions, we look at these variables, and it will point us in the right direction.
- The number one school-related factor—hands down—that contributes to the achievement gap is **lack of rigor in the curriculum**. Lack of rigor is fundamentally about attitudes and expectations—not about the written curriculum, although that is important—it is about the implemented curriculum, the hidden curriculum. This variable is more about the quality of teacher interactions, the building of relationships, the access or lack of access to curriculum—consciously and unconsciously. The rigor factor is followed by a lack of **teacher preparation**—those who have the least experience are often placed with African American students. Students who need the rigor don't have access. Other factors include increased **teacher absenteeism, class sizes** (on average, black students are in classes with 10 more students than white students), **instructional technology** (either not available or not used), and finally, **safety**, including negative peer pressure.
- In the family/community category, several factors also influence the achievement gap. Data indicate that African American parents are less likely to be **physically involved in their children's schools**. This could be interpreted as parents not caring, but schools can be intimidating and emotionally threatening to parents. **Parent/pupil ratio** (family size): African American families typically have two students per family, Hispanic families have three, white families have one; thus some families are more stretched for quality time with their kids,

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academically in particular. **Talking and reading:**

Many African American children do not have a strong [traditional] English vocabulary; instead, many speak an African American or Black English vernacular or Ebonics, and thus don't do well in language. This can depress test scores and depress people's expectations. **Excessive television watching:** For grades K-6, 82 percent of African American students have a television in the bedroom, compared with 72 percent of Hispanics, and less than 40 percent of white students. **Summer loss:** Low-income children are less likely than higher-income populations to participate in summer enrichment or academically oriented summer camps or to read extensively or write over the summer. Finally, proportionally, more African Americans live in **poverty**. Homelessness is more prevalent, thus many would be changing schools more often, especially for African Americans.

- Health factors that contribute to the achievement gap include: **Hunger and nutrition:** If you are hungry, you cannot learn or concentrate. This also contributes to developmental delays. **Birth weight:** African Americans are more likely to be born with low birth weight than any other group and have the highest infant mortality rate. They are constantly playing catch-up developmentally. Third is the issue of **environmental racism**—such as with lead and mercury. Lead, prevalent in homes among low-income populations, contributes to violence, attention deficiencies and low IQ test scores.
- As for solutions for closing the achievement gap, we must address these factors cited: We need more prepared teachers in the classrooms who can work with students in the low-income populations and culturally different populations, we need improved access to gifted and Advanced Placement programs and less access to special education programs, and we need to have health care providers in schools.
- Society tends to have a bystander effect—we see children not getting the services they need, and

we wait for other people to take care of it. It is an issue of academic and social triage—who's worth saving, and who is not? Too often, low-income populations, minority populations, seem to be expendable.

- The existence of the achievement gap shows an issue of disconnectedness. There is a lack of five Cs—caring, commitment, co-destiny, collaboration and comprehensive services. There is a feeling of “those children” and “those kids,” rather than “my children,” and “my kids.” This shows there is no co-destiny.

MEMORABLE QUOTES:

“I think we know how to close the achievement gap, my problem is the will, the sense of urgency is not there; we need to stop playing games and pretend like we don't know how to close it.”

“Beliefs are our problem. Attitudes are our problem. Values, or lack thereof, are our problems. Our priorities are mixed up; we don't really invest in our children...”

“A mind is a terrible thing to erase.”

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Jean Horstman—Executive Summary

BIO:

Jean Horstman, CEO of Interise, has more than 20 years of nonprofit leadership experience, spanning the private, public and nonprofit sectors and two continents. Before joining Interise as its first CEO, Horstman served as the national director for civic engagement and corporate citizenship at Citizen Schools. She has partnered with other national social entrepreneurs, serving in senior leadership roles with Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild and BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life), and was also the managing director of the Society for Organizational Learning. She spent 16 years working in the United Kingdom and Eastern and Central Europe, where she led organizations responding to societal changes related to post-industrialism, post-communism, urban and economic redevelopment, and globalization. A graduate of Duke University and the City University of London, Horstman is a fellow of the Society for Organizational Learning and the Royal Society for the Advancement of the Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce.



SUMMARY:

Boston-based Interise is a non-profit organization that stimulates the economic revitalization in lower-income communities by providing a diverse group of small business owners with entrepreneurial education, new networks and access to new markets. These business owners in turn create new jobs, grow their businesses and develop into community leaders. Eighty-seven percent of Interise businesses are women- or minority-owned businesses, or are located in low- to moderate-income neighborhoods; the majority are entrepreneurs who have had little or no respect from larger businesses or lenders, despite the fact that they are often the larger local employers in their communities. Interise accomplishes its goal through relationship-based change. Specifically, its strategy is to help small businesses move from isolation and exclusion to trusted relationships by creating personal and professional “meaning making” through networking with one another and volunteering throughout the community. Not only does community volunteering personally and professionally enrich the lives of the givers, as well as the recipients, but such contributions across the Interise network have totaled 5,000 volunteer hours, valued at more than \$1.2 million. If we as a society were to carve out more time for voluntary engagement with those who have traditionally been seen as ‘other,’ we can build a framework for attitudinal changes that make it more likely that we will grow into a people who recognize the need for legislation that promotes equity, equality and opportunity for all of us.

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Jean Horstman—Executive Summary (cont.)

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- All human abilities are learned. We depend on others to acquire the skills and knowledge that we need for our lives. Behind every “I” of our highly individualistic society is a large “we.”
- Interise enables entrepreneurs to make behavioral changes through practical, peer-to-peer learning, a business executive education curriculum taught in classes and in smaller CEO mentoring groups, and access to volunteer business experts in its Private Sector Network (PSN).
- Historically, the job creation rate averaged 1.5 new jobs per business within 12 months of completing Interise’s curriculum. According to 2009 data, the average job creation rate was almost double this. When businesses across America continued to lay off staff, the majority of Interise small employers were hiring.
- Numbers can only tell part of the story of the impact of relationship-based changes. To see the whole picture you need to understand the enduring nature of the relationships that cross cultural boundaries, and for that you need stories.
- When convening to explore questions, share strategies and reflect on what they had done and were doing to continue to grow their businesses, entrepreneurs spoke candidly of themselves, their businesses and their communities. Many found that in seeking to keep themselves and their businesses viable, they also looked for strategies that would benefit their communities. The health of one was intimately linked to the health of the other.
- Human beings are ‘social animals,’ and thus, we have developed two relational approaches to help us order our life together—friendship and social status. The first is based on sharing, mutual support, cooperation and recognition of the needs of others as we work to meet our own needs. The other has its roots in power, coercion and privilege.
- Interise’s relational approach is based on three core values: respect and integrity, continuous learning and improvement, and grit and vibrancy. Business owners learn to move from isolation to trusted relationships on which they can rely for guidance, truthful feedback and fun. The connectedness established through Interise creates friendships that are very different from the ones many small business owners have used to initially grow their businesses—ones that provide pathways to new markets and new networks. As they grow their local businesses, these entrepreneurs in turn connect their communities to these larger relationships.
- Volunteers who wanted to use their business skills to “give back to the community” often learn that what they really want is to be in community with people outside their usual social enclave. Often, many find that they cannot be fully themselves without the work they do in community volunteering. Not only do they end up giving back, but they are often transformed as well.
- Our average work week is growing. Someone working a 44-hour week is annually depositing almost five additional weeks with his or her employer. With our jobs requiring more of our time, there is less time for building relationships outside our work and family, which means less time for engaging and learning with our fellow citizens, and less time for the community. Why do we work these increasing hours? Is it rooted in how our form of capitalism apportions status; that is, status is acquired through achievement and working, rather than relationships?
- A framework of boosted voluntary engagement is more likely to emerge when we stop framing volunteering as “giving back” or “helping others.” While this might be the initial impetus, many volunteers find they discovered a need for meaning beyond their jobs. They use their business skills to step out of transactional relationships and into gift relationships with strangers characterized by trust,

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Jean Horstman—Executive Summary (cont.)

shared learning, creative collaboration and sometimes laughter.

- In our society big knows how to work with big, but figuring out how big works with small is an ongoing challenge. We see this in the response to the recession. Policies designed for big business failed to create new jobs: that is what smaller businesses do. The challenge for government, particularly big government, as it seeks to address major social challenges, is learning how to work with and leverage the impact of these smaller social intermediaries.
- The temptation will be to find a way to try and incorporate social intermediaries into the professional structures of existing institutions or to attempt to scale their impact in ways that mimic corporate development. Social intermediaries are learning that they can often best scale mission impact by being small, smart and connected, working alongside and with existing institutions and government while maintaining their own values, approaches and cultures of innovation.
- The goal of social intermediaries is not revolutionary change, but continuous, connected and consistent small changes that build relationships which move us to a more sociable and equitable society, one where there is greater possibility and room for all of us to have more fulfilling lives together. Relational-based change doesn't move quickly or necessarily in a predictable way—it follows the learning in the relationships.



MEMORABLE QUOTES:

“The future is something that not one of us owns, but paradoxically, all of us own together.”

[Volunteers find that] “Life is more than their work; work is more than their jobs.”

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Douglas Scarboro—Executive Summary

BIO:

Douglas Scarboro, Ed.D., is the executive director of the Office of Talent and Human Capital and is education liaison for the City of Memphis. The Office of Talent and Human Capital addresses Memphis' key human capital needs by developing collaborative action around strategic problems with Memphis' workforce—specifically, providing strategic direction for partnerships that assist public housing residents in the development of workforce skills; increasing the number of college graduates; and developing, recruiting and retaining knowledge workers. As education liaison, Scarboro keeps the mayor abreast of local, state and national education issues and serves as the mayor's primary point of contact for local K-12 and higher education institutions. Before working with the City of Memphis, Scarboro was the director of community engagement at The Leadership Academy and has served as a founder of LaunchMemphis. He has a bachelor's degree in political science from Morehouse College, a master's degree in business administration from Campbell University and a doctorate in higher and adult education from the University of Memphis. Scarboro is an adjunct professor at Christian Brothers University teaching business strategy in the Masters of Business Administration Program.



SUMMARY:

As executive director of the Office of Talent and Human Capital and educational liaison for the City of Memphis, Scarboro and his office's program "One Memphis" has a vision to address Memphis' human capital needs by developing collaborative action and working through workforce issues, including engaging the public housing sector and raising the number of college graduates. Memphis, which is on track to be the first majority minority metropolitan area in the country, can evaluate its demographic strengths and reframe to achieve strategic advantages, especially in the areas of entrepreneurship and minority- and women-owned small businesses. Aiming to build Memphis as a "city of choice," his office seeks to address the achievement gap through leaders that are focused on the issues through deliberate access, attention and action. The implications to society of not addressing such needs are broad and grave: When municipalities forecast the number of prison beds they will need, they make projections based on the educational levels of the fourth and fifth graders. As an example of how closing the academic achievement gap can pay dividends for the regional economy, if Memphis' percentage of college-educated individuals grew 1 percent from 23.7 to 24.7 percent, the economic boost would be \$1 billion. Given trending analysis, it is critical to secure intervention on the achievement gap early in the pipeline.

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Douglas Scarborough—Executive Summary (cont.)

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- When Atlanta was chosen as a site for the 1996 Olympic Games, there was great community fervor. A mentality of a city's people changed from a thought pattern about 'why can't we do this' to 'why aren't we doing this?' 'Why aren't we the international city we've been touted for so long?' 'Why aren't we the head of the region or have a number of headquarters here or leading the nation in certain areas?'
- At any point in time, there will be individuals who will be leading a city, and you have to ask yourself what those leaders are doing and where it is you're going.
- Despite a deliberate goal to ultimately lead an effort around city building and city change, there's not a curriculum where you can learn about this. One way to do this is through various educational experiences, such as through political science, government and business.
- Understanding government is critical because it plays a role in not only shaping a city, but also where the resources are allocated; and where those resources are focused can ultimately lead a city in new directions.
- In this new knowledge economy, no longer are corporations only looking for placement, they are looking for the human capital. They are looking for where you can go to find individuals focused on the area where they can gain the competitive advantage. The cities that will lag behind, the cities that are not going to be able to move to the forefront of the economy, are ones that don't have that human capital in place, those that suffer largely from the achievement gap.
- Trending out educational achievement gaps have broad social impact. When municipalities forecast the number of prison beds they will need, they make projections based on the educational levels of the fourth and fifth graders.
- Instead of trending out how many people will end up in prisons, we can change the mindset and look at how to position people into a particular business area and develop strategic business advantages. If we can look ahead of the trend and increase the rigor, we are able to have that human capital, and we are changing the pipeline. Memphis has that set in place, and will have that for a number of years to make it a city of choice.
- In this knowledge economy, people make deliberate choices of where they want to live; if they do not want to live there, they will leave. People will vote with their feet.
- Memphis is on track to be the first majority minority metropolitan area in the country; more people are considered minorities in what is the seventeenth largest city in America. In the Memphis population of 600,000 to 700,000 people, one-third live at or below the poverty line; 70 percent of these are women- or women-led households.
- Considering entrepreneurship, the percentages of small businesses that are led by women and minorities, and what's driving the national economy, if you look at this correctly, Memphis has a strategic advantage. There are a number of women heading households, but the mindset needs to change and we need to have them head businesses as well.
- As an example of how closing the academic achievement gap can pay dividends for the regional economy, Memphis' percentage of college-educated individuals is 23.7 percent. If that percentage increased just 1 percent, to 24.7 percent of the population being college-educated, the economic boost to the economy would be \$1 billion. This is achieved by having 8,002 additional individuals to complete college and go on to higher-level jobs, which ultimately provides a direct impact to the local tax base.
- It's extremely important for governments to be interested in the achievement gap. Taking a trending analysis, if kids are four years behind in

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Douglas Scarborough—Executive Summary (cont.)

fourth grade, and we're looking at a billion dollars of a potential economic boost at the end, there are a number of milestones kids could be working through. We have to be focused all along the path, but especially early on, at the beginning of the pipeline.

- The City of Memphis is also focused on the issue of “brain drain.” Every day, five young professionals in the knowledge economy and five middle-class families leave the city. So while there are individuals coming into the city, there are people leaving as well, because of “city of choice” issues.
- The City of Memphis is focused on access, attention and action in addressing the achievement gap:
 - **Access:** Not only must we make sure individuals can participate in this knowledge economy, but also take part in closing this achievement gap. We must, as government, focus directly on solutions that provide access for people, and let them know the access is there. The focus in Memphis’ “One Memphis” campaign is on bringing people together, such as in virtual town hall meetings.
 - **Attention:** What you focus attention on is what will ultimately flourish and grow. One newer implementation is the “child impact statement” of new services, so that the ultimate effect of new programs on children can be evaluated in the long term. Attention also means being able to focus attention on specific areas and use nontraditional media sources to get specific messages out, and do so in new mediums and in faster ways so you can drive the messages. One example is “AC-TV” (using the mayor’s initials), which is the mayor’s public access television programming to the citizens of Memphis. This programming will speak about issues of education and community, will be engaging and interactive.
 - **Action:** New funding has paved the way for policy changes and new initiatives in Memphis.

Tennessee was one of the first states to receive Race to the Top funds after the state recently received an “F” for a truth in advertising score for meeting educational standards. Standards for K-12 students are now changing; they will be much more rigorous. Also, the state received funds from the Gates Foundation, with the intent that funding will support teacher effectiveness initiatives and student achievement. Other grant funding includes the Promise Neighborhoods grants designed to replicate successful neighborhoods in other communities, and evaluating pay scales for teachers. Teach Plus is an organization working to promote teacher retention. Also, Memphis is building programs around social entrepreneurs and creating community leaders—creating connections around community action programs that ultimately help retention.

- Tying to the book *The Outliers* and the St. Louis Fed’s 10,000-Hour Challenge in community development innovation, you can have specific action around a particular area, why not let it be around an area that’s extremely important to all of us? Why not let it be around issues that affect the achievement gap? Don’t ask who else is doing work in this area; look toward yourself, don’t ask who should be taking charge for the achievement gap, look to yourself and say ‘what is it that I can spend, where are my 10,000 hours, and how can I spend that toward closing this gap,’ because it’s extremely important for all of us.

MEMORABLE QUOTES:

“Don’t ask for whom the bell tolls, the bell tolls for thee.”

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What are attendees saying?

COMMENTS FROM ATTENDEES:

What's been your major learning, insight or discovery?

"The Tupelo Project Team focuses on retention of students who are dropping out of school and recapturing African American male dropouts. How can we get dropouts back in school or assist them in obtaining their GEDs? Students don't learn the same way as they used to. We have to go outside of the box. If we recapture some of the students, we may also recapture some of their parents who dropped out. Education is the key."

"It was interesting to hear educators and economic development people talking about the achievement gap. The wave of the future is entrepreneurship; however, the kind of education we are providing does not provide critical thinking. Entrepreneurs and today's workforce need to be able to write, speak, communicate, work in teams and interact with others. We are not educating the whole child. Underprivileged kids are not gaining skills to be successful."

"We know there is a problem. There is also more than one solution. Dynamics between Scarboro and Ford show this. Whatever your resolve is, you should do it. Be active. Do what you have to do, as long as you get positive results."

"I remember coming to this country [from Africa]. The high school system was very different. Teachers didn't reach out. It's about motivation. I didn't have a mother and father at home. It was a drive within me to push to go where I wanted to be, achieve what I wanted to achieve. Mom was working 17 hours a day, and there was no father in the house. We don't focus on teachers. We don't value our teachers like we do athletes and entertainers. Teachers are innovators; they innovate us. We need to pay them, too. That's one solution."

How does this discovery relate to your particular perspective (individual, organizational, or community-based development)?

"My perspective is that we don't pit standardized education against educating the whole child. It is an equity issue. We have to make sure children are involved in the student council and other things that can't be measured. We need to share the knowledge we have and expose children; let them know they have options."

"Scarboro's comments are correct, except that the Greater Memphis region will be the first predominantly African American region in the country, not city. We need to recognize Memphis as being really the Hub of the Delta. As bad as the statistics he mentioned for educational achievement in Memphis are, there are areas around us that are even lower. Nationally, when you hear conversations about Memphis, it is one of the places designated as a place that does not require a lot of education to make a living. Historically, that has been the case (largely due to the logistics and distribution industry). Why do we advocate increasing higher education achievement levels; there is a pull of people who continue to locate here to fill these jobs. Retooling and restructuring: How do we do that from a regional perspective, from a tri-state region? We can't just talk about Shelby County. This is something that I did not hear in the conversation. How does that translate to public policy and to public policymakers?"

"Retention of knowledge-based talent is hard to do in any area. This is the 24- to 35-year-olds who are looking for something different. Older age groups are looking for somewhere safe. All places safe don't have what 24- to 35-year-olds are looking for."

"Economic development: [There exists a] large manufacturing base around furniture now being made overseas. These jobs are not available now. Incubators need to be widely advertised. When we hear people

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What are attendees saying? (cont.)

talking about being an entrepreneur, we need to help guide them. Watch out for knowledge-based talent to engage them.”

What is missing from this picture so far? What is it that we are not seeing? What do we need more clarity about?

“One of the things I don’t hear is molding the talents children already have. We don’t do a good job of helping kids find their passion.”

“What was really interesting is that we are missing opportunities with 3- and 4-year-olds. We need to light that fire for learning. Need to front-load instead of trying to catch up in later grades.”

“What’s missing is the synthesis and tie-back to policy and policy implications. From a policy perspective, resources, strategies and approaches have resulted in an entrenchment. There has been a focus on volunteerism to make up the shortfall. But it has become more difficult for people to become engaged, due to the trend toward longer work hours. How do we come up with the approaches and policy recommendations to move us further?”

“Overarching issues are complex, but we have a program in Shelby County that is a powerful intervention, although it is fragile program that’s only 6 or 7 years old. This program provides a free, age-appropriate hardcover book each month for children under 5 who register for the program and live in Shelby County.”
“There are structural impediments that are not connected to policy. We have to connect programs to public policy. [We] need to figure out how we advance policy.”