

5.13.2024

[00:00:00] Thank you. Well, good evening everybody. Thank you for the opportunity to be here, and thank you for coming out. I love the fact that we're a smallish group, so let's make this a dialogue. Uh, if I say something, uh, that you have a question or a comment on, I'd love to hear it sort of live in the moment. Uh, I may delay the answer to a little bit later on, but, uh, uh, just appreciate the opportunity to be here.

[00:00:22] Um, so I think if we're gonna talk to education, it makes sense to, to share a little bit about my journey and my own experiences. As you can tell, probably I'm not from Wisconsin. Uh, I was born and raised, uh, in England while I was born there. Uh, at age four, my parents moved to New York City, and then at age seven, they sent me back to a British boarding school.

[00:00:45] So between ages, uh, seven and 17, I was, uh, in a British boarding school quite near Cambridge. Received a really, really good education through that process. Um, did well on my O levels, studied maths, physics, and [00:01:00] chemistry for my A Levels, um, applied early. Uh, my parents were still in the us. They'd moved down to Virginia and, uh, I applied early to Northwestern in Chicago.

[00:01:11] Um, just because I had a hunch that's where I wanted to be. I thought Chicago was a great city. Uh, I was admitted, uh, to Northwestern. Uh, Christmas of my senior year, stopped studying and failed for all of my a um, so I got, um, stern talking too when I got home. And my dad told me, I better hope that Northwestern doesn't call to get my A level results, which thankfully they didn't.

[00:01:37] So I went to Northwestern and when I was at Northwestern, I was there in the early nineties. Uh, the Soviet Union was imploding. Mm-Hmm. I was fascinated by totalitarianism Soviet history and what would happen, uh, following the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Um, and so I studied Russian, uh, summer of my senior [00:02:00] year.

[00:02:00] I spent in Russia. I was in Moscow and I was in, which is the old Gorky. Uh, and learned just a huge amount about, uh, Russia and the sort of Soviet mentality, uh, came to appreciate both Western Europe and the United States, especially through that experience. And I remember sitting down on the KLM jet at the end of that 12 weeks saying to myself, I will never come back.

[00:02:28] Uh, I just struggled so much with the sort of Soviet mentality. Uh, I found it a very, uh, depressing, backward looking country and stunningly beautiful and wonderful people. Just a place that I knew I wasn't gonna spend the rest of my life. So I came to my senior year at Northwestern. My dad said, well, you are three years in.

[00:02:52] You better finish, graduate and figure out what's next. I ended up doing corporate, graduated. I was at the 12th boss as to what's [00:03:00] due. So I joined AmeriCorps, uh, and Amerco ended up placing me with Habitat for Humanity, uh, in the central city of, uh, Chicago. So I did my year of service where essentially I was their property manager and I managed 60 recently refurbished habitat homes.

[00:03:21] And at the end of that, they hired me to oversee a 40 unit, um, redevelopment right by the United Center. Uh, and so I ended up having a, a further two years with Habitat, uh, doing this redevelopment and just learning an astonishing amount about the American Central City and. I could not, like I knew within a year of joining Habitat that my work would be in the American Central City because I was so perplexed by my understanding of the United States compared to Europe, and especially compared to [00:04:00] Russia as a country that can do anything, a solution minded, vigorous, energetic country, once upon a time that seemed to have answers to every problem.

[00:04:14] Uh, and I, uh, could not fathom why the central city was the way that it was and why it seemed so intractably problematic. I was also struck by the families that I met because they were so kind. They were so loving. They were so embracing, they so defied the stereotypes that you kind of pick up sort of through media.

[00:04:37] Um. So about halfway through my time at Habitat, Paul Val and Arne Duncan took on the Chicago Public Schools. And I was reading in the paper these unimaginable horror stories from Chicago Public Schools. And I was meeting the families that were moving into the Habitat homes that I managed. And I was realizing that even though these families [00:05:00] were unusually motivated, their children for the most part, were not well educated sometimes to a shocking degree.

[00:05:09] And so as I was with Habitat, I just started visiting schools. I would call 'em up, member of the community, I'd like to see the school. And for the most part, they managed to get tours, uh, and was horrified by what I saw. The, the memory that most was most jarring to me, uh, was at Crane High School on the Southwest side, uh, where.

[00:05:33] I had just completed, uh, a study of, of n Nutri in Winnetka. And I mean, just, I can't be naive, but how you can have two high schools 25 miles apart if that, that could look so astonishingly different. And at Crane, when I asked for the College and Career Center, the person looked at me with [00:06:00] astonishment and said, we don't have that.

[00:06:02] Mm. And in the, the bathrooms, uh, it was nothing that forced pots, like no toilet paper, no dividers, no merits, simply force on the parts. And you literally walk outta the high school and see the Sears Tower and, and the Magnificent Mile, and it, the whole thing just didn't compute for me. So I was absolutely fascinated.

[00:06:28] About why the schools were the way they were, and I wanted to see where the answers were. So I went, I left Habitat, went to DePaul, uh, where I got a master's in secondary education with an emphasis in social studies. Uh, and my vision was to live and teach in the same neighborhood in Chicago. And so I got a student teaching job at Joan f Arry Middle School, which was a very diverse but very low income 600 student middle school in the uptown neighborhood of Chicago, some in the north [00:07:00] side, just north of Wrigleyville.

[00:07:01] Uh, and did my student teaching. And then at the end, student teaching, they hired me. And I was so excited because I was teaching sixth graders social studies and I was so ready to have an impact and to impact children in a really significant way. And about four months in, uh, I sort of had this moment where I realized.

[00:07:26] For a variety of reasons this school cannot and will not succeed. And what it felt to me like was the school was set up to literally meet the needs of adults and almost no support mechanisms for students. Uh, and so I soldiered through the year growing increasingly mystified. I will say there were some amazing people that taught that, especially people later in their careers who were so dedicated and so [00:08:00] passionate under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

[00:08:03] Just did amazing work. Well, I left, at the end of the year, I was literally trying to do overseas relief work because I was fed up with Americans poverty, couldn't get a job in overseas relief. And then my upstairs neighbor asked me to teach. I. A summer school course at Niles Township High School. It's district two 19, right along I 94 in Skokie, Illinois.

[00:08:27] Uh, one of the highest performing districts, one of the best paying districts in Illinois. Uh, and so I taught a, uh, six week, um, course there called, uh,

people and their cultures, which was for incoming freshmen so they could do the whole year of, uh, social studies and then do AP classes on the back end.

[00:08:46] And I tell you, I walked into class that first day and it was hilarious because I was terrified. They were terrified 'cause it was their first day in high school and they were all sitting there like this, looking at it. And I just [00:09:00] never seen anything like it. And we had the most spectacular six weeks where I was in a school set up for kids to succeed and well resourced.

[00:09:09] And I was, as a young, I. Like not even first year teacher yet. Well supported. At the end of that summer, the principal approached me and asked me to stay and teach US history, which was hilarious because I'd never taken a course in US History. Uh, and so I gave the British version of US History. There's bunch of very confused young adults in Chicago at this point.

[00:09:32] The rebellion, the American rebellions. Yes. We spent that other British. Yeah. Um, so what, what Niles did for me was help me understand what a great school should look like. Uh, again, it was diverse school, it was mixed income, uh, and it was beautiful because kids in that context were able to learn and were able to succeed.

[00:09:57] The problem was I wasn't where I [00:10:00] felt called to be, which was the central city, and I felt sort of like fish outta water. Uh, a year in, I met, um, a guy by the name of Cole Kniple, who was a Lutheran from Appleton, Wisconsin. He was the director of the English department. Uh, he had followed a guy named Neil Del from Whitefish Bay down to Niles.

[00:10:20] And Cole had become the director of the English department. I was, uh, just met him through our common students, which were, I coached cricket, that's why they hired me to Coach Cricket, the Indians, and Pakistani, um, who were in the English department because they were ESL. So Cole and I met, and uh, after my second year there, Cole left and became the principal of St.

[00:10:44] Marcus, uh, in Milwaukee. And he had been up there about two months, and he called me and he said, Henry, I think you should visit Milwaukee. And I said, why would I do that? Uh, and I, you know, I was a Baptist. Uh, [00:11:00] passionate about public education, getting paid very well at a huge public school. Mm-Hmm. Um, and he wanted me to take a dramatic pay cut and move to this town I'd never been to before where I knew nobody to join a small Lutheran school with a hundred kids.

[00:11:14] Mm-Hmm. And, uh, nonetheless, just to kind of be friendly, I came up, I visited three times, and the third weekend I came up, uh, he had convinced me this is what I was supposed to do. Mm-Hmm. That was 22 years ago. So I'm now, uh, in my 23rd year, uh, at St. Marcus. I started out as the assistant principal and then the principal.

[00:11:37] Uh, and now I serve as the superintendent. And I've been on this crazy journey of, um, changing learning, uh, and still trying to ask this fundamental question of why is it so hard to achieve academic success or educational success in Central City? Um, and with that, I'll tell you the St. Marcus [00:12:00] story and what I've learned, but questions are, where exactly is St.

[00:12:03] St. Marcus? St. Marcus is about a mile north of downtown. It's got three campuses. They're all along First street, one on north, one four blocks north of that on center of one four blocks north of that borough. So here's who we are. We're 150 years old. Uh, this year. My understanding is this club is 147 years.

[00:12:27] That Correct? Got you. By three years. Yeah. Um, we now have 1200 students. We have three campuses in the historic Harambe. We are 93% black. You have a 90% high school graduation rate, 89% student return rate, 1% incarceration rate. Uh, and our school fills up through a random selection process. The clearest strategic advantage we have as we compare St. [00:13:00]

[00:13:00] Marcus to our neighboring schools is we do not bus. So parents have gotta be able to have the wherewithal to get their children there and parents actually have to go through, I mean, you have to apply to any school, public or private, but you have to sort of seek out a private school, right? So it's very, very clear to me that we have a chunk of our student population who are, uh, better equipped.

[00:13:22] We also have a chunk on the bottom end who found us sort of randomly maybe by proximity, where we have some real struggles. So it's a very mixed student population in terms parent buy-in parent engagement, parent sports. So that's, uh, sort of who we are. As you can tell, we've been through a fairly rapid growth curve.

[00:13:46] Like many Lutheran and Catholic schools, we nearly went out of business in the eighties. The low point for us, we had about 350 children in the 1890s. So went from all white German speaking [00:14:00] until 1918, then teaching in English, but still all white. And then in the 1960s it flipped to all black. And by 1981 there were just 56 students.

[00:14:11] So the question was merge, relocate, or stick it out. And for whatever reason, uh, the congregation decided stick it out. The eighties and nineties were tough in 98 vouchers opened up to private schools. I think everybody's familiar with vouchers, correct? Mm-Hmm. Uh, so, uh, charter, so you've got the district public schools, which is just public schools, and you've got charter schools that are public schools.

[00:14:39] But they have a lot more freedom than traditional public schools. Uh, and then, uh, voucher schools originally, uh, were for, for very low income kids who lived in the city of Milwaukee. Uh, in the last 10 years, the income limits got pushed quite high. So now your income level can be up to about [00:15:00] \$70,000 for a family of four.

[00:15:02] So it's now lower middle income and low income. Um, but you still have to live in the city of Milwaukee to be in the Milwaukee Proud Choice Program. So about 95% of our students use vouchers. Uh, about 11% are in the special needs scholarship program. So we have a big chunk of kids, uh, who have some range of special needs.

[00:15:25] Uh, and as you can see, the main campus is now 600 students. In Red is our center street campus that opened in 1415. That is a, uh, half the size of main campus. And then three years ago we opened our newest campus, which will grow to be the same size as the main campus. Um, so it'll be 1500 kiddos. When you said special needs, did you mean financial special needs or do you mean, um, developmental special needs and other disabilities?

[00:15:53] Other disabilities. So they have to qualify through MPS. Mm-Hmm. To, to [00:16:00] be considered. We, we, uh, were for a long time the state's biggest provider of special needs scholarships through the special needs scholarship program. Um, so that's sort of our trajectory and who we are as a school. Interestingly, it said back here, uh, we're a four star school, which means we exceed expectations.

[00:16:22] Uh, in our view. We, we every year have bounced back and forth between four stars and five stars. We generally write on the line. We generally get a very good rating. Uh, we are one of the highest performing what they call 80, 80 schools on the north side of Milwaukee. An 80 80 school is 80% low income and 80% African American.

[00:16:45] There are about 96 of them in the city of Milwaukee. Um, interestingly, when you break apart the data, uh, we are not in fact, uh, a high performing school. It's just [00:17:00] that we dramatically outperformed the local competition. Mm-Hmm. So in this column right here, we've got reading Proficient. You'll notice 20% of our students are proficient or advanced.

[00:17:12] To me is wholly unacceptable. As you may know, the statewide average post pandemic is now 38%. The forward exam is a rigorous, it is a rigorous test. Mm-Hmm. Before that, the previous test was not rigorous at all. We were telling parents everybody was proficient, which to lie. So it's beautiful that the full exam is rigorous.

[00:17:34] 38%, we'd all agree as a statewide average is too low. Uh, we're at 20% heralded as this school. Uh, that does great work. It's because the state report card takes into account student academic growth far more than attainment. We think that's a major problem. So only 5% of our report card comes from this [00:18:00] proficiency number, and about 50% of it comes from how quickly our students grow.

[00:18:06] Does that make sense? So from one year to the next, from one year to the next. So we're in the 95th percentile of all schools in the state in terms of how quickly students are growing. Sir, you look quizzical. I am physical, by the way. Do, do, do you, um, like we're listening middle school, do you go through high school or you go through eighth grade?

[00:18:31] Eighth grade? All of these are eighth grade schools through eighth grade. So what, what I put on here is these, uh, four right here are our closest public school competitors. Um, and as you can see, the reading proficiency rates are just horrific. These are the 80, 80 schools, uh, citywide, public and private.

[00:18:54] Uh, in the list of the 35 lowest performing schools in the state, [00:19:00] uh, all 35 are in terms of reading proficiency. Um. I should say in Milwaukee, all 35 are on the north side of the city. None of them are on the south side. Uh, and, uh, the 80 80 school average is 7% proficiency, which is unc ably horrific math proficiency is worse, but this is the number that is just awful.

[00:19:30] Uh, you know, uh, 80% of our kiddos, or, or I'm sorry, we've got, um, if we've got 40% below basic and 20% proficient or advanced means that 40% are basic. Let's St. Marcus, right? Those 40% still graduate from high school, uh, almost all of them. So we have a really good high school graduation rate. These kiddos that

are below basic, uh, tend to be younger in the school, uh, are below basic rate [00:20:00] decreases as they get older, as we move them out of below basic.

[00:20:04] Uh, and they tend to be the newer students, students that have arrived within the last two or three years. Um, but when you look at these below basic numbers right here, these are the dropout factors, right? This is where the true sort of educational crisis, uh, exists in our city. Um, before we dig into how we as a country view education, are there any questions on this?

[00:20:31] When are these numbers from 23? Great question. So this is post covid, and in fact, we were just shy of 30% pre covid. And in fact, schools like ours that are predominantly low income but had high proficiency rates got hit the worst of any schools in the state because most middle income and upper income, uh, students were in homes or communities with more resources.

[00:20:59] Um, [00:21:00] and a lot of our competitors didn't have far to drop. In fact, this number barely dropped, dropped two percentage points. It just wasn't far to go. So where do your graduates go to high school? So we place them really carefully. We have an alumni team of three. Their most important job is to get them into the right high school.

[00:21:21] Uh, because what we know is that if a student goes through freshman year and returns for sophomore year, they have about a 98% chance of graduating high school. If they go to the wrong high school and move, chances are they'll move multiple times and end up not graduating. So, Wisconsin, Lutheran, Milwaukee, Lutheran Reagan, uh, Rufus King, International Baccalaureate, HIAs, Dominican St.

[00:21:48] Augustine, Pratt Kingdom, Pratt Luther Pratt, um, and then a wide handful of others.

[00:21:59] Any other [00:22:00] questions I'm gonna get beyond data now? Any other questions on this? It's that aggregate is in eighth grade. Uh, this is all a up through it. So it's third grade through eighth grade, Steve. So it's an aggregate. Aggregate, yeah. So why is Rufus King still over? It's still open. Did you follow this story?

[00:22:19] So any of you, uh, 12 years ago it became a, a national news story, unfortunately, uh, that, that Rufus King Middle School was in a closed NPS building that had been vacant for seven years. And, and Greg Thornton, the MPS

superintendent, visited state Marcus and I asked him if he had any use for it, if we could buy it.

[00:22:40] And he looked at me and he said, Henry, we'll never use that building and yes, I will help you buy it. So I wrote a letter to the school board and they very currently declined selling us the building. Uh, and I was young and. Naive and we started marching around the [00:23:00] building. Oh. And it became a very big political hot potato.

[00:23:03] The mayor got involved and then it, it sort of went on the national networks and, and then they were forced to redevelop it because they promised to, and it's the third tragically middle school in that building that has failed. But they have to keep it open. It's declined from, uh, the 450. They said they would put in it, uh, to about 220.

[00:23:31] Uh, it's capacity is a thousand. But they, you know, sadly, they can't close any of these buildings. We wouldn't actually attempt to acquire any of them at this point, but they can't close them, even though that one, that's the fullest is ow. Homes at 58% capacity. So it's one of the problems that the district has.

[00:23:54] As it has depopulated both. 'cause kids are leaving the city and with the rise of [00:24:00] vouchers and charter schools, they're, they're sort of flying their planes at 60% capacity. And then financial just doesn't work. But they can't turn these buildings into housing quickly, so they just have to keep them out.

[00:24:15] So will you be your, your situation in Milwaukee, your Lutheran school, are you a public school? We are. Or private voucher school? Not charter, not public. You're private voucher school. Right. Okay. Go ahead. Are you gonna cover the cost and the division between per private tuition and the voucher? The value of the voucher?

[00:24:40] Yeah. At some point. Okay. Yep. Okay, then I'll hold my questions for that. Done. Um, I, you know, I'm so in my journey, I wanted to know while what. What have we always thought as a country about education? Do we mind just, just going around and reading these? Would you mind just taking one each? There's like five of them.

[00:24:57] Okay. Can you start us off? [00:25:00] Sure. Benjamin Franklin said, the good education of youth has been esteemed by wise men in all ages as the surest foundation of the happiness in both private families and in Commonwealth. All

governments have made it a principle object of their intention. Benjamin Franklin, 1749.

[00:25:21] I don't think so. Is that wrong? I think it's wrong. I'll check that is, was he alive? I'm sure the quotation is accurate. I just disagree with this perspective. Oh, I see. I. Um, think the government has,

[00:25:41] don't wanna everything.

[00:25:47] Educational writers, you might be familiar with them, but they've written on the history of education, we end up until the 18th century, uh, throughout world history education was the [00:26:00] private preserve of wealthy. Powerful. Uh, that is a great point. Uh, and what I think interesting about that is, so interestingly, my high school was founded by Henry VII in 1564 Right.

[00:26:17] And was called a public school, but still in England called public schools. Right. So, and, and this actually raises a great point about what we're gonna talk about today because does it matter that you don't educate the bottom 30%? Does that matter? And I would, I would argue, I think he would say, we just need the top educator.

[00:26:44] Right? Uh, and that was certainly, I think the mentality back then when they opened Felstead in 1564, it was for the elites so they could run the empire, um, or the future empire. Uh, let's go to the next one. [00:27:00] Upon the subject of education, I can only say that I view it as the most important subject, which we as a people can be engaged in.

[00:27:08] President Abraham Lincoln, 1832 before Mr. President. Well, interestingly, his very first campaign, um, uh, and I believe it was, it was in Illinois when he said that, and obviously, and this is so interesting to me, how it happens throughout history. Uh. Everybody has this notion that education is the most important thing that we could be talking about, but in practice, it very rarely is.

[00:27:35] Right. Uh, and that was certainly, I mean, he had ultimately big fish to fry, but, um, only 23. Yes. If your dates right. Yeah. Well, and it's interesting too, right, because unless I'm incorrect, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln had pretty humble origins, right? Right. And Benjamin Franklin had to go through an apprentice program.

[00:27:54] And certainly Abraham Lincoln in Kentucky didn't, you know, he wasn't, he wasn't the son of a [00:28:00] gentry or you know, a minister or something in New England. Yeah. So ated, right. A Republican government should be based on free and equal education among the people's beyond me. So the concept is developing the, but also access

[00:28:26] you. All the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years. The right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental. The freedom to learn has been bought by bitter sacrifice. Whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight for the last ditch to keep the open, the right to learn.

[00:28:49] W Du Bois, 1949. 1949, probably writing from Africa that's late up. But this is [00:29:00] interesting because Du Bois, decades before 1949, was very much, you know, the talented 10. I, I don't think he at all had, uh uh, an expansive view, egalitarian, egalitarian view of education. I mean, he was very famous. You know, dispute between Du Bois and t Washington about, you know, the, the aims of education and, um, who it was for, though, to be fair, to Du Bois, he was interested in dumping most of the resources in the down the 10th, but not to exclude the others, but where to invest.

[00:29:46] But resources determine a hundred percent what, what you receive. But if it's all about public, public education, it's about permits and distribution, then you gotta make a decision about where you distribute, as long as the class system still exists, which [00:30:00] it does. Well. And women's colleges would only have been open for 45, 50 years at this point.

[00:30:06] They were all, and you wanted the dialogue, so they were

[00:30:14] fascinating.

[00:30:20] John Dewey in 1907 said, but the best and wisest parent wants for his own child. That must. The community wants all of this. Any other idea for our schools is narrow and unlove actually, one destroys our democracy. I'd love to hear some thoughts on this one. This tells the truth and not in the way that Dewey intended.

[00:30:46] Explain. Okay. Uh, I agree that democracy is in herd by [00:31:00] citizens, people, residents of the community, um, scare both intentional not wanting for children of the community what they would want for their instruments.

[00:31:19] Restate that for me. I missed it. I didn't hear you. Oh. Oh, okay. Okay. So this, this actually, uh, this is a syllogism of sorts and the fact is it's aspirational That must the community want for, its for all its children. The reality is that people do not care about other people's children. If, if you're gonna be like, completely Yeah, and I'm, I'm being a little, you know, hyperbolic about it.

[00:31:56] But if people do not care about [00:32:00] other people's children, then education is going, they're gonna be indifferent at best and hostile when it conflicts with. Things that they would like to care more about. Um, and I think that I see that play out every day in decisions that are made in priorities that are, um, not addressed or implemented.

[00:32:31] If you look at what people do, instead of what they say makes me think of homeschooling, I mean, what I want for my child is this. Yeah.

[00:32:43] It seems to reflect an assimilationist debate that, uh, was going on very actively in 1907. It was still kind of going on saying, Hey, um, it seems to me Dewey is reflecting the added kind of the melting pot ideal. Mm-hmm. There was a very [00:33:00] strong ideal. Really started after the Civil War is still going on today saying we have to.

[00:33:10] We must want kind of the same thing for all children in, in our community. The subtext being, um, because we want to inculcate American values in them. The sub subtext back in 1907 was we want to inculcate white Protestant values in all our children, which at that point, a lot of German Catholic parents in Wisconsin Mm-Hmm.

[00:33:31] And elsewhere were saying, I'm not having, but does that all mean there was no genuine sentiment that we should want as a, as a society, we should want what we want for our children, we should want for every child. Do we not think that genuine sentiment was there? It's socialist. There wasn't much. Actually, Wisconsin had a lot of socialists.

[00:33:56] We do, yes. Milwaukee. Milwaukee specifically, [00:34:00] you know Milwaukee. Yeah. Um, I think it's easy to want this in. I think it's easy to want it out loud, but it's not easy to pay for it. It's not easy to see it as, yes, as a compromise of if I can't have everything good for my child and I have to share if I have to share a swimming pool or a healthcare plan or a or, I mean, there are so many things that we have been unwilling to share in this country because of our specific history.

[00:34:31] This country's specific, and I would say toxic history, the way that we have built our nation. I think it's, it's, this is a very problematic statement to actually implement. I, I think it's, as you said, aspirational. I think it, it would be wonderful to really want this. Yeah. Yeah. I think our welfare as old people in this room depends on wanting this [00:35:00] because we need a more educated workforce.

[00:35:03] We need a more educated, critically thinking. Set of people to, to be civic-minded, but I'm not sure that that's what many people really want. Well, I, I'm gonna agree that statement, I don't think it's necessarily what we really want. It's truly what I really want. Okay. Well, the, the, the problem isn't the right, we're getting older.

[00:35:24] Do we need very well educated people to take care of us when we get to a stage where we need nursing care? You know, um, self-interest is what I was trying to, if for no other good reason. I mean, in a sense, you need, and this is the whole argument for getting more immigrants, you know, you need people to do the work that your, your population isn't willing to do.

[00:35:51] And, and, um, maybe some of that is why our education, that perceived [00:36:00] desire, that's not the word perceived. Um. Need to have an underclass, um, as racist as that is, um, yes. Might be propelling you the, the bad, the poorness of our, the indication would, I am not, not surprised given the title of the name of the club and the city we're in.

[00:36:31] Feel like you guys are intellectuals. I just wanna say I am not like genuinely I was well educated, but I'm not like I took all of these quotes at face value and know relatively little about some of the folks, especially Jack Dewey. We, it's okay. Thank you. But what I wanna say is, my reaction to this was this is the best like American ideal around education and is the exact opposite of what I experience in Milwaukee to York.[00:37:00]

[00:37:00] I am astonished to the degree to which. People can show this interest in other people's children and support structures and systems that unfairly punish those children. So let's get into that. Um, so for me to hear your dialogue around this teaches me I need to do more reading, so thank you. But, um, let's just dig into what's going on and why a little bit.

[00:37:28] So, the educational crisis in Milwaukee, as of the 2023 Ford exam, there were 47 schools with less than 5% of the students proficient in ELA, English language arts, English language arts. Um, all but three of the, those 47 schools were

70% or more black, and most of them were nineties black. Okay? There's 89 schools with less than 5% proficient in math.

[00:37:57] Uh, and all but 15% [00:38:00] percent or more black. So the. The sort of conclusion there is, oh, uh, this is, this is actually a different data here. 37 schools, uh, had in Milwaukee have less than 70% low income, but within those schools, 37% of proficient in reading, which is the statewide average. In other words, the schools that are moderate income, moderate or upper income are actually doing okay in the ward to be at 37% meets the statewide average.

[00:38:36] And that actually isn't too bad. But then you look at the 40 schools, 42 schools that are more than 70% Hispanic. Those 42 schools have a 17% proficiency rate. And then finally, 114 schools that are more than 70% black have an 8% proficiency rate. [00:39:00] In other words, they, it was fascinating to be in these conversations, especially with the business and political community about the educational crisis.

[00:39:08] There is a refusal to identify and pinpoint that the crisis is in the predominantly low income African-American schools. There is this resistance to name it and address it as where the real failure, uh, is in our schools. Why do you think that is? Because it's 'cause people think it's unsolvable and it's deeply uncomfortable to name, and it's not, everybody is uncomfortable naming it, right?

[00:39:42] So, so black democrats are extremely uncomfortable naming it. White Republicans are extremely uncomfortable naming it. Uh, and any politician who mentions it is going to, is gonna get shredded one way every another. I think it also falls into question the whole nature of the economic structure. Mm-Hmm. [00:40:00] Uh, I mean, you said that kids are moving out of the city and so there's not enough kids.

[00:40:04] That's not true. Their parents are moving out of the city. Right? Yeah. White flight started in the sixties and with it, when resources with it, when political power that could in fact really move the levers to support people, um, I think it's a bigger story than school behavior. Uh, we took tra for 48 years.

[00:40:31] This is about the culture. Mm-Hmm, sure. Well, I think it's about the schools, but it's about the larger culture. Mm-Hmm. And really deep ways that we just scratching the surface of Yeah. I think it's about Wisconsin and, uh, I, I actually made some notes, um, from the study that was done in July of 2020. By Levi who's a, we gonna get that, just so you know.

[00:40:56] Oh, you're gonna get there. Go ahead. Okay. Well, I might be repeating it, [00:41:00] but, um, he, uh, did an assessment of the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the country across 30 indices to measure the quality of life for African Americans and Milwaukee ranked at the bottom. Hmm. And Levine says that it's well known in academic research and popular analysis of Milwaukee is simply, um, of one of the worst metropolitan areas in the country for African Americans.

[00:41:37] And, and, and I view this as a statewide problem. I mean, I think we've effectively abandoned Milwaukee. We, we use its advantages. We have the white flight outside of the, uh, wild commun. Leaving, uh, uh, an impoverished center city. And that, and, and so this, this is I think, a larger political [00:42:00] problem. I, I agree with you people.

[00:42:02] I, I mean, nobody talks about it, by the way. Um, Levine said there, there are three drivers to this problem. One is educational attainment, one is segregation. I mean, we are, Milwaukee is a highly segregated city. We're a segregated state. I think that's one thing we don't admit to ourselves. And the third was the lack of African American representation and economic leadership positions work that way.

[00:42:32] Yeah. Which all part of the backstory that sort of leads to these realities. Um, so that sort of, you know, some of that comes out of Levine's study. We'll look at. Some of his specific data points. This is, uh, black and white incarceration rates in Milwaukee County. You know, you can't, you clearly cannot draw a direct line between the school system and the prisons, but one of the points that I [00:43:00] frequently make is that if you look at St.

[00:43:02] Marcus's 1200 students, there are 15% of that number on the bottom end that are all but impossible to move. We see incremental growth with that group academically, and it's because there is literally no support in the home. Mm-Hmm. Then we've got 20% on the top act. My two children would be case in point, who could go anywhere and they would be fine academically.

[00:43:32] Right. The fascinating part to me is the rest in the middle is that 65%, 65% in the middle. Who, it makes all the difference in the world, whether they are at state Marcus or a really strong public school like Maryland Avenue Montessori, or in one of the many failing schools. [00:44:00] And what's fascinating to me is to watch in our school, very broken families and students completely change their trajectory.

[00:44:12] And the only thing that changed was their school, the, the bottom, 15, 20%. Very, very complicated everywhere. But sadly, what's happened in Milwaukee is because we have created both a dysfunctional public school system and a dysfunctional private school system, that middle 60% getting lost. Hmm. Uh, and it, it, the issues that are part of the broader, like life experience and community realities, segregation, all of that is intractably problematic at the very bottom end, but not throughout the spectrum.

[00:44:50] Um, you know, and then these are just some outcomes from various studies because of all of the problems in [00:45:00] the city, including the schools that are a part of such a large number of dropouts. Milwaukee is one of the cities spends the most on policing. This is from Levine's study directly, percentage of blacks holding a college or advanced degree in Milwaukee.

[00:45:19] Mm-Hmm. So with a red column, obviously, where is Chicago? I'm very curious. I'm a former Chicago, so. It's right in the middle, champ. Okay. That might sa

[00:45:35] uh, this one is percentage of blacks with a high school degree in the cities that are worse of Minneapolis, new Orleans and Miami. Interesting

[00:45:49] height segregation schools. I mean, to point earlier that we live, my wife and I live on an all black block, one block north of North Avenue [00:46:00] between our North Avenue and our center street campuses. And like North Avenue is the line, it's just beginning to blend because of gentrification that's moving north.

[00:46:11] But the segregation is absolutely horrific. And in fact, he finished his study and I don't think I have the slides in this presentation, but I have them in another one of comparing Milwaukee to Birmingham. What's fascinating is. Between 1965 and the present by almost every indicator Birmingham is shooting up.

[00:46:31] Mm-Hmm. And it's like a perfect ex with Milwaukee. There was something that happened down south in cities like Birmingham where they had to so violently confront the problems that they ended up actually resolving it in a way that our city and state tended to run from it. And folks were able to say, I'm just gonna go to a different space.

[00:46:56] Right? So the segregation issues are horrific. In [00:47:00] fact, uh, Milwaukee, as of, um, I wanna say 2020 was as segregated in its schools as it was in 1965, but in about 1985, it dropped from about 80% of students in hyper segregated schools to 25%. So there was this period of time, I mean, it's like a v. Uh, and then we

abandoned all of the desegregation practices because some of them were just so bad, um, that the then, uh, the schools got, uh, segregated again.

[00:47:37] Hmm. Um, this one is just horrific black male incarceration.

[00:47:47] Oh. Wisconsin as a state is shameful that way. And if you compare us to a state right at Storm Mill, Minnesota, similar demographics, completely different [00:48:00] approach over the last 40 years to, um, the problems of crime and treatment and drugs and everything else. I mean, just so much more community-based treatment.

[00:48:11] And, um, instead of just building prisons with no fiscal notes, without any notion of how much is, is yet another prison gonna Yeah. Cost. Yeah. So if you have prisons, you have to fill them. Just like school buildings, I guess you don't have to fill the school buildings, which you do have to fill basically prisons, right.

[00:48:31] Um, there's an amazing book called More Than One Struggle by Jack Doherty. Has anybody come across this book? He basically, it's called More Than One Struggle because it is the Black Fight for Fair Education Access. Mm-Hmm. Starting in 1920 when the first African Americans on Mass arrived in Milwaukee. Uh, and he unpacks the decades and it's just mind boggling.

[00:48:56] Um, things like when Brown versus [00:49:00] Board was passed in 1954, you know, it took from 1954 to 1979 before the Milwaukee public schools were forced to desegregating. Um, and you read about that story compared to places down south where they had to integrate almost instantly, and it was extremely traumatic.

[00:49:22] Fight went on for 25 years before there was any movement at all. Are you guys aware of, in the seventies to eighties, it says Fight against unfair busing. Are you familiar with Intact busing? No. Intact busing was a, was a concept the district put together essentially to avoid, uh, desegregation. What they would do was take, let's say Lee Elementary, which is on eighth and North Avenue, uh, they would take Room two 19, uh, which a group of fifth graders put them on a bus in the morning from Lee, drive them to Hawley, 20 minutes down North [00:50:00] Avenue.

[00:50:00] And then at Lunchtimes, you know what they did with them when they got to Holly? They were put in their own classroom. That was, that was Lee two 19. Hmm. And at lunchtime, they bust them back to Lee for lunch. For lunch and recess, and then back, and then back again. Oh. And then back at the end of the day.

[00:50:20] What, what's completely astonishing is the degree to which we as a community resisted and fought, giving black kids access to decent schools. What was that called? Intact. Intact Busing. The, the book is, uh, more than One Struggle by Jack Dougherty. Um, but it's been fascinating. It's gone on and on. And then, you know, we, our third, our third school building is the, uh, the old Rombe Community School, which was formed by black parents in, I wanna say the late sixties.

[00:50:57] After St. Elizabeth's Catholic School [00:51:00] closed, the St. Elizabeth's left. It was formed by a group of black parents. It was one of three independent schools. Urban Day on the West Side, Bruce Quad, Lupe on the south side, uh, Harambe Community School on the north side. And they, these parents just wanted a place.

[00:51:19] Where they could have black teachers and their kids could thrive. And Harambe community school was for 40 years a just anchor in the community and just thrived tragically. In 2002, the the controller ran with the money and was never caught, and the school just collapsed. But in the meantime, because those experiments in stepping outside of the district was successful, there was the movement for voucher schools.

[00:51:46] And that the real tragedy with the voucher school system was out of political necessity. When they created it, the voucher schools were funded at about 60% or 50% public [00:52:00] schools. So then what happened was parents started opting in because they were so desperate to get out of the district. The system grew and the fact of the matter is, is that you cannot run on the north side of Milwaukee.

[00:52:15] A successful voucher school on the voucher amount. So to your question earlier, the voucher amount is now \$9,500. Okay. We raise an additional 3000 for every single child. So we're spending 12 five. If you take that 3000 out that we raise for every child, the wheels come off. We go from 20% proficiency and we drop way down.

[00:52:47] Um, so I'll, I'll get into this in a second. This is like historic problems, uh, within the community vouchers. Yeah. Uh, some minutes ago you [00:53:00] made a comment about vouchers and I wasn't sure, did you say that they're, to receive a voucher, a family has a cap of \$70,000 income? Correct. So richer families cannot get, they can pay tuition ish.

[00:53:13] So I pay tuition. Okay. All right. Thank you. And you have to spend the full voucher amount for every child in the building, whether they're tuition or not, or

you have to return it to the state. Say that in different words please. So if you don't spend 9,500 every child in your building, okay. I, you have to return the difference between what you spend per child and what veteran is, um, within the community.

[00:53:43] You know, this got alluded to earlier, these five things I'll even tell you of the last 15 years. I'll certainly, from time I started the breakdown of the family, the collapse of the church and the advent of social media have made all work fantastically more difficult. [00:54:00] It is a completely different ballgame today than it was 22 years ago.

[00:54:06] And so, and, and screens and social media. Because poor families in general have fewer resources and less know-how to harness it and control it is shredding young kids city. It's just horrific how out of control of the city, um, challenges facing black students. So all of the things that we've talked about are why it's so challenging.

[00:54:34] And then I just wanna break down, like from my perspective, the problems in NPS versus the problems in the voucher schools because they're so different. So in NPS for both, it's a nearly impossible task, right? Especially on the north side with African American kids. But all of these issues are profoundly problematic.

[00:54:55] I have friends that lead NPS schools and work in [00:55:00] NPS, the frustration level, the governance, the management, the economics. There. I mean, the stories I hear are just unimaginable. One of the things that I have the hardest time with, with the district is the way that the talent gets channeled from the poor schools to the wealthiest schools.

[00:55:22] And the district does a spectacular job in 30 or so schools, predominantly white, predominantly middle income, where most of the employee's kids go. And I, I see this constant channeling of resources that gets pulled out of where the poor kids are and gets sent to sort of where the base is. Um, which is just another way that the kids that have been left behind for so long continue to be left behind and are literally voiceless.

[00:55:56] Um, on the, on the private charter school side, [00:56:00] again, a nearly impossible task. They're not quite as impossible. The district has a harder job. Inadequate funding. Oftentimes there's poor strategy or execution, just folks don't, this was especially true 25 years ago, the 50 worst voucher schools, thankfully, are closed.

[00:56:18] They're gone. We've fought hard to shut them down. Um, there's about six more. I'd love to see closed, but bad schools failed. Kids must close. Right. To your point earlier that as a business, it should have happened in schools. So what strategy did you take to close down those schools? What did you do? We worked with DBI to get them on technicalities.

[00:56:44] Okay. Uh, generally financial. Um, and then we've struggled historically with a lack of accountability. Uh, you know, the arguments has always been market market doesn't work when parents don't have the information that they need. It just doesn't, it works to a [00:57:00] certain degree and it's better than nothing. Uh, the fact that we've closed about 60 schools is evidence that now there is a high level of accountability that the worst operators have been weeded out.

[00:57:13] But you had to take the initiative to make that happen. DPI would not have done it on its own. Well, DPI, to be fair, I think wanted to, especially early on in, um, but they just ran into this like wall of, until it was evident that, I mean, we had to, we had to fight like crazy to get our side to do state testing.

[00:57:37] And my argument was, what are we afraid of? Right? Like, let's, let's jump in and do what everybody else does. Um, this is sort of. Frustrating. Um, this is where funding will be at in 2028, following the referendum that was just passed. Sure. You heard about the \$280 million referendum for MPS. Uh, the [00:58:00] second one, it's not a one year referendum.

[00:58:01] It's every year in perpetuity. Uh, dramatically increases the person funding in the district. Um, and it really heightens like, frankly, if this number doesn't move, we are gonna see the K eight private schools that are delivering the best product to the poor black kids start to unravel. And candidly, that 20,000 isn't gonna make an ounce of difference for the poor black kids in a central city.

[00:58:37] It will help the district, but not the poor black kids. And this all comes back to this John Dewey thing. Those kids convinced of this now. The problem is intractable because those kids don't fundamentally matter. They don't matter to anybody. That's, that's money provided by Milwaukee District [00:59:00] per student, 20,000.

[00:59:02] This is state and local funding per student, per student property taxes, state redistributor taxes, and then I suppose federal stuff that trickles in. Yeah. And the voucher you live on state money, no. Property tax, correct. Right. Madison's

about 26 to 29, by the way. Hmm. It, I, so people always send me, because I, I'm furious about this because we got robbed frankly, in the last budget cycle.

[00:59:28] Most of the money went here, uh, and here, and we got left behind in this last minute political deal. Um, but so people say to me all the time, Henry Money Works sold it. My response is, you are absolutely right. Money will not solve it, but lack of money. Mm-Hmm. Like the argument works both ways and the wheels are gonna come off.

[00:59:51] Uh, if we don't fix this, um, said a minute ago, the problem is black kids don't matter. Let me ask you a related [01:00:00] question, what talk a little bit, if you would, about your view of how do you see the culture of management in NPS and in Wisconsin schools generally? Would you say that, uh, uh, management really runs the organization for itself?

[01:00:19] I think kind of a common principle among many management consultants. When you have a bureaucracy, the bureaucracy is gonna run things first to suit themselves and only second to suit their clients. Would you say that's true for, uh, the Milwaukee schools? Yeah. I mean, I think once. A fact is the union runs the district by virtue of the fact that every candidate that they run gets elected and every candidate that opposes the union gets voted out.

[01:00:51] Um, and what, uh, Jim was telling me earlier about a, a German from the RIP School District that was a likening, his experience in [01:01:00] public education, 2009 to gm. The, the clearest analogy I can give is why all of the, the huge airlines of the eighties, twa, a PanAm, all the rest of them, ultimately went up business because of legacy costs, because the, the employee became more valued than the customer.

[01:01:19] And I like it is mind boggling to me that nobody names, when a union, when there's a complete imbalance between a union and management, it's not gonna work. It's gonna fail the customer at the end of the day. And that's the way I view it, because I watch decision after decision after decision driven by a union that does absolutely nothing for the customer.

[01:01:50] And the best example of that upfront was the whole debacle of, uh, the Malcolm X School building that became Rufuss King Middle School, had nothing [01:02:00] to do with the custom and was all about preservation Charleston, um, uh, like her or not? Uh, um, no. Yeah, I thought so. Uh, Betsy DeVos, I, I, you know, I, I agree with this.

[01:02:20] I, we have, um, created institutional racism in our school systems and, you know, I. Folks would say the voucher system was a way out of that. But in the way that it was structured, it's had, it's had a very similar result. There are schools like ours that raise a ton of extra money that now are considered a great place for low income after American kids to be educated.

[01:02:53] But nonetheless, in private schools and public schools, the vast majority of black kids in Milwaukee remain trapped [01:03:00] school. Um, this is thoroughly depressing. Let's go to some solutions. Um, and then we can just wrap up with any dialogue. Here's what the way I see it 23 years in of doing this thing. Number one, acknowledge the problem and own it.

[01:03:15] Like I feel like as a state, every single individual in our state needs to own a sense of corporate responsibility for the problem. That's completely unrealistic perhaps. But if we want a pathway out, it's gonna start with that. Secondly, engage in personal sacrifice to solve it. Mm-Hmm. It looks different for everybody.

[01:03:41] It looks for me, I live in the neighborhood and it's about the personal relationships in the neighborhood, and then it's about my work. Right. Uh, but it, it's gonna take enormous sacrifice to put a dent in. And I think that fundamental problem is, is there's an [01:04:00] unwillingness to engage in that level of sacrifice.

[01:04:02] So is there some, well, next word is funding, but is there some sort of financial sacrifice that people around the state can do? Or is it a political involvement? Well, well you say engage in personal sacrifice. Yeah. So it could be tutoring, reading. Right. You know, I'm gonna give in my retirement, you know, one afternoon a week.

[01:04:24] It moves the needle. That's sacrifice. It could be philanthropy, it could be both the public school or a private school. Um, I don't know what political sacrifice looks like other than you'll see in my last bullet point, one of our fundamental problems is we're such a politically divided state. We just don't like to talk to each other.

[01:04:43] And so it, it, it's, our state is so extreme politically at this point on both sides of the aisle. Yeah. That, that might be a sacrifice. Folks being willing to say, you know what? I'll sit down with you even though I don't agree with you at all. Um, I think what [01:05:00] two points, first of all, multi public schools does have a foundation.

[01:05:03] It does. Which is relatively new. Yeah. And actually trying to model itself at the Madison Public School Foundation to have it successful. Mm. And if you have any particular views about the efficacy of that foundation, um, um, yeah, I, you know, so. I know almost nothing about what they find. I'll tell you this, the, I have seen person off to person, off to person.

[01:05:26] People like Jennifer Bartolotta Mm-Hmm. Around the Bartolotta restaurant groups. John Ky from Northwestern Mutual who came in and threw everything they had and helping NPS move than needle. And at the end of the day, and I don't wanna speak for either of them, but a lot of those people have just been like, and the, and the, and the brutal tragedy is at this point, so intractably in self preservation mode [01:06:00] and dysfunctional that I, I so badly want a solution for the district.

[01:06:10] I just don't, I'd make a second political point. Um. Because there, there's a parallel issue in our rural areas of rural poverty. Hundred percent. Hundred percent. And, um, I, I potentially see, um, a politic, poss a possibility of a political alignment over this issue now that rural, urban, and rural Absolutely.

[01:06:36] Um, right corner. And, uh, I'm too old to do anything about that, but I, but, uh, I think that's a possibility. Interestingly, there's been a lot of recent talk around that because the only way that those KA eight voucher schools get moved is if we can draw in rural districts who could also benefit from addressing the [01:07:00] lowest funded kids in the state.

[01:07:02] Um, real quick, uh, resolve NPS governance issues. Like it just has to happen in, oh, this is fascinating. Birth to age four. Um, we, if we, we'll never do it, but if we would just recognize that the brain research in the last 20 years has exposed the battle is won or lost by age five, and yet we as a state still fund four states at 50% of five year olds.

[01:07:32] Uh, it's insanity. Um, but right there is so much that could be done that we're not even really, at least not in the mainstream looking at yet, fix the state report card. What I was referring to earlier, I love the state report card. Like I love that there's a measure, um, but it just needs to be tweaked. Uh, and then end the, you know, partisan politics.

[01:07:55] Celebrate the middle. Um. Are my solutions. Thank you [01:08:00] guys for being so.

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