

# S02E11 Literacy

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## SPEAKERS

Ray Abel, Kareem Weaver

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Ray Abel 00:00

Hello, and welcome to research the news. If you're a regular listener of the show, you know that sometimes we have guests on that we may disagree with on policy issues. And sometimes we just want to explore a topic that isn't getting enough coverage in the media. Today, we're exploring. And what we're going to explore is literacy specifically with us students. And in my research, I found some crazy stats, the literacy rate among adults in the US is 80%, which means that 12% of the people in this country aren't able to read, and 54% of adults aren't proficient in the percentage of fourth grade public school students performing at a proficient level and reading is only 34%. The best way to summarize this problem is a quote from today's guest. Imagine being in the Bronze Age and not having bronze, or being in the Iron Age without iron. Well, we're in the information age. And if you can't read, you can't access information. And this is powerful. Imagine not being able to read or type. Or imagine struggling every time you need to do these things. If you're literate or not proficient, this will either be a struggle, or impossible. You think this would be a really difficult problem to fix, but the solution seems like it's in our reach. So why are the numbers improving? And that's what we're going to talk about today. As always, there'll be no edits to the podcast, we're just gonna have some conversation and see where it takes us. And with that, let's start the show. All right. As we get started today, I just want to go over a couple quick changes. Sometimes, we'll have a co host this season, and sometimes we won't. And season one, we had a co host each episode, but now we're going to kind of depend on the guest and the topic. And Gretchen, who is my co host for most of season one will be guest hosting. But fortunately for her, and unfortunately for us, she just took a teaching position at a university. So on top of all our other jobs, her schedule is a little more limited, but she will be back on for some guest episodes. And as always check out research the news.com and as all of our links that we talked about today, so whether that's statistics or articles, they'll all be there. Now I'm going to intro our guest. Cream Weaver is the co founder of fulcrum, an organization in Oakland, California, whose goal it is to ensure that every child is an ontime reader with full literacy. And he previously led development organization that supported the professional growth of teachers. And he was also a teacher and administrator himself in both Oakland, as well as Columbia, South Carolina. He's also in a new documentary called The right to read which was produced by one of my childhood heroes, and the guy who should be hosting Jeopardy LeVar Burton, and I learned about his work through an article in Time magazine called the push for phonics which discussed a massive effort to change the way

kids are taught to read. And that's what we're going to talk about today. And remember, if you dislike what either of us are saying, keep on listening, because hopefully, you'll at least understand us. Kareem, welcome to the show. more than glad to be here. Thanks for having Yeah, glad to have you on I just for our readers, I want to go talk a little bit about the research coming into this. That documentary I watched, there's some podcasts, we'll link to in unresearched news.com. And it was amazing to me that literacy is such a big problem in this country. And I feel like it's something that was even more amazing that we don't really talk about it. And today, I think cream is going to do most of the talking. But before we get started, I wanted to use my lack of educational experience in the school system to try to explain to listeners, what is currently being taught for reading and what works for reading. So do you mind if I take a stab at that cream?

K

Kareem Weaver 03:53

I'm gonna go ahead. All right.



Ray Abel 03:57

So typically, throughout history, phonics was what was taught. And that started, I think, in the mid to late 19 1800s. And what phonics is, is sounding out letters and, and trying to put together the sounds that letters make, and you can learn to read by sounding words out. But in the 1960s, whole language reading kind of came into vogue, and what that was, was coming up with words that make sense using what they call a three queuing system. So you see pictures, you look at context, and you try to put together words, you know, from this, and the goal is an accuracy, but understanding the text and one of the big things that I saw as a problem with this is the founder, the person who came up with whole language reading, for example, said that when a student reads something like the man is on a horse, that is if they say the man is on a pony, that is basically the same thing, which to me, is not the same thing at all. And I think that's a huge problem. But what kids do is they look at these pictures on the screen and say, Oh, that man's on a pony and they might misuse the word but they at least understand the whole text at a certain level. And what's happening now is balanced literacy has become a thing. And that's kind of in theory teaching both where you have you teach phonics, but you also teach the holistic view of reading the whole language reading. But from the documentary and from some of the research that I've seen, it tends to still be focused on the whole language reading, which, as far as I know, has been completely disproven as a good way of learning to read. So that is my layman's take. What did I get wrong? Graham, what would you add on to it?

K

Kareem Weaver 05:37

You say, Look, I'll give you a c plus b minus. A passing score? Yeah. So you can see your way to graduate with it. But you got the general points, right. I mean, there's more to it than just phonics. But that's, that's kind of the heart of it. You know, do you actually teach kids directly how to do something? Or do you let them experience their way through it? That's basically what it comes down to. And, you know, we we have this culture about self discovery and erudition, and, you know, and that's all fine. But you know, you got to teach kids, it comes down to do you teach directly, not, in fact, I was I had a meeting with the chief academic officer of a charter network. This is a few years back when I first started this work. And I was

explaining to them, you know, what the situation was, the challenge was, and the chief academic officer looked at me, and he said, and sincerely, he says, But what does this do for our philosophy, of self discovery of kids figuring things out on their own in what you're saying makes sense. But I don't understand how you connect those two. And I looked at him. And I've known him for years. And I said, Man, you know, my organization, and the NAACP is our duty to treat you like a crack house. Because what your philosophy is doing is that much damage to our community. Wow, he just looked at me is African American guy just looked at me, I was like, Man, I don't know how else to make it plain to you, the damage that you're doing. You got to teach kids, you can't expect them to know something that this is a Hocus Pocus, teach them and it will see from there. So you did a pretty good job summing it up, but it's just about do we teach him directly all the pieces? And have them you know, build their knowledge and build their skill and build everything else? Or do we, you know, just kind of do it through osmosis and experiential learning and all the rest?



Ray Abel 07:51

Well, I think, you know, that was when I was watching these documentaries and listening to these podcasts. That's the thing that kept coming back to me, I kind of I got a little bit angry at someone who had learned to read fairly early and I, my grandfather always encouraged me to read. And so watching the documentary and seeing some of the good parents who are really trying to help their kids, that was some of the support I got at home from my my grandfather. And I just kept thinking, why do we teach this way? And so, you know, I started digging in and seeing that, obviously, curriculum is a huge, huge thing. And there's a woman, Jessica Caulkins, I believe is her name that does a lot of the curriculum that they're trying to change that over but it's in a third of the classrooms. Why are we still teaching this? Is it that there's like, in my head, I sort of think, is there some kind of weird curriculum Cabal? Or are teachers just not aware of other options? Why do we think we're teaching something that's as bad as crack when it goes to?



Kareem Weaver 08:54

A good question? So Lucy Calkins, her name is Lucy Calkins, her her curriculum is very, very popular. And there are others too, because she's not the only one. There are some others. And first of all, we got to recognize that publishing is big business, big business. Imagine having a customers that have to buy your products, every couple of years, you know that they spend hundreds of millions of dollars around the country on new books and new materials and all the companion guides and teachers editions and this and that every year. Some of these publishers are for profit, a very few of them are nonprofit. You know, I met with some of the CEOs and they told me Kareem, we have a fiduciary responsibility to our shareholders, to give the customers what they want. So I was blaming them and mad at them. But what they were saying to me was, hold on wait a second. We just given to teachers and principals and superintendents and everything what they're asking for. We don't tell them what to do. We respond to their requests, and we sell it and I had to step back and think about that. You know, there's some truth to that. They're not the university putting up these methods. They're not, you know, the culture within education. So who's responsible for it? The hard answer is we are. Because while we're so busy with everybody else, and everything else, we're sitting here looking at it, we're too busy to pay attention to our kids is the bottom line of it. And we're letting this nonsense go on schools every day across the country, red, blue, independent, you

name it, it happens everywhere. And we're too busy. And I think the pandemic actually shook it all up, because for the first time, a lot of parents had a kid in the living room being taught how to read on the screen. Now, wait a second, what are they doing over there? What did she tell you to do? You're supposed to look at it. So the game kind of is up at that point. So I think for us, it's paying attention more. But Lucy Calkins has one curriculum or units of study, and they're adapting it to her credit. She has acknowledged some of the issues and is trying to fix it the main but the damage is done, man. I mean, you know, what are you gonna do? And



Ray Abel 11:13

I mean, I saw some articles recently that that was changing, but it seemed to be after a ton of pushback from people like you and other organizations and parents, and it still seems to be a big hesitancy to change that which, inside I was I was getting, I was getting pretty upset that this was still being taught and that there were people holding on to this because it doesn't seem at all the research keeps coming back that this is wrong. This is wrong. And one of the I was listening to a podcast from a woman named Emily Hanford, and she was talking with a principal. First off Lucy Caulkins, I said Jessica Lucy wouldn't appear on her podcast, which I was pretty upset about, because I wanted to hear her side of things. But she was talking about how she contacted a principal in Oakland, who said there wasn't enough information, and they were committed to the curriculum they had invested in. And those were the words of investing in this curriculum kind of gave me a little bit of a yellow flag of what isn't I started looking at some of the numbers. And I tried to find you said just now a couple 100 million dollars in curriculum. And I tried to find numbers for how much was out there. And the only thing I could find was from St. Louis, Missouri School District, Rockwood that they had one of their bottom line budget items out on the internet. And they spent for 22,000 students \$25,000 in one fiscal year just on Lucy Caulkins curriculum. So that's over \$1 student and there's 76 million students in the US. So you start doing the math. And



Kareem Weaver 12:45

it's not it didn't You didn't have on top of that. You have the professional development, the training, the supplemental materials, the licenses, all of that it's a cottage industry, it's not even a college, it's a metropolis. It is in business is booming. Because we have to educate these kids. It's part of the Department of Education, free and appropriate education, and we got a right to it. Okay, well, what's what's appropriate. And, and that's the challenge. So I'll put it to you like this. Imagine, you know how you're a kid and you ride with your parents. And you see, you see your mom or dad driving a car, and you've been doing it for a while you're 89 years old, and you're thinking, Man, I could do that. That's that's the driving every day, I could I could do that I could drive this car, I bet you if I had to, I could drive this car. Now there are some kids who for whatever reason, they can pull it off. There's an emergency, somebody's got to get to the hospital, and you see a kid sitting on phonebooks with leg extensions, and they figure that thing out, most kids crash on the way to wherever they go. And, and that's the same thing. It is literacy right now. It is, you know, a small percentage of people that can figure it out just by watching and being read to the passengers in the car, and they see this, they can figure it out. But the majority of our kids are crashing on the way so we can debate about the kind of car it is or the curriculum, you know, sure. Would it be easier if it was a UFO? Or as opposed to as opposed to explore? Sure. But at the end of the day, you have to teach somebody how to drive you got to teach them how to read a mess, and you needed a license of this or that. But you

have to at least teach them how to do it so they don't wreck their lives and wrecked by this tune. It's the same thing with our kids, man, our kids. You know, they're not magicians. They're just kids and they love being read to the materials. Sometimes they're engaging and it's some people who say well, let's make the curriculum more fun. And this is more or more tied to their culture and their language background and all that's fine. Like all that's fine. But here's what they don't realize. Good teaching is the answer for that. You You could give me the most boring, dry curriculum. And if I'm a great teacher, I breathed life into that thing. My mentor, teacher Rest in peace, Dorothy Shanks, she told me one day, she said, Kareem, I could teach a kid anytime, anywhere. That was her attitude. And she meant that thing, you know. And so the curriculum matters. Yes, it does. But it's also the educators that matter and learning the science of reading, not just how to do a curriculum, learning what has to be taught, figuring out what kids need, whether they have dyslexia, or they just regular Johnny needs to talk the ABCs and one, two, threes, and how to put it all together to make a sentence and a story, etc. So we got a long way to go in along with ago,



Ray Abel 15:48

I think one of the stats I heard, that ties back into what you just said, when I was doing some of the research here was that they think 40% of kids will learn to read no matter what. And I think that ties in with what you said that some kids will just grasp it. But when I heard that, I thought to myself, it doesn't seem like going back to you saying we're not teaching. And I'm actually doing some college courses in mathematics right now. And I have two different professors, and one of them is very good at explaining I don't, I don't want to know, here's the answer. And here's the quick way of getting there. I want to understand what's happening behind the numbers and what's happening and what's causing something to happen. That's what I strive for. So I end up going on YouTube and looking at videos of like kids algebra, because it's getting me back into remembering how to actually do this work. And I think that's the part where when I see this whole language reading, where you're just telling kids just guess, and just try to figure it out. That doesn't at all seem like teaching and educating. It seems almost to me, from a computer perspective of machine learning, we throw a bunch of stuff at them, and hope it sticks. And that seems like the wrong way of doing it. But what do what do the teachers think? Because I feel like we've talked a bit about administrator so far. And we know that you're fighting against this, but and one of the teachers I saw in the right to read documentary seemed almost in tears, because she didn't know what she could do to change things. And so generally speaking, our teachers kind of stuck in the old way, do they want something new? How do you what do you get for the vibe them?



Kareem Weaver 17:20

Right now teachers are confused. Because they understand the universities who prepared them. And the licensing boards that gave them the credential, etc. Most have been taught a certain way. They've been taught to the look see method, you know, but and the evidence about what works has been mixed. They haven't really had a situation where kids were thriving at scale. But everything you've been taught all your training all your background, the money that you spent in this university telling you one thing, now all of a sudden, there's this movement to say wait a second, there's a different way. And it actually is older, way more established. And but we're not doing it. They're like, wait a second, what are you talking about? And if they deviate from the script, oftentimes they're punished. In Oakland, one of the best

educators I know, was chased out of Oakland, because she had the nerve to say this wasn't right. Because if you say if you say it's not right, you're questioning authority. Now, it's about power and control. You know, teachers have a contract, and they serve at the pleasure to Superintendent basically. And it's like, you know, they post something's not right, but what are you going to do? A lot of teachers just close the door to the best they can, that and you see teachers, you know, online getting resources or using their own curriculum, or whatever it is. And that's tough, you can't slip and slide your way through your career. You know, you have to work together with your colleagues, etc. So teachers are in a confused state right now. And I will say this, there is a movement or a tendency to blame teachers for things that maybe some do deserve blame. Sure, you go along and get along. At some level, you're responsible for what you do. Sure. At the same time, they feel betrayed, betrayed, they spent all this money, time and energy to do the best they could to get results for kids. And now, it's all broken down. And people are pointing the finger at them. There's a sense of betrayal because I don't see many superintendents and chief academic officers and school board members raising their hand and saying, you know, we blew it. We gave you all the wrong curriculum. We said the wrong thing. We went with the trendy stuff that was wrong. It's not the teacher that they're not saying that they on to the next job the next career, and they're not trippin. And they left the teachers holding the bag. Now teachers are like me now do they told me to do what you expect from you. So a lot of it is betrayal is frustration because it's sobering to think that you've been doing something for years. And you, you weren't serving kids the way they needed to be served. And that's, that's a, that's a hard bag to hold. And so right now teachers are going through it, and they're being tasked with learning things all over again. And who's responsible for that? Who's gonna pay for that? Who's gonna value their time? I mean, there's a lot. There's a lot? Well, I think



Ray Abel 20:22

I do encourage everyone to watch this documentary when it's released their screenings across the country, because I don't think you can watch this and not have compassion for the students, for the families for the teachers. One thing in my research that came up, though, going back to administrators versus teachers, I started looking at the number of administrators versus teachers. Now, I wonder if you have some thoughts on this. So I looked up some doe Department of Education stats. And for elementary and secondary teachers from Fall of 2000, there was 97,000 administrators, 141,000 principals and 2.9 million teachers, fall of 2019, which was the last year of stats, it was 182,000 admin 193,000 principals and 3.1 million teachers. So teachers went up by 8.7%, while principals went up by 36, and admin staff went up by 87.6%. So you talked about spending money and how it's a resource problem, but I look at that, and they say, why aren't we at? Do you have any thoughts on? Is that a problem with we need more teachers? or more? Or we just need to re assess funds? Or is that the right way? Should we be spending 87% more and as is,



Kareem Weaver 21:38

I have something it's probably nobody gonna like this one. But it's not about the money. It's not about the ratios. I mean, listen, all that stuff matters. That's true. And we need more teachers, they need to be paid more. First of all, like just in general, you ought to be able to buy a house in the neighborhood you teach. If you've been teaching kids and doing a great job and why you have to live 50 miles outside of town. That's a whole nother question, right. But when I say it's

not about the money, man in school districts have a ton of money is what they spend it on. I split on that since nine times out of 10. And I spend it on people and I spend it on professional development and training. You know, I'll give an example. When they have a new curriculum, most most your listeners, if you had to pick a new reading curriculum, what would you do? Like if you have a year or a year and a half to choose? How would you do it? Would you go visit your neighboring? You know, look for somewhere that's working, maybe go ask some questions, you know, read some recent research, maybe you have a team of dedicated people to figure it out. Now, not just not just school districts, they look to see what their neighbors are doing. They see who has the best brochure, they get a committee together of whoever has the time and bandwidth to actually do it. And then they vote. And it's like, wait a second, how about we take some time to go look around the country to see what's working best? How about, we do some research and read what these curriculum actually have to offer. But for the most part, teachers, and I'd say IT administrators to that I'm gonna shift to this a little bit, right. There's another aspect of it. So I'm gonna just given everybody a mulligan, you can't just do the wrong thing. And not have your finger on the steering wheel. It's your class, you're the teacher, you're the principal you to educate you the superintendent, minute when I taught, you know, I use the materials that I needed to use to get the results I wanted to get for kids. It cost me a lot of money. That was terrible. But what was I supposed to do have kids guess words? What the sector has to come to grips with? Is the fact that in order to make sense of the results that we're getting for kids, we had a choice to make? Do we look at ourselves and what we're doing? Or do we look at these other factors outside the kids, and pointed fingers there. And collectively, we chose to do that. And that is something that we have to account for. And and when you engage with parents of community, like there's a reckoning that has to happen. So we talk about poverty, and they're so poor, you know, they're so they're so traumatized. And these rural areas and Appalachia or its inner cities or whatever, they just have the you know, these are, these are like the lower parts of society. And so these kids are handicapped, they came learning anyway. So what are you going to do? Like, we actually bought into that as a sector to explain away why we weren't doing what we were supposed to do, why we weren't doing what the research said, gets the best results for kids. So we got to look in the mirror and be like, You know what, what is it about us that when the chips were down Instead of checking ourselves look in the mirror, we point our finger at these kids and their families and their communities. You know, is that little is that little boy in rural Kentucky? You know, is He? Is he defective? The little white boy whose parents are strung out? Or it's an opioid use whatever it is he so he can't be taught. What about the little Latino kid who's coming from parents that don't speak English is the unteachable now that she can teach her? Or what about the little black child who's who, you know, like all these, we start pointing fingers at all this other stuff. And that's a reflection on us, and who we chose to show up as when the chips were down. Because when the chips are down, we could have said, Wait a second, what are we teaching? Is this working? Let's look at the materials. Let's look at our training. Let's look at all these other factors. Now, we didn't do that. We didn't do that we turn to the kids and say, oh, yeah, they're broken. And this is the wretched of the earth, you know. So. So there's there's a lot to account for. And sometimes it's just best to wipe your hands up and walk away. And a lot of people doing that right now, because it's too much dissonance to hoe.



Ray Abel 26:06

I mean, I love what you just said. And I think this is one of those times where I think there's probably a lot of issues, we may come from different perspectives on you and I based on our backgrounds, but I think that everyone tends to want the same thing in the end. And this is part of the thing we want to do here in the podcast is talk about what are some solutions? And what

are some? What are some ways we can come to agreements. And that's one of the things I get frustrated with, you know, when I tell people I'm fiscally conservative people get really be obviously you were born rich, and you just had, you know, all of this great background that you want to keep your money. It's like no, I was actually on welfare and food stamps and had a ton of issues. But I want to spend money on the right things. And that's the same thing you're saying here. I mean, I don't mind if we have the same budget for schools, I just want to spend on the right things and don't want to feel like my money is being wasted. And the part you talked about with kids being handicapped. That's the problem I see on both the right and the left, I feel like the right tends to not put any stock in home life and historical factors. It's just pull yourself up by the bootstraps, and you have no excuses. And it's like, well, you're coming from a disadvantage. And then on the left, it's like, well, if you do have a disadvantage, you're handicapped, you're going to struggle, just deal with it and try to fight against the social issue instead of trying to better yourself. And that was one of the things I saw. In the documentary, there was a mom and dad, who were working with a kid named Fred Jr. And man, I'm rooting for Fred Jr. Oh, my goodness, little Fred, Fred, oh, my goodness, that kid, his parents were amazing. And mom was working three jobs working overnight that dad was at working as well, but they were doing whatever they can to help their kid and even moving them to a different school district. And that's the part that hit me, when they talked about moving him to a different school district to get better education. When you're born with wealth, and when you're born with money, you don't have to worry about this public school system. Because if it, if they're not teaching something that works, you take your kids to a private tutor, or you move them to another school district. Whereas when you are poor, I mean, the fact that those parents said that they wanted to move to a different school district was shocking to me not because they aren't doing the right thing, or they didn't think they would care about their kid. But just trying to understand how you do that when you're working that many jobs and trying to just get by putting that as the focus. It just it's amazing to see parents who are like that, and I want to be able to give those parents the opportunities that they need to succeed and be able to give them the the tools they need.

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### Kareem Weaver 28:38

If you're working hard and doing the right thing, and trying your best to make it as an individual, as an as a family, you're doing everything you can do. And you assume that when you can't go to school, they're going to at least have a chance and they do their part, right? They're going to use this public institution, they're going to do the best they can an income find out that oftentimes, that's not the case. It's sobering, you know, a common theme throughout the country. There's two things one, a lot of parents of families send their children to other relatives, so that they can go to a different school, you know, because your address has to be a certain pin to qualify for, or they move, or they or they lie and say we live someplace where they really don't live. They use somebody else's address to mail come to the other person like this is I did it. My nephew came to live with me. You know what I'm supposed to do? Let him just struggle in this. So that's the first thing you got this kind of underground railroad of people trying to navigate the system because they know the truth that forget the bumper stickers and the slogans, they know the truth and that school teacher Kay's been awful for whatever reason, then you have folks who have the money. And when you have money, the assumption is everything is alright. And that's not true. Because just like you said, people spend money on private tutoring all the time, all the time. The way we teach reading is not working for them either. It's not working for folks who are well heeled, who just happen to be doing well in life that's not working. So you see these places like Kumaon and Sylvan and these little tutoring centers, that's the cottage industry. That's if I had to put money in somewhere, as is investor, I



put it there, because they're all over the country, because kids can read, they go places where they know people have their sources, they're not gonna let the kids fail. So they sit in the kumana learned things that show learned in school, these these type of things are happening all over the country. He's trying, but his parents are trying to figure it out and save their kids.



Ray Abel 30:36

I mean, I, one of the podcasts I was listening to you talked about tutoring in New York City being \$400 an hour for reading with some of those private schools. And I mean, jeez, I'm thinking about switching.



Kareem Weaver 30:48

What would you pay? What would you pay to save your child? What would you pay? What would you pay? If it's in New York and Beverly Hills of Palo Alto, where Oakland or anywhere else? How much would you pay? If you know your kids not getting what they need? Would you pick up a second job? Would you pick up a third job? Would you pay the \$100 an hour for the tutor? Or do you just let your child suffer and say, Oh, well, a parent's got to make this on top of your regular bills on top of your other commitments, that puts strain and stress on families. Because you know, when you live in on the razor's edge already, you might not have that kind of bread, you might not have that kind of money, right? But the reality is parents have to answer that question. Okay, how committed? Are we to make a new sort of does kid can survive? Or do we just let it go and leave it to chance?



Ray Abel 31:36

I love it. Now, one of the things we like to talk about here is not just the problems, but the solutions. And when you talk about that, instead of forcing this on the parents, whether they're low income or high income, because it didn't seem like this was the teaching method didn't seem to be focused primarily on lower income settings, it seemed to be pretty prevalent everywhere. But what when you say we need to spend money on the right things? Where does some of that money go? That's the right things. Is it strictly the curriculum and changing what that looks like? Or is it a more holistic approach?



Kareem Weaver 32:09

Oh, you got to spend money to get good curriculum, there's got to be a tight tune to the research. You got to have good assessments. You have to have good intervention programs, when kids aren't reading, you got to be able to help them, you know, have safety nets. And there's some really good programs out there for safety nets. You have to provide quality, professional development, understanding that the universities aren't doing what they're supposed to do. I've been in universities, talking with Dean's and their faculty and listening to them. And matter of fact, I was in a very prestigious, I was at a very prestigious university, and engaging with him about this whole topic and how they teach reading because I also work with the NAACP. I'm on the Education Committee for Oakland, I was on the California State Conference Committee, and I'm no longer run out of money on the local. But we talk with

universities and colleges, and we challenged them and we ask questions. Now forget, so I'm in this meeting, the dean is there, the faculty is there and he brought all the faculty in. And the they're debating about this, they're talking in front of the dean, the Dean thinks they're going to call in their professors, and they're going to share with the NAACP, what's working, come find out the professor are arguing right from the Dean, two methods, one teachers debating with the methods to teacher, they've had this long standing feud for 20 years. And the methods to teacher Betsy says, you know, I've had to teach methods one and methods to because she's not teaching what she's supposed to be teaching like. So at the highest level of our institutions, there's a debate that has been going on to the detriment of our kids. So you can't really count on the universities to get their act together, I would say, funds going in his public universities should be tied to a commitment to teach kids how to read and to have some accountability for the line like they should they shouldn't be able to just teach in your thing that the teachers, they're spending their hard earned money and the public is subsidizing US universities, we should expect that you've given people the tools they need to serve our kids. So money's got to go until that's fixed money's got to go to professional development. Teachers should not have to come out the pocket after buying their way through college, you know, the tuition everything. And then, you know, learning all the stuff they had to learn. They shouldn't now have to go back and pay 1000s of dollars to learn how to teach reading on their own. They when they barely make enough money to pay the rent, they need the state or the district or the county should be paying for the professional development. They should be providing a stipend to value their time so that they can go and learn what they need to learn for our kids. But that's where the money should be going man and teachers and all these other things I just named the American Federation of Teachers has a has a website, they it has the elements of an effective reading program. It's phenomenal. It's fantastic. And they've had another 15 years. The problem is, we're so busy arguing about everything else, everything else, that we don't really pay attention to it.



Ray Abel 35:16

So I think there's two things there. You want to I want to touch base on one as the arguments over some of the theory behind things. And the other is what actually, how can you tell if something is good or not? Other than testing, lack of testing is shocking to me. I think there was what is it the any a test is the only reading proficiency tests I forget the acronym is but the lack of testing to see if these programs are working was was pretty shocking to me. But when we go back to the theory, I think this is something that I have a frustration with with higher education is the fact that in theory, a lot of these ideas sound great, even the idea of the whole language reading to me as someone who likes to look at the whole picture sounds great in theory, but in reality, it doesn't work. And one of the quotes you had in the Time magazine article that you mentioned, I wanted to just kind of touch base on was you said that regarding phonics. You said this seems dehumanizing. It's colonizing. It's the man telling us what to do. And that was a kind of a common theme with teachers. And they didn't think they abandoned what they worked, because they didn't like how it felt to be adults. And so can you talk to me a little bit more? Because that was one of the things I found confusing was what is dehumanizing about phonics or about this method of teaching? And why are people kind of thinking that and is that theory prevalent and a big problem.



Kareem Weaver 36:42

So, look, man, you have, you have to understand who our teachers are, who our educators are.

Okay, they wouldn't be in those positions, if the system didn't work for them. The way things were taught, worked for them, about 5% of people are going to learn to read pretty much on their own, you got another 30 to 35% that are going to learn to read in any variety of methods, you use whole language pictures, balanced literacy, cool, you know, Montessori method, whatever, like, they'll figure it out, just teach them something, they'll pick it up. Everybody else, it's gonna be tough. Like, you have to actually teach them step by step to crack the code. And some are gonna need some diagnostic support. You got kids with dyslexia, and so so who do you think is teaching? Who do you think are the principals and supervisors in history, this that 35%, then it worked for. So for them, it doesn't come from a place of malice. They're seeing, they're seeing the struggles of kids and their wit's end to make sense of it. And if they can, well, by and large, the best thing I could do, the most loving thing I could do, is to do for them. What was done for me, to teach it to them the way I learned it, not realizing that they're the survivors of a system that doesn't work for the majority of the people, and the way that work for them is not going to work for everybody else. That's one of the biggest challenges we have as learners bias. So, you know, in terms of, I want to make sure I get your question in terms of how, you know, they're, they're perceiving it, or why they allow things to happen, or and all the rest or how we move away from that. There's some humility that has to happen. We have to question our assumptions. There's politics involved, too, you know, I hate, you know, I hate to even go there. But there's some of that, you know, if it worked for me, it must be the right way. But beyond that, politically speaking, like, I want kids to be affirmed, I want them it's a very loving, caring approach. Some would call it a progressive approach. It's wanting to affirm the kids. Well, that's all fine. And well, we want to affirm the kids, we want their identities to be formed, we want them to have belief itself in the community, and that's all wonderful. But, you know, my position is the best way you can do that is teach them how to read. Then they can go read about Dr. King, they can go read about Malcolm X, they can go read about whatever they you know, whatever their thing is, let's not make assumptions and prescript who and what they will be instead let's give them the tools to unleash their own potential and develop as a as they want to develop them, their families and communities needed to be the you got to back off. The ideologies are killing kids, like let's stop explaining away to issues. And let's just teach the kids like the politics is is stifling. And like I say Oftentimes, our, the way we do things comes from a good place. The education is a profession of helpers, like we want to do good. That's what you want to do if you're going to be a teacher or a principal. But at the same time, you can't just rely on your own frame of reference, because he'll betray you is the way we learned it. Those were the survivors of the system. Now, you go to prisons, it's a whole different ballgame. They're reading about between third and fourth grade level. In fact, the Office of Justice, or the Department of Justice, about 25 years ago, came out with a report basically saying, these young people that are coming into prison, we got to reduce the recidivism because they go to come back and go to come back, the best way to do it, is to teach them how to read. This is what a prison system was saying 25 years ago, we got to teach them how to read. And when you come in labeled as being handicapped, or disabled, what we found out is they just can't break down words. And the teachers like, it's amazing new redid. And so that's why, you know, 25 years later, here's the first step back. Trump signed it. And this is part of the criminal justice reform stuff, basically saying, Okay, let's now take it seriously, clearly, the education sector is not gonna change. So we're going to have to change and make sure that we're going to screen people for dyslexia when they come into prison, the Federal Penitentiary, we're going to give them the help they need to get a GED. But it shouldn't man, I don't think anybody in our society is thinking that the Federal Penitentiary should be the first place people get screened for reading difficulties. Or that should be the place where people get the help they need to learn to read and I unless the most cynical among us, maybe, but most Americans would say, Nah, that's not the way we want to do things. So we just have to shift our thinking, man, it's possible. It's doable. But parents, teachers especially. And leaders have to put their

hands on the steering wheel, and be humble, to acknowledge what went wrong, and say, Okay, let's commit to doing something different. And as a parent, I'm not going to let you spin me around and talk over my head. I don't care about all that, as you speak, I just need to know, is what you're doing following the research? What are they going to learn that sounds what what sound and when, what week, I want to come see it. You know, don't tell me my kid has a level K or L What does that mean? Can you sound out? You know, and are they understand what they read. So we have to take a step back and move away from the political analysis of everything. It's important, it's important, you got to go there, I get it, you gotta go there. I'm not gonna go there with you. And this is a we thing, we all got to figure this out. Because if we don't do it, right, and everybody's clutching IT person, they walk down the street, because you don't know what a person who can't read is going to be, you know, pushed into a situation and do you know, when you're homeless and have no place to lay their head at night. And here, you come with \$100 purse, which you think is gonna happen, you know, so it's something for all of us to resolve.



Ray Abel 43:01

You know, it's I never thought about that connection until you just said it. And I cheated and looked up at some stats here. And I was I wanted to see what percentage of prisoners who can't read. And it's estimated at 75%. That is



Kareem Weaver 43:19

listening. Right? Right. So what we argue about in the elite ivory tower spaces, right, the people on the ground, and our prison system is the most it just lays everything bare. I'll give you an example. Real quick. So, I used to be an administrator at a juvenile justice facility. This is in South Carolina. And that probably was illegal. I told the story only once before, it probably was illegal. But you know, sadly, I hate to say it like this members will keep it real with you sadly, like nobody care. I care. It's like whatever, you know, they locked up for a reason. If you can get them to act right, good. Go ahead and do it. We actually took volunteers of kids and and took them to church. Oh, wow. I took them to church because you know in itself you got Sunday school, right? They do Sunday school everything so we took them to Sunday school. And it took all of one Sunday for everything to change. Because in Sunday school you know, you got to read a little little little they have little unfortunate little tracks love your lessons. They had their they couldn't read the lessons. So these all ladies were like, oh, no, we don't these babies. What are y'all doing and we they can't read. So they taught them how to read mother dewdrop and Mother Wardlow and all these people, they just they would teach them how they're like No, we got this. We got this. They would teach them how to read. Then they would take them to the kitchen and feed them they had a kitchen. Now. This went on for months and the kids loved it. As they were getting attention, the church loved it because they felt that this was their mission. You know, the only thing I had a young man who was scheduled to be released, you know, back to whatever his situation was, he came back up to me Weaver, Weaver, man, well, I can't go back, like, what can I do? Can I just say, like, maybe a couple more months? like, Nah, man, we can't, that's not that's not that's above my paygrade you gotta go, you gotta go, Nah, man, I'm learning. Man, I'm gonna read. Like, if I just get a couple more months, imagine that young person begging to stay incarcerated. Because it's the only place that teaches them how to read these little old ladies within little things, teach them sound out words and all of this and sort of, so that they could read the scriptures. You know, so for us as a society, we have to make up

our minds, you know, the, what is our so that they were doing it so that they could access that? What's our so that and I would submit, we got to be teaching his kids to read so that they have a fighting chance in life, so that they, you know, our, our economy can flourish so that our families can be stabilized so that we're not spending all this money unnecessarily so that we're not wasting their time and talent. So that the pain, the real pain that happens when a child is struggling to read is abated. You don't know how that's gonna metastasize when a child can't read the pain that it causes? And they start wondering, don't they care? Don't these adults give it give two cents about me and my future? They just don't let me fail like this. There's a sense of bitterness and enmity that happens with kids when they realize the adults just didn't care enough to help them. So we've got to figure this out so that our kids have a fighting chance. And I always appreciate those old ladies in that church because they were like, no, no, no, I don't know what you're doing. We don't teach these babies to read. We got it. Don't worry about it.



Ray Abel 47:03

You know, I love I mean, I love it. And I hate it. I love the fact that that's happening. And I hate that it has to happen. I hate hearing that a kid wants to stay in prison to be able to learn but, you know, I worked before in an after school program. And I was faith based and seeing people come down there was there was a woman there was a basketball game we had one time and the name was Miss Gail. Miss Gail was an older white woman. She had this group of kids that came down for this basketball tournament. They were about six, eight, I think they were all black kids. From the inner city, Miss Gail comes down with her little umbrella. And she has like a little old tank top on and she's reading her little book when like watching These Kids play basket and those kids loved Miss Gale, you wouldn't looking at the situation they wouldn't stick out as like, wow. That seems like they would have a great friendly relationship. They would hang out. But the kids did. They hung out with Miss Gail, they went to her house. They learned from her they learned but she really cared about the kids and really helped them grow. And, you know, that's the kind of stuff that I want to see happening, but not when they're in prison when they're outside of prison. And I mean that. I think that's powerful. What you guys did down there. Is that something that's still going on?



Kareem Weaver 48:27

No. In fact, I think that juvenile justice facility, last I saw it had transitioned to another use. But yeah, that was part of my assistantship when I was in South Carolina as a grad student, you know, and like I said, I don't want to get them in trouble. But I'm talking about it now. It's because I found out that they may have a transition to something else. But it was I was desperate enough to figure out something that worked. And that's the question is like, are we desperate enough to fix this problem? Are we, to be honest, the adults us we're too distracted. We argue we fuss and fight Thanos, red and blue, conservative, liberal, all that type of stuff. Like we got plenty of stuff to debate. Are we desperate enough to prioritize our children? Or do we want to keep fussing and fighting about this? Or about everything else? I got? And I honestly don't know the answer to that question yet. When I go into NAACP means I'm asking this question. When I go to these other places I'm asking that question the Yup, you're done yet. Can we can we focus on his kids yet? Are we still we don't wait too long. Or do we have to wait until your child goes to jail to York has not even gone to jail? That's like a salacious thing is wait until your child experiences the pain. I was reading about that while the shooting in Texas. I

wasn't surprised when I read the investigative report and said the kid was googling dyslexia on his computer before this that you know, like men If you leave kids in the place of pain, and if you don't give them the help that they need, you just don't know what's gonna happen. You just don't know. And it's a challenge for all of us. Because here's the other thing, what we're doing actually works for some kids, like you mentioned before, you know, 30 35% or so of kids are working. I mean, our proficient readers, what we're doing is working for some kids. It's working. Right. And so the question is, is that enough? And we have to ask ourselves as a country, is that enough? What's our standard? Do we think our kids are somewhat defective? Do we think that because it's not just, it's not just kids of color? Or white kids or poor? I guess everybody? Can we even do that everybody thing anymore. Everybody thing is out of vogue, like we've done in big projects, you know, we're gonna go to the moon, okay, everybody's on board with that we're gonna do this, we're gonna fight for civil rights. At a certain point, at a certain point, everybody got on board with that, then we have some everybody things do we still had an illness as a country to do it everybody thing. This is like a national works project. It just happens to be about our kids and what they need to survive.



### Ray Abel 51:15

You know, I, as frustrated as I get with media, with Twitter, with certain people's, pretty much all politicians. I think at the core of it, I do think we have the everybody in us. But the problem is the everybody are the silent majority. And I feel like, there are so many people who want to see solutions, but they don't even hear about them. And the fact that I mean, all I hear about when I hear about education is the parent, fighting against critical race theory or fighting to include more critical, it's a critical race theory, it's social issues. It's transgenderism, it's all these things. And it's nothing about the education itself. That's what I hear about in the news. And that's where people get very passionate and emotional. And I think if anyone heard that 34% of kids were proficient in reading, if they aren't upset about that, they're not the person I want to hang out with. But I would say 95% of the population is probably going to be upset about that. But we have this vocal minority of politicians, then media, and Twitter is just such a disgusting place where you get all these texts, you go through Twitter, and you think, man, people, we're gonna have a civil war here soon. And like, everyone hates everyone, let me get on public. And it's like, everyone pretty much likes each other. And so I do think that we do have an everybody mentality, we just need to get some of the people in power to get behind us. And I think when you look back at the history of slavery, with the history of civil rights issues, keeping all those things comes from power. And it's, we always got to look at who's in power and challenge them. And I feel like that's not happening enough. And one thing I'll say this is you're gonna talk me off a ledge here, because I hear what you're saying. And you brought up the dyslexia thing for the ivaldi shooter. And when I was doing some of the research, I had two kinds of people that I got very upset at, and that was the Goodmans, who started the whole whole language Reading System and Lucy Caulkins, those people were on my mind, my list of people I was upset about. And one of the things that Goodman said when they were talking to him in the same interview where he said that, you know, it's okay if you confuse horse and pony because it's the same thing, which is just completely ridiculous to me. He said dyslexia isn't real. And you know, all these things where I'm like, these are the people Goodman created this program. Caulkins implemented it. And for some reason, we're still doing this. And it seems like such a bummer work. It's not just that you're saying it's bad. We're seeing results that it's bad. Research is showing it's bad. Teachers are saying it's bad, and we're still doing it. I do want to talk about the headset earlier, I want to talk about some of the

good things that are happening and some ways we can fix it. But talk me off a ledge Am I over? Now? Should I not be mad at Goodman and Lucy? Because you've you've tried to kind of I think pull back some anger. But I don't know. They made me really frustrated and

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Kareem Weaver 54:06

Goodman just passed away. He just passed away not too long ago.



Ray Abel 54:08

Well now. Now I guess I shouldn't now you're making me feel bad. Yeah. Timing.

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Kareem Weaver 54:17

But I would say I would say that, you know this, some people think that Ken Goodman was dyslexic himself, because with her language is his strategy is basically a theory about how to work around. It's a blunted workaround theory. Because if I struggled to read and decode, I'm gonna get these workarounds. So I built a system of how to work around that that's coming from a mind of a person who can but we normalize that and made that but that's not it. So that's almost like learning Chinese or character languages and I will learn to the image and I just learned these images what that for that language that's cool, but this is a phonetic language, these romantic you know, Italian, French, Latin, Greek You know English Spanish these these languages you you crack the code and you can anyway, I would say it's our psychology. You can look at Lucy Calkins stuff and it's not about her man like she did what she she's doing what she's doing and she's evolving I guess. But what is it about us that makes that method chicken soup to the soul? Why does it feel so good? Why did why do we jump on the bandwagon with both feet and try to come hell or high water for our kids? You know, I heard somewhere that you judge a tree by the fruit it bears? Well, what's the fruit? Like if we don't have to go to Harvard to figure this out? We'll just see is a working? Man, it's not working? If it ain't working for the kids, no, what are we doing? Who is it working for? Well look at who's cashed these checks. You know, look at it kind of justifies the London 1/3 that it worked for. Right? If I'm in I'm a chief academic officer or a superintendent work for me. Many of them feel that to say this thing didn't work for everybody in somehow diminishes their achievement. So you mean that what I got is an all on my own? You mean that two thirds of the population was outside of the competition? You mean that? What I'm saying doesn't have that? Yeah, actually, actually, you got to just get over that. It just that's just the reality of it. Two thirds of your competitors never had a chance to get out the starting blocks. And, and it but it doesn't mean that you have to quit your job. It doesn't mean you don't have any credibility. What it means is you have to stop. You have to stop with the imposter syndrome. You have to you have to stop acting like everything is okay. When you deep inside? No, it's not okay. Two thirds of the kids aren't broken. Two thirds of the kids can't learn Come on, stop playing. Let's be real about this. So what I would also offer is this. So you take Goodman and Caulkins and others. And there are plenty others, I don't want to just pick on them. Like I'd say that I'm happy to hear Caulkins is starting to evolve. That's a that's a huge sign. And I gave her a lot of credit for even opening up that competence because there's others like pundits and personnel who run Ohio. And they have a billion dollar publishing game. And they got budget and like now we're sticking with it. You're crazy. We're sticking with it. So I would rather have my art record for them, but

whatever. But then we look at people like Marva Collins, the late great Marva Collins, an educator who was in Chicago. And, you know, she started her own school after work in a traditional public school that she took kids, they were classified as being unethical. You know, back in when I was a kid, they would say retarded. And those kids graduated with honors from college eventually, ma'am, you know, and it's like, Well, what did she do? Well, you know what she was doing this, this little old black lady in Chicago was teaching check this out. She was teaching kids how to sound out words how to put them together. So she was doing the phonics stuff. She was doing vocabulary. She had a reading the classics, Shakespeare in the row and all this other stuff, and what can comprehend that stuff and present it so she was doing all these things. But it wasn't sexy. It wasn't enough. Why didn't that catch on like barn? Why? The program that we use in Oakland to make a lot of games for about six or seven years, was basically the program that she built. Open Court, but then we decided to because it wasn't you know, it wasn't. It wasn't trendy. It wasn't poppin as they say, so we went to something else. But why don't we elevate what works? Forget the politics, forget the labels. Hey, what's getting the most kids to read around the country? What let's find that out. Let's do that. This simple, as opposed to elevating somebody who, you know how many years ago see Carlton Calkins teach in, in fifth grade or third rate of growth machine mystical teachers don't want to understand that raw middle school teachers, like but I'm just saying, like, if it has evidence of working, if you tell me cream, all you got to do to get kids reading at a high level, is take these plates, spin them on your fingers, close your eyes, and mumble under your breath. I'd be a mumbling plate spinning blindfolded person. I'm gonna do what works. I don't care what it's called. But instead of doing what works, we're falling behind people with no evidence of something that actually work. It makes no sense and most parents don't even know that most parents assume you drop your kid off at school you got to do all the work stay the school man school try to figure it out. Teams are hanging on for dear life with the materials they have which were never intended to reach all kids at home too. To reach about 40% of kids,



Ray Abel 1:00:02

you know what's crazy and Marva Collins, I just I read a book recently by a guy named Thomas Sol, who I'm a big fan of. He's an economist. And he talked about Marva Collins and his book. And he mentioned that Reagan was looking at nominating or for Secretary of Education. That's



Kareem Weaver 1:00:19

right. He wondered, and she said, No, and I wish she hadn't. She said, No, but I get it. Man, Lou, I get it. When you are a great teacher. All you want to do is teach. You can't get involved. But listen, so I was fortunate enough to be in a position of having an impact on kids. You can tell me nothing. You barely I mean, I was doing other things like coaching kids and doing this and that. But teaching was my bread and butter. And when it needed so great, you can't even envision yourself doing something else. So they can hear and be like, listen, you've done great things. We would love you to take this to a bigger stage. She said no, she didn't even accept the nomination. It just, it breaks my heart to this day. But I understand it, right. Teachers love to teach. So if she had been the Secretary of Education, I can only imagine the difference she'd have made.



Ray Abel 1:01:11



I mean, hopefully we wouldn't be having this conversation. That's, but it's crazy to think I mean, but I think that's the I mean, politics in general, it seems that it's not I totally understand why someone would want to be in politics. I mean, the back then we didn't have Twitter, and a lot of things that make everyone look evil, but you still everyone's vilified everyone, you find the worst character traits, the worst qualities, drag some of the mud. And the only people that want to do that are the people don't care if they're terrible people. And that's why we have who we have in politics. But

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Kareem Weaver 1:01:40

what right, you mentioned the politics before. And this is one time that we think about the dynamic. So here you have a black woman in Chicago. And we have Ronald Reagan, the President wanted to nominate her now he is a conservative. I don't know more of US politics, but she's a black woman, educator, and highly regarded in the community, you know, nationally, but he was willing to say, Oh, that's good. I just want to say, I want that for everybody's kids. And I think that's what it's about, regardless of your political leaning. Don't we want what's good for everybody's kids? Right? And actions to proceed? race, class, location, region, whatever, party affiliation. We don't have that kind of mindset today. It's like now we just stick to our tribe. You know, if it's red, it must be it must be right. If it's blue, it must be right. You know, whatever it is in the libertarian in the middle, Sam, we don't. But but this this, like, there has to be a remnant in this country of folks that say, Kids First, and to hell with the rest. We can we can argue and fuss and fight all we want to later. But right now, today, we got to save our kids. And for that to happen, I need you. I need you to board me. I need you to put pressure on his curriculum companies, I need you to come to this principles. I need you on the PTA. I need you to advocate that legislator for initial screening for dyslexia learning difficulties, I need you we need each other. And our inability to do that will mean we parishes fools. So we'll see we'll see what that put challenge to do what we think because because that's really what we need right now.



Ray Abel 1:03:23

I love it. I always tell people, I get very, very bored with talking with people who agree with me on everything. That's not a real conversation. To me. It's unreal dialogue. And I feel like what you just said, there, it's hitting the nail on the head. It's if if someone disagrees with you, now, it's your evil. And I can't imagine, you know, looking at some a current president doesn't matter party looking at someone from the other side of the aisle and saying they're doing something, right? Because you don't want to give them the rub. You don't wanna give them the, oh, we're going to help out the other party. And it's not about party. It's not about politics. It's about kids. It's about prisoners. I mean, again, that 75% This is the kind of stuff that comes up when you just have conversations. I mean, that's the 75% We did an episode about prison reform recently, and I'm all for it. And I think there needs to be, there's a lot that needs to be addressed. We're doing an episode on police coming up this season. But I've never heard that 75% number of illiteracy until now. And it ties so much together and explain so much. And then you tie that in with dyslexia with the ivaldi shooter and people talk about mental health issues. But that to me is a mental health issue. If you can't read if you have problems learning. And I think it's so important to talk about these things.

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Kareem Weaver 1:04:40

Well, I'm gonna push on, I'm gonna take that one step further, it comes a mental health issue. But I want to make sure people understand yes, dyslexia is real. And you got to rates of about 50% in print and in between 40% We've had three different studies, University of Texas and others. Let's say folks locked up dyslexic 40 to 50%. And having said that, I don't want people to think this is a niche thing. Like, oh, this is the kid with this. This is for the kids with disabilities. Man, Man, Man, this is your son and your daughter, this is this is your neighbor. This is this is everybody. Everybody our kids are struggling to read, I don't care how much money you have. You don't necessarily want to spend an extra, you know, grand a month to help to pay that tutor. You know, okay, how much money I have, I'm not just going to light it on fire about don't have to, especially when you pay your taxes. This is everybody problem, man. It's not just, it's not just in one demographic group. But we can't help put everything in terms of, you know, the tribes is like, that's our prison and we see these colors, and we can't get out of that. We got to step back and say, Okay, wait, is that was it? Was it? Okay? Surely there are differences amongst groups, language differences, you know, class difference? Sure. Oh, five, okay. Sure. However, however, I think we have to establish not just for his podcasts, but as a country, that actually our children have a common interest. And that as a pup, as a public, we want to get the greatest number of kids reading as possible. And we have limited resources. So everything we do, should be aligned with that goal. Is this going to get the greatest number of kids partner reading possible? Is there another way to do it, it's gonna get even more kids to do it? How much does it cost? I mean, just think about this, here's something, there are a lot of districts who are now saying, Hey, we're going to make a shift, we're going to go towards the so called Science of reading, whatever that is a science of reading, okay, we're going to get a new curriculum opened, it's like this, they fired up in that movie that you referenced the right to read film. You know, Oakland made a shift, and I'm grateful, we've come a long way, we got a long way to go. But man, they chose a curriculum to do that takes anywhere from an hour, two hours a day, prepare to prepare for to prepare for now. Okay, you say what's the problem with that? Well, if it takes between five and 10 hours a week to prepare for, and you only have contractually 100 minutes a week for teachers to prepare, what could go wrong? at the, at the at the least, you wouldn't have some unprepared folks, you know, who are who can't do what they're supposed to do. At worst, you gonna have a labor problem. Because the message is either this is not that serious a deal. Because it just doesn't line up, or we don't care figure it out. It's incomprehensible, we as adults have got to take a step back and look at the things that we're willing to accept, and the assumptions we're making. Right? And it's gonna mean, it's gonna mean maybe getting over ourselves a little bit, it's gonna make this go mean, we have to be humble a little bit, and get out of our bags and our assumptions and all that to say, Okay, what's the best thing we could do to get the greatest number of kids because it just happened some places in our country, there are places where kids already you mentioned a positive, you know, go down to Goose Creek Elementary down in Kentucky, go go to go to see for Delaware, I was talking about Super Delaware, because they, you know, nylon capital of the world, they, you know, people coming from Dominican Republic and Haiti, second language learners. And, you know, the white kids, black kids have low socio economic status, kids. Hi, everybody, everybody starting to read the same district a few years back was one of the lowest in the state, what are they known? Make sure you go, you know, maybe we should go ask some questions. If they would like, now we do, we don't keep doing what we do. We'll figure it out. So we got to be curious and humble, and a part of it is being willing. So I'm from California, I'm from California, and we Californians have this thing where, you know, we really don't want to hear too much what anybody else is saying. Maybe Massachusetts will listen to it. But other than that, we don't want to hear it. I don't want to hear what's happening in Mississippi. I don't want to hear what's happening, you know, have to be in Georgia some right. We don't want to

hear that. Yeah, you know, that's our political win. So we got to get out of that bag too, because maybe maybe something that was recipients happening that's worth at least learning about, and maybe even replicating, you know, we got to be willing to learn from each other and be humble. So that's a big challenge, too.



Ray Abel 1:09:32

And someone who's not from California. I will say that. I looked up some stats on poverty and I was reading an article. It was a specific article about California Education and they list themselves as in the article. The highest poverty rate in the country is like that can't that can't be true. That's not real. That's and I looked it up and Mississippi is number one when you look at just straight poverty levels, but when you look up something called supplemental poverty levels, which I didn't know what it was before. So for the for the listeners, it basically is anyone in the population who has money left over to actually buy things fun things or live life So California they don't have as much poverty based on levels but they're gonna have such a higher cost of living. How only? Yeah, they are they are the lowest and the highest in the country except for DC, which I don't count that because they're not a state. But when you look, California is the highest in the country for poverty. It actually even beats out Mississippi. And so I mean, there



Kareem Weaver 1:10:33

those are those are fighting words. Out here. Yeah, running man get you in a broomstick. Because in our mind, this is like the bastion of, of prosperity out here. We look at these, you know, I'm a college football fan. And we turn on our TV. And we look at these stadiums in Louisiana and Georgia and Mississippi, they packed with people just 80,000 70,000 going crazy yelling and all this weird California, like what in the world is going on here, honey? How know how can they all be going to these games, it's because they love the sport, but they also got a little money in their pocket to go to a sport in California, may you pay in half, at least half your money that you make is going to your rent, it can even afford it sometimes as much as 60. And 70%. People are house ports, they have these big, nice houses, sometimes sometimes it's just a shack and it's still costing half a million bucks. But they can't afford to do anything else. So now you layer on that, on top of that, not paying high taxes, and you have to pay for supplemental programs for your child to learn how to read, what are you going to do. So if you have the money, the Uber wealthy, you might have a chance, but if you're just a regular person trying to make it day to day maybe working two jobs, you and your spouse, good luck with that. Good luck with that, but the south and that it's not just the South as other regions to like. It's all about priorities and economies and all that type of stuff. And there's so there's an economic component to all this stuff. But at the end of the day, at the end of the day, whatever system you have, however your economy looks, we can't be so wealthy, and we can't be so poor, that we're willing to throw our kids under the bus. Now that gotta be that's got to be the first consideration. What do they need? You know, there's a tribe in Africa. Sunday, when you when you meet them, they say, and how are the children? That's the that's the ground. It's like, what's up is how are the children? And that's the question we should be asking ourselves, how are the children across across all the demographics, how are they doing? And they're telling us if we listen, if we watch their actions, if we see how they comport themselves, how they thirst for attention. You know, we talk about an attention deficit disorder. Yeah, there's attention deficit, right. Nobody's paying attention to them. And so because of that, they act in a

disorderly manner. Right? And so we just have to step back and ask ourselves how the children will, if they can't get back to your original point, if they can't read an information age, what are they supposed to do? What they're supposed to do, they realize that the deck is stacked against them. And they govern themselves accordingly, unfortunately, well, I



Ray Abel 1:13:20

love that you just said back to my original point, because I stole that line from you. And now I get to take credit for it in the future. I'm gonna start using that being like I came up with this. My line now sorry, Kareem, I just told you, right. But I think I, we talked a lot about the issues. And we talked a lot about some of the solutions. And I just in wrapping up here, I just want to kind of hear a little bit about what you're doing at fulcrum, and what you see as kind of the next steps into actually solving some of these problems. I know there's been some progress. So if you want to talk about some of the progress you've seen, or what's next and what's, what are some big goals for you, I'd love to hear that to kind of wrap up.



Kareem Weaver 1:13:57

So fulcrum, we're part of a coalition of groups. That's led by the NAACP, to really advocate for the districts using best practices, get better curriculum, provide better training and support, stop some of the things that don't really give good results for kids. So the first thing is, I will put this for everybody, we have to actually pay attention. We have like my grandfather said, you notice we always go to war during football season. So my grandfather used to say is every time football season about to start you can you can bet we were gonna start up this is gonna be something that happened. Summertime, not football season. So we got to stop being distracted and keep the main thing the main thing. And, you know, so at fulcrum, what we're doing is we are first of all supporting this underground railroads of kids learning to read so that's on the side. We do that, but we also engage with universities. We engage with districts, and we try to get them to teaching adults how to do the right thing in terms of reading instruction, we work with any stakeholder. We connect with unions, we connect with the NAACP, we connect with parent organizations, and we try to get them all on the same page. It's not easy. It's not it's not always fun, but it's the right thing to do. So I think the first thing we can do before we start trying to get the system to fix itself, we got to get our act together, build coalition, talk to your neighbor, find out how your neighbor's child is learning to read, how's it going for your neighbor? What about you at your youth center or at your church? How's it going? But why aren't we have a Sunday school classes when we have all these kids? Is it because they can't read the stuff? What's really going on? At your church? Pastor? Why don't we have a youth program? And why don't we do this? Why are we offering tutoring. Like there are some basic things we can do to get our houses in order as a society. And then we got to push on the school systems. That's district, county and state. every state, every state is different. You know, everybody's got different rules and regulations about you know how a Department of Ed acts, but they need to borrow on a research consensus in the brain science. They need to have curriculum that works. If your curriculum is still using stuff. It's balanced literacy base with its fondness upon now as soon as I messed up, you should be interviewed, just sitting there taking it. Good luck with that. Good luck with that. So you got to be aware, alert, go together in coalition to push to make sure that we get evidence based practices, and you got to push on universities, public universities shouldn't be getting the public money and not do the public good. You got to push on them because they're not going to do what they sell for the most part,

and you have some that are, you know, aligned with the International Dyslexia standards. And, you know, the latest in reading is sure, but most of the universities are islands among themselves, and they're not accountable to anybody. The public has got to push on them and demand that they prepare educators with the with the research consensus, and the brain science on how reading skill is developed. So that's our charge. I know it's kind of convoluted, but go down to your school and see how they teach and redone. Yeah, I mean, I don't want to ask them I use the best practices. And if you hear the words Fountas and Pinnell, you've got to be better be on if you hear Lucy Caulkins units of study or balanced literacy, you should be asking questions because there's something in the middle something's not right. And you don't want your kids to be the guinea pigs. And an experiment on matter of fact, I'll start with this 1996 A parent Her name was Miss Victoria Jones. She came to me and she said Mr. We were after like Jabari, that was her son, I feel like Jabari, I feel like they experimented on my son, like a guinea pig in a cage. I will never forget that. Because she was taught he was taught whole language and all of us hit Deploy couldn't read. He was experiment on, do not let people experiment on your child. They're not lab rats. Go find out how they're being taught to read and, and determine if it's aligned to the science. And the research consensus on that.



Ray Abel 1:18:19

I don't think that's convoluted at all. That's that quote is heartbreaking. But I think it's, I think the charge I 100% agree with I don't have kids of my own. But when I see parents that are involved when I worked with kids and after school settings, any kid who had a parent or a grandparent that was more involved it was you could see the huge benefit there. And I think just that charge to get parents to find out what their kids learning. And like you said, I think with a pandemic, people hearing home, that remote learning and seeing what's going on, I think that was a big push, and it started things but I I appreciate what you guys are doing at fulcrum. And I hope you keep pushing parents to go do that, because that's where change gets made. So



Kareem Weaver 1:19:01

then I would also encourage people to get involved with organizations, whether it's NAACP or other organizations that have a platform that can get the attentions of these folks and say listen, this is a civil rights issue. We need your help. You got a local NAACP joining you don't educate your community get involved. It's a tool to use to actually get things done. And you know, naacp.org people are welcome to go there and sign up and get involved using that vehicle as well.




Ray Abel 1:19:30


Prima cream, I have one last question for you. Now before we did a brief little intro talk and we talked about some of the best arms in baseball so we're gonna go off topic for a little while here. So, cream talked about David Parker, who was a Pittsburgh pirate who I grew up in Pittsburgh, and I brought up Roberto Clemente and Bo Jackson and I don't know I just gotta say, I think we should both pick the best arm in the history of baseball and I'm going to just limit it to these three Clemente Bo Jackson or Dave Parker who's the best arm Oh, what's the best armor in baseball?

 Kareem Weaver 1:20:03


You can't pick that. You can well okay if I if I have to pick if I have to pick. I love Bo Jackson. I remember when he was throwing people out of defense in Kansas City I get that but man big day Parker, big day Parker on a big stage. Listen, I love cespit is love back in the day Tony armas. Y'all probably don't know about these folks. I love all those arms. But big day Parker would money on the line and a man on third base and a fly ball and a deep right fields give me big day ball.

 Ray Abel 1:20:38

All right. Well, I'm still sticking with Clemente even though he was before my time, but I just can't look at me. And I will say like, just as a human being, I just have such a respect for Clemente and we'll see you soon in

 Kareem Weaver 1:20:51

the social places and things have donated stuff. I understand the Clemente legend Clemente with the great you know, activists I respect that about him. But we just talked about going above see you just like this reading people. You because most of the stuff in your the question, you got to stick to the fundamentals, who can throw somebody out at home with a gay game was on the line. To get what you talked about?

 Ray Abel 1:21:17

You know, I love always going back to logic and arguments. And that's one of my thing. People are too big on emotion. And I can't believe he just called me out on that at the end of this episode. And it's accurate. It's accurate. I'm sticking with the emotion of it all. But all right. Well, Kareem, thank you so much. I hope to actually have you back on the show at some point in the future. And I appreciate the conversation. And I also appreciate what you what you guys are doing. And I'm gonna wrap up here at the end of the show. By saying that you should check out the right to read great documentary. It's not out yet, but they're doing tours around the country. Check out that time magazine article get involved like cream said. And on a side note every episode we'd like to end with some kind of recommendation. And my recommendation this week on something I've been reading outside of this topic and listening to a podcast called conflicted if you guys get a chance to listen to it. It's hosted by a guy named Amon Dean and another co host. And Amon Dean was actually a al Qaeda bomb maker. And he was a jihadist you don't you don't understand that when you start hearing him speak because he's such a nice kind, seemingly gentle human being. But he was a bomb maker ended up becoming a double agent and was exposed accidentally by Dick Cheney of all people, and is now doing a podcast with a fatwa. But it talks about some of the when you talk about emotions, and we talk about all of the people getting behind a specific tribe. I mean, he talks about what went into his time as a jihadist and how he got out of it and some of the struggles but that's our podcast recommendation of the week is conflicted. And Amen. If you're listening, we'd love to have you on the show sometime. But if you're out there listening, feel free to share this podcast. Thank you once again to Kareem and we look forward to coming back with another episode soon.

