State System Perspectives on Scaling Evidence Use
July 8, 2025

Panelists: Dr. Carey Wright and Dr. Jason Glass
Moderator: Victoria Schaefer

Kerry Friedman:

Afternoon everybody and welcome to our first panel in our series on Envisioning an Evidence-Based Education Ecosystem. Today's panel is bringing perspectives from esteemed leaders with experience scaling evidence use in their state systems. My name is Kerry Friedman. I am a principal education researcher at SRI and also the director of The LEARN Network. I'll take just a brief moment to tell you about The LEARN Network, which is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences to support the scaling of evidence-based practices and programs that accelerate learning so that The LEARN Network, we facilitate capacity building for educational researchers and developers and also engagement activities with educators, all with the goal of bridging research to practice and building more useful evidence-based products that can achieve widespread and sustainable use and impact.

I am extremely excited to introduce our moderator for today's conversation, Dr. Victoria. Schaefer Victoria is a director and senior manager on SRI's teacher quality and systems Reform team. Her education career demonstrates a real commitment to bridging research and practice with her work supporting educators to improve opportunities for all students. Currently, she leads a portfolio of work that builds school-community partnerships, bridging schools, law enforcement, first responders, and mental health providers together so that they can identify and support students. Previously, Victoria served as the director of the Regional Educational Laboratory for Appalachia. We are bringing evidence-based practices to educators was a top priority. I have personally been very inspired by Victoria's dedication to bringing research to bear for students and for that reason I can't think of a better person to lead us to today for this panel. So I'm going to pass it over to you.

Victoria Schaefer:

Kerry, thank you very much. Welcome everyone. Thank you to our audience for joining us today and thank you to both of our panelists for joining us as well. We are really excited today to have Dr. Jason Glass and Dr. Carey Wright join us for what I have no doubt will be a very inspiring and engaging conversation kicking off our summer conversation series. So first let me introduce Jason. Jason is a former state superintendent who spearheaded the United We Learn initiative in Kentucky. That initiative was a vision for a public education system that would create deeper and more meaningful learning experiences for all students by increasing collaboration and coordination with community partners among others. Jason has led statewide efforts in deeper learning and literacy policy. For example, as commissioner of education in two states, Kentucky and Iowa, all with a big focus on community-driven change efforts. Currently, Jason is the superintendent of Laguna Beach Unified School District in California.

Next I want to introduce Dr. Carrey Wright. Carey is the current state superintendent in Maryland and she's the former superintendent in Mississippi where she was the architect of what is now pretty widely known as the Mississippi Miracle. The Mississippi Miracle is what we're all increasingly coming to know as the unprecedented effort to produce learning gains for students and it results in unprecedented gains in statewide literacy and math proficiency and then improved outcomes for all students pre-K through 12 in Mississippi. So again, welcome both of my panelists. I'm really grateful that you're here and we're excited to get this conversation going. So if I could take just a moment, both the panelists and for all of

the folks who are joining us live today to do a little bit of stage setting and want to call our attention to the fact that we live in times of a wealth of information about how to improve teaching and learning.

And we hear it all the time. We often hear the word evidence tossed about and we say we built evidence for what works. We also live in times of increasing innovation, really fast-paced, increasing innovation, and we live in times of declining student performance. Researchers have built a lot of evidence for what works, we call it what works in education. So let me just pause a second to make sure we're clear about this evidence, what we mean by this term. Evidence researchers have studied ways to teach math and reading for example, and identified interventions that work to improve student achievement as measured for example by standardized tests. It's true across multiple content areas. We have a lot of evidence for not just math and reading, but things like school climate as well. So as a nation we have a lot of documentation about how to teach and how to lead schools that help students thrive.

At the same time, the education community observes a rise of cutting-edge technologies in these innovative teaching methods that I mentioned just a moment ago. But when you look at the most recent data that we have, it's 2024 national assessment of Educational Progress data. It's almost stunning. It shows that reading and math scores for grades four and eight remained below pre-pandemic levels. So arguably these scores offer a different kind of evidence.

This is outcome evidence, the outcome of what our schools are producing. It's what the students actually know is demonstrated by those tests. So we have ourselves a conference, we have a lot of evidence, we have rising innovation, and yet we have test data that suggests our students are just not learning what we thought they would be learning or what we've determined they should be learning. So people are concerned and want to have a conversation about what would it take to bring all this evidence to bear. And so I'm going to raise that just a bit more today to say if we want to mobilize what we know works, let's assume we're doing that. And then I want to ask both Jason and Carey what it would look like if we had an evidence-based education ecosystem. That's right, an entire ecosystem where students were thriving in getting what they need to live to their highest potential and want to start there. So if we imagine that, I'm going to ask you to describe that future state. How about this? Carey, let's start with you.

Carey Wright:

Sure. So thank you and thank you for having me. I think I'll speak from the SEA, the state agency perspective. I think that the first thing that I think the SEA is if you were starting all over again, they need to be thinking about, start with a concept that everything they do requires some kind of research to substantiate it. I think that is where you start is once you start with the evidence base and you've got as a state chief to provide a very compelling story and reason about why you are selecting the practices that you're selecting and you've got to communicate that frequently and very clearly because not everybody is steeped in research. Not everybody even understands some of the research. So you've got to turn it into your own plain language in order to communicate that to your stakeholders. I think the other thing that you've got to do is stick with what works relentlessly.

These are children's lives we're dealing with. We don't have the time to be following something of the next bright shiny object. We've got a lot of research out there about what works when it comes to children's learning, so we need to stick with that. I think the other thing that we need to make sure we're doing is stick with a plan year in year out. Consistency is critical. It's not plan A for one year and plan B for another year and plan C for another year. That's not to say that you don't analyze the data and make corrections, but you don't just throw everything out and start all over again year after year. You've got to have a strong strategic plan as the foundation of this. You've got to know where you want

to be. You've got to involve the entire agency, every single office, every office and every department has to see themselves in this plan and understand their role right from the beginning.

I think you've got to establish very clear metrics right from the beginning. What are the outcomes that you're looking for? How are you going to measure those outcomes with what frequency? And then most importantly, what are you going to do with the data once you've collected? That to me is critical as the state chief because you've got...

If something is not working, the data will let you know it's not working. And so you need to try another research-based strategy instead. I think you've got to make sure that you are very clear in your communication, not only with your stakeholders but also with those folks inside the agency, with your legislature, with your elected officials. Everybody needs to be very clear about what the vision is that you're painting. I think that that's where we as state chiefs, it's important for us to say, here's where we're headed and here's why we're headed in the direction that we're heading. And I think using data and research to support those decisions makes a lot of sense. We just need to make sure that our stakeholders understand why we're using what we're using and I think you need to also create systems that prevent some kind of deviation from evidence-based approaches. You don't want people to fall back on past practices that may not have been effective or proven to be effective. And I think overall you've got to build organizational capacity to sustain long-term implementation. And I'll stop there.

Victoria Schaefer:

Wow, thank you. So you touched on a lot there. And before we go and start unpacking, I'm going to turn to Jason. Jason, you have the floor and I'll just remind you of our question. Paint for us the picture of that education ecosystem where all students thrive and get what they need to lift to their highest potential.

Jason Glass:

Thanks Victoria. And I really appreciated Carey's opening remarks. The part that where she talked about it can't be the plan of the week or the plan of the month. You really need to stick with something. It's something that really resonated with me. I want to express my appreciation to you and to SRI for hosting this important discussion on how we use evidence to improve our education systems. I really appreciate this question about what education can and must become. Ask us to imagine a system where every student engages in meaningful and real world learning work that connects their interests, their communities, and the challenges that they'll face in life. A system where academic mastery remains critical, but it's also paired with purpose and curiosity and the skills that we know our kids will need to navigate the complex world that they're have inherited foundational skills. Literacy, numeracy content knowledge are absolutely essential.

They are the building blocks of opportunity for our kids, but we also know that they're not sufficient on their own for successful future. Our students are stepping into a world shaped increasingly by automation globally interdependent, rapid change and deep social challenges that are likely to be exacerbated as our kids get older. Preparing them for that future means expanding not only what we teach but how we define success and what that looks like. I think a real challenge for those of us in leadership positions is that much of our existing evidence base is rooted in standardized machine scored measures on a fixed body of knowledge. And these measures are really important. They've helped drive improvement in several contexts in the era that came before us, but they also tell us relatively little about how we prepare students. For a world where knowledge is dynamic, context is constantly shifting and the ability to apply learning in new situations in the context is paramount.

And I think that's why state policy has to do two things at once. The state leaders have to think about two things at once. One is grounding its work in high quality evidence and at the same time building capacity for innovation that's future focused and encourages some experimentation. I want to be clear, this is not a call to abandon the need to challenge students or academic rigor. It's a call to ensure that we're challenging them in ways that are meaningful, relevant, and aligned to the kinds of work that they'll have to do when they become adults. So here are several key actions I think states can use to bring that balance to life. One is to reimagine and redesign our accountability systems to reflect broader, more meaningful definitions of student success, including growth and achievement, but also engagement readiness for life beyond school. Second, intentionally create policy space for innovation by funding pilot programs and assigning resources to evaluate the evidence that come out of those supporting networks of learning communities, allowing districts and communities of districts to test new models with some safeguards and research support.

Third, invest in educator development. This is something that I want to tip my hat to Carey, again, she's done marvelously in all the roles that she's been in, but invest in the development of our frontline educators, particularly around evidence-based student-centered practices. In addition to the literacy-focused efforts, Carey's well known for I would add project and problem-based learning, formative assessment, inclusive instruction. Fourth, I think states can use the levers that they have such as graduation requirements, assessment waivers, accreditation guidance to remove barriers and incentivize deeper more connected learning experiences. And finally commit to equity not just in access but in design by thinking about families, students, communities as partners in shaping what learning looks like. That's something that we really focused on in Kentucky. If we want our schools to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities ahead, then state leaders have to model that same willingness to learn, adapt, and lead forward.

And that means using evidence not only to validate what we already know, but to help us build toward what is emerging and what's coming ahead. So one of the exciting things about working in education, it forces us to think about the future and how we build toward that. And as we think about what's possible at scale, I want to recognize Carey Wright's extraordinary leadership in Mississippi. Her success aligning state-level systems to advance early literacy outcomes tells us that a coordinated evidence-informed action at the state level can move the needle for students and that leadership matters.

Victoria Schaefer:

So you have both said so much so already my wheels are turning, I am inspired. I want to go roll up my sleeves and there are a million questions burning. One thing I want to comment about what I heard Jason say, Jason, you are calling for the use of evidence echoing what Carey said, but you also added an element that I didn't hear Carey say and maybe I missed it, Carey, but Jason, you're pushing to say that our evidence is not static, reframing what you said a little bit, but in fact we should be thinking in this future evidence-based ecosystem that we are always generating evidence to, we're using learning and then adapting and sharing so that we continue to grow. So I'm just flagging that I heard you say that that's a critical part of an evidence-based ecosystem, that it's generative and I see Carey nodding. So Carey, I just want to acknowledge you if there's anything you want to say and follow up to what Jason said too.

Carey Wright:

No, I just think that's really critical and Jason's spot on. I mean we gather evidence each and every day and each and every year, and that's what I'm talking about by using a data system to really analyze the data that you're collecting. You don't collect data for data's sake. You collect it to see if it's telling you a

story or if it's proving that what the process that you're going through or the initiative that you're undertaking is actually working and that then generates its own evidence either to continue what you're doing or not. And I think we've got to keep that in mind. We can't just rely on research change each and every day, each and every year. And as leaders we have to stay on top of what is most current and what we're saying needs to be put into play. So I totally agree with what he said about it being generative.

Victoria Schaefer:

Okay, so you both touched on key themes that appear in literature. I'm going to refer to capacity building literature and I don't know if you necessarily intended to do this, but you paved the way. Because I wanted to point to conceptually how all of our audience understand the role that a state department of ed can play. And then the literature tells us that when we think about building capacity, because that's essentially what we have to do, we have to build our capacity to get to this evidence-based education ecosystem. The literature tells us that we need to think about policy, organizational capacity, human and resource capacity and different points. You were referring to those though not necessarily intentionally or formally. So I do want to ask you if those sound right to you and then if you could peel the layers of the onion back for us and help paint that picture more about the role of the state agency in creating evidence-based education ecosystem. So Carey, I'll turn back to you and start looking first.

Carey Wright:

Yeah, well you're speaking to my heart when you're talking about capacity building because I am a firm believer in building the capacity and the areas that the literature is outlined I think are really very specific. So if you're talking about policy capacity to me, you use that to set direction and you use that to drive behavior. And I'm going to talk about that just in a second. Organizational capacity is the ability of your agency or if you're a principal, I was a school-based administrator of your school in order to put together the structures that would support implementation inside or outside the agency, whichever you're focusing on human capacity, I can't say enough about, you have got to ensure that the people that are working either in your agency or in schools have the skill and knowledge needed in order to execute on the strategy and the evidence-based approaches that you're using.

Resource capacity for me means ensuring that you've got materials and or funding that align with the goals that you're trying to get accomplished. But all four have got to work together. You can't just focus on one area of this capacity piece and assume that you're going to reach what you want to reach. I'm going to give you some examples from that. I think policy either comes through legislation, which as a state chief we know very well. Legislators legislate a lot for us to get accomplished, but that's like the foundational level or if you're a state agency, the state board also sets policy around implementation details. So let me give you an example. In Mississippi they passed a Literacy-Based Promotion act which talked about professional learning requirements for teachers in schools and also all around instructional coaches like what were they supposed to be doing in those schools.

So that was a piece of legislation that drove that. But policy I've always believed drives behavior as does accountability, and I can't say enough about that either. So policy combined with the accountability can definitely drive behavior, but if you want to see change in classrooms, then policy, whether that's however that gets defined for you or accountability has got to address the change you want to see happening. And I think you need to be very specific about what kind of behaviors you're expecting. For example, in Maryland we just passed our math and literacy policies and they're very specific about what we are expecting from teachers and teens in schools. And an example from Mississippi, even though the legislation had passed, there was two pieces of legislation in 2013 when I first arrived. One was the

Literacy-Based Promotion Act. Which focused on literacy, but the other was the Early Learning Collaborative Act which focused on early childhood and nobody had built the organizational capacity in the agency to execute on both those pieces of legislation.

So we didn't have an early childhood department, we really didn't have a literacy department and so we had to reorganize the agency and build the organization's capacity in order to execute on both of those pieces of legislation. And you've also got to hire and develop staff inside your agency to have expertise in these areas and you've also got to be able to recognize that the agency in order to address the strategic plan, has to address organizational and human capacity needs. The people want to do the best, but sometimes they don't come to the table immediately with those skillsets. So it's on us to do that. Everybody has got to see their part where this is concerned and their part in policy implementation. You've got to build human capacity within your organization. Do they all have the same skills and knowledge that you need in order to execute on their jobs effectively?

You can't assume the capacity is there once you get as a state chief or if you're a brand new principal, whatever role you're playing, you've got to really do your job in assessing do all of the people have the skills that are needed in order to execute on what we're trying to get accomplished and also align your resources. I can't say enough about that, whether that is human, whether that's organizational, whether that's money, whatever those resources are, you've got to align that to design that resource capacity to address all of the policies that you're trying to implement. And that requires going back to what I just said at the beginning, you've got to address all four capacity issues in order to really be effective as a leader.

Victoria Schaefer:

All right, thank you Carey. So Jason, I'm going to turn to you right away. What say you about the state agency's role in those four types of capacity that we touched on policy organisational human and resource?

Jason Glass:

Well as usual, Carey said it all and said it very well, so I won't try to cover the same ground that she did, but as she was talking I was reminded of that movie title, everything Everywhere all at once. So that feels like what we're trying to do. Or another quote came to mind, the Ashley brilliant quote, it's hard to take my problems one at a time when they refuse to stand in line. And that's also as a state leader, what you face as well. You're trying to do all these things and sometimes different elements of them bubble up and you got to handle it while it's the same time maintaining momentum on all the other areas as well. But I think if we're serious about innovation at scale, we have to treat evidence not just as a tool for validation, like in an accountability system, but also as something we learn from and continue to improve from.

I want to talk a little bit about Carey's work in Mississippi as an example of success around this. It's a clear example of how you use evidence to drive measurable change. Mississippi's commitment to the science of reading, which was grounded in decades of cognitive research, was then paired with aligned policies, professional learning, coaching supports and accountability structures. So that kind of system coherence is critical when implementing a research backed strategy at scale. It's not just the what, but it's the how? The who? The under what conditions, everything everywhere, all at once. At the same time in Kentucky with the United We Learn initiative, we've showed that impact at scale can also be driven by expanding the very idea of what counts as evidence. We supported districts in piloting new models of evidence, capstone defenses, student exhibition, performance based assessments and partnered with research organizations to study that evidence in the context that it was happening.

So our aim wasn't just to prove whether something worked in a narrow sense, but also to learn how to make it better, how to make these experiences better for students and in more places. I think together these two stories point to several concepts about how states can leverage evidence at scale. Carey mentioned this earlier, but it's worth repeating. Start with a clear and consistent student-centered vision and stick with it. Evidence is powerful when it serves a compelling purpose and one that your communities believe in that you can get people motivated to follow. Second, and we also saw this in Carey's story and it works she's doing in Maryland now, align systems and supports, whether it's early literacy or deeper learning, scaling requires coherent policies, sustained investment and a whole infrastructure, a thoughtful infrastructure to support the implementation. Third, invest in people. Teachers need ongoing, embedded, supportive, just-in-time professional learning to translate that evidence into practice with fidelity and creativity.

I've spent a lot of my career focused on bringing about deeper learning shifts in schools and I've given talks about the importance of creativity, problem-solving, complex reasoning, all the terms that come up when we talk about deeper learning. And I get lots of head nods from people that say, "Yeah, we need that. I believe in that." Then the teachers say, I don't know exactly how to do that or I wasn't even in a school where I experienced that kind of learning myself. And so we've got to think about how we support the people that are in our schools to deliver the kind of learning that we hope for our young people. I talked earlier about the importance of supporting local innovation. It doesn't all come from the state. I would say the most important learning, but the most important experimentation is already happening in schools, but you have to slow down and take time, nurture it, find it, and connect it.

So support smart experimentation and how to get promising ideas to grow. And I think one other point that I'll just end with is that it's important to remember that the impact you're going for is that the micro level. And what I mean by that is that as states we can spend and state leaders, we can spend an extraordinary amount of time and energy on statutes, regulations, policies, directives, large scale systems, theoretical concepts that sound good when delivered at the microphone in the committee room where they sound good in the conference room. But what ultimately matters is whether or not there is a change in the individual experience of a student and is that happening at scale in the classroom, in the community.

So we can't pat ourselves on the back too much and declare victory for just accomplishing something legislatively or on paper or at the macro level. We've got to design and follow through to make sure that the changes are happening at the micro level, the individual student level. That is really all that matters. So states that strike that balance between fidelity to proven strategies and an openness to emerging strategies while targeting the impact directly on students as a priority, I think those places are the best position to make an impact.

Victoria Schaefer:

Okay. I'm loving what I'm hearing, so thank you both so much. I'm getting excited again. So lots of things are on my mind and I want to try to do two things at the same time. I really would like... I love where Jason's going and I need to acknowledge that it's so important for us to just recognize at the end of the day all of what we're putting in place, this evidence is for our students, for our students to be able to achieve. So I don't want to lose that thread and I do acknowledging it and I'm holding it off. And for Carey, I'm wondering if you can take that a little bit and help me. I'm really also curious about policy and the references I've heard to policy and I think there's a connection here. Is there anything, Carey, that should be said about policy and evidence and implementation down at the teacher and student level? Is there a way for you to weave a thread through those three and help us understand their connectedness before we just dive fully into students or is that really the pathway students?

Carey Wright:

There's nothing more, and I can't applaud Jason enough for that comment. We have to remember as educators, this isn't a job. We are dealing with the development of children's lives and there is nothing more important that we do each and every day than the decisions that we make that are going to impact those lives. And so for me, I always say the magic happens in the classroom between a teacher and a student. That's where the magic takes place. And our job is to make sure that those teachers are as well-prepared as they can be, have the skills that they need, that students have the resources at hand, that they are feeling safe, that they are feeling recognized, that they're feeling seen, and that they're feeling like that interaction is a positive one each and every day. And so we cannot lose sight of that.

In fact, I've created cards in Mississippi that I also created the same card in Maryland to go on every person's desk in our agency. And the question is what I'm doing now or getting ready to do, going to have an impact on student achievement? And I don't care if you're a finance person or you are food services or you're in one of the content areas, we lose sight of. That's why we do what we do is to make sure that children are being successful. And so that's the reason I feel so strongly around what we're talking about today around the policy work and I can certainly talk to you a little bit about that if you want around exactly how that impacted the work that we did, the literacy work that we did in Mississippi because it had a huge impact on that.

Victoria Schaefer:

While we're here, why don't we just go ahead and pin it back, connect that policy to the students for us?

Carey Wright:

Yeah.

Victoria Schaefer:

I'll turn to Jason with a similar question.

Carey Wright:

Yeah, I think the thing that I want to say is the work that we did around literacy, I think the first and most important policy decision, and it was a policy decision just as it was a policy decision here in Maryland, was to start implementing the science of reading statewide. And then we organized the work to address the human and organizational capacity issues. And that was not only at the agency level, I wanted to make sure that we were building teacher capacity. So as the messaging started to come through around what we were doing around the science of reading is, how we help all teachers get better at their craft so that all children are learning to read at the appropriately developmentally age appropriate that we know that they do, but how do we make sure that all teachers have that same background? And so we chose science of reading very specifically because of, I think Jason said it's got decades of research behind it that proves very clearly that a systematic approach to teaching reading definitely works.

And I think within that, the whole agency had to align behind that. So we had to make sure that we were all walking in the same direction, focused in the same thing. We had a state board, we had the legislature, everybody was looking at the policy decisions and looking forward, I think that you've got to implement evidence-based practices as a team. You cannot operate in silos as an agency or even as a school. You've got the departments in schools or grade levels in schools, but it's got to be seen as a team effort. Even in Mississippi, we aligned all of our resources with the science of reading so that we made

sure that teachers and leaders had access to everything that they needed in order to be able to address the lack of resource capacity in our LEAs. I didn't want that to be an excuse.

Well, we just don't have some of the resources. So the agency created a ton of resources and provided tremendous professional learning, which had never been done in the state. The agency drove that because we believe so much in building human capacity. That became a huge strategy for us and is continuing to do that today. I think we even created, Jason mentioned a community. We created a website just so that parents would know that we could build their capacity to work with their children at home and they had access by grade level bike content area. We developed high quality instructional materials for all of our teachers because again, we wanted to address the human capacity issues that existed in our LEAs. Everything was linked together by a very coherent system of evidence-based strategies.

And I mean every resource, every professional learning, every policy supported that same evidence-based approach. And we produced the solid outcomes. I think because of that, we started seeing children were actually learning to read. So we were evaluating that on an ongoing basis, making sure our teachers were prepared, making sure our leaders were prepared to see what they should be seeing in classrooms on an ongoing basis. And that is ongoing work. It's day in, day out, and that constant feedback loop to teachers and to students is critical for teachers to continue to learn and for students to continue to learn.

Victoria Schaefer:

Okay, thank you. Jason, let me turn to you now. We've heard a little bit about Mississippi. I want to turn back to your experiences and what you might want to share about United, we learn your effort in Kentucky or something else in Kentucky, keeping in mind where you were taking our conversation down to the student level because you've brought it home for us and I want to give you a chance to expand on your own experience with that just a little bit.

Jason Glass:

Yeah, thanks Victoria. And those that want to learn more about the United We Learn initiative, it's still the state's signature education policy direction right now. So you can Google United We Learn and learn about where it is now, but it threw out of an intentional statewide listening and design thinking process. So we took the design thinking concept and took it to scale across the state. In the wake of the pandemic, we engaged thousands of Kentuckians students, primarily families, educators, business leaders, community members in a series of in-person and virtual interviews. We had a group that followed up that conducted hundreds more of those in-depth interviews. We asked a simple but profound question, what do you want school to look like for your children in your community? And then we let people talk and listen to what they had to say. What we heard was remarkably consistent from people across different parts of the state.

People with different political stripes and beliefs. People across Kentucky wanted a system that moved us beyond compliance and test preparation. They wanted school to be connected to life and to prepare their students to be successful in life. They wanted school to be more engaging and meaningful to students. They wanted it to be more empowering. They wanted a place where students felt valued and cared for and loved. They wanted a system that was more equitable and one that just didn't serve some students well, but served every child well. So from those conversations, three big ideas emerged. The first was creating a more vibrant and meaningful student learning experience. So I'll just emphasize that again, vibrant and meaningful student learning experiences are the centerpiece of the united. We Learn

Vision and trying to change those experiences at the micro level, at the individual student level is the crux of the work.

Second, we work, the second elements of United we learn is building an innovation ecosystem across the state. So it gets back to that element of we want just not to rely on best practices and evidence. We also want to encourage thoughtful and supported and evaluated experimentation and innovation. And that happens in districts across the state. So connecting that work and supporting it. Finally grounding all of this in shared ownership and shared leadership. People also told us that they were tired of people that had suits on and look like me making decisions and at the state capitol for their communities and their schools, and they wanted to be more involved in the decisions at the local level. So we began co-designing answers to that with students, families and educators from across the state, specifically focusing on those places in the state and groups that had been left out of decision-making processes and felt like they didn't have any power.

So we aligned state-level supports around those goals, invested in regional deeper learning cohorts. We launched an assessment and innovation initiative, encouraged districts to adopt capstone projects, graduation defenses, real-world performance tasks that were aligned to their local. And then later a state portrait of a graduate. A lot of states and districts have portraits of a graduate. It's often just a flyer you put on the wall, but Kentucky was really working to make those experiences not just a poster, but what students actually experience in the course of learning. What made I think the initiative different is that it wasn't something that I came up with. It was a shared statewide effort and it is a shared statewide effort based on what Kentuckians told us they wanted. It belongs to the people of Kentucky. It was important that it not be mine as the commissioner, that it wasn't the governor's wasn't the legislature's or either political parties, it wasn't the state board.

It was what Kentuckians told us they wanted. And I think the evidence that maybe we hit the right notes on that is since I've moved on to a different role, I'm no longer in Kentucky. I haven't been there for two years now, but United We Learn, continues to guide the state's, work under a new leadership and a different board, and it remains the north star of the state and strategic planning, professional learning system redesign and continues forward. So I think the reason that that happened is because it was based on what Kentuckians wanted primarily. And I think that's a lesson in any significant change initiative. You take the time to learn that. What is the change? There's all kinds of things as a state leader that you can expend your time on and focus your state agency on. There's almost an innumerable set of priorities that someone could push before you and say, "You need to be working on this." But taking the time to find out what is the right one for this context in this place is a really important step.

Victoria Schaefer:

Well thank you Jason for taking us down to the grassroots level. Thank you both. So I'm mindful of our time and I'm mindful that we already have two questions from folks in the audience. So I know that we need to be pivoting our conversation to make time for the folks who were kind enough to come and spend an hour with us this afternoon. Before we do that, I want to give space if there's anything that is left unsaid. So this is a powerful moment and powerful moment in our time, in our history where we are on the brink of really transforming education with all that is coming with our technology and AI. And so as we move forward, want to make sure if there's something you want to say, you have a moment to say it, Carey or Jason, would one of you like to go first?

Carey Wright:

I guess the thing that I would encourage us to do, and I think Jason and I have both been talking about it the entire time, and that is the whole idea of using the framework that we've been talking about around

evidence-based strategies around policy capacity, human capacity, organizational capacity, etc. And I think that I don't care what decision you're trying to make or what initiative you're trying to move forward, whether it's something that is brand new or something that you're continuing, you've got to keep that in mind. But most importantly in education, you've got to keep the classroom in mind. And what is it that you're doing as a leader that is impacting the classroom the most? Do teachers have everything that they need to meet the needs of all students? Do they have the resource capacity in terms of materials or instructional materials that they need in order to do that?

Have they been trained in even how to meet the needs of individual regardless of what their problems have to be? But keeping children is the focus cannot be overstated. And also the importance of building teacher and leader capacity. I can't say enough about that. You can pass all the policies that you want, but to me, implementation is the name of the game and you've got to have a strong implementation plan to substantiate whatever policy lever you're trying to pull because what was to say, a plan without any kind of action is like a dream. And you want to make sure that you're executing well on behalf of children, teachers, leaders and communities. And so I just think this whole conversation that we've had today is in each of our own ways we've done that and we continue to do that, but we continue to do that with children at the center of everything that we do.

Victoria Schaefer:

Right. Thank you Jason.

Jason Glass:

Yeah, plus onto that what Carey was saying, I think it's just adding onto that I agree with everything that she says as is per usual. Carey, I admire your work a great deal. But what I would add to that is that there's an element of this that I think is really important and that is making sure that the people that are in the state agency and to the extent that you're able, the people that are in the legislature and in the governor's office are also getting out and understanding the complexity of what you're asking your teachers to do and hopefully what you're asking your students to do, the more that... And this extends to all of the sort of people in the education orbit in states and in Washington that are in non-profits and think tanks. I've been in, I don't know how many meetings where we've sort of talked about educators as a barrier or used they that they can't do it or they won't do it and it's us.

And to the extent that you develop those, the understanding of what really happens in a classroom, the complexity of what we're asking, the shifts in classroom to happen, and make sure that that's shared among the policymakers so that they can craft quality supportive policy for what we're asking teachers to do. I think that's a critical element that I just add on to what Carey talked about.

Carey Wright:

I agree 100%.

Victoria Schaefer:

Okay, well thank you Jason. Thank you Carey once again. So we have at least three questions I believe. And so I'm going to turn first, we had a question in the chat. Let me make sure I scroll up and find it.

Kerry Friedman:

I'm happy to share the questions if that's easier for you all.

Victoria Schaefer:

So the first question. Thanks Carey. So the first question is really about educator preparation. So what role and responsibilities do you believe undergraduate and graduate educator prep programs have for creating a culture that values and incorporates research and rigorous evidence in practice? So who wants to tackle that first?

Carey Wright:

Well, I can start, and I'm sure Jason can chime in. We've both had this experience. It is absolutely critical the teacher prep program stay current with research and with knowing what works in classrooms. What sometimes we find is that they're still relying on old pedagogy that is not working. And I'll stick with literacy for a second. I mean, I think about the debacle of whole language, and yet I can tell you that in my experience, the whole language is still being taught at college and universities likewise balanced literacy.

And I think that you've got to make sure that teachers are prepared to know what to do day one, because if they don't, I liken it to the fact that students and their families have spent four years of money to be trained to become efficient and productive day one. And yet what agencies are finding and what locals are finding is that they're having to come back in and put in more money for professional learning that really could have taken place during teacher prep. And so I've often said imagine what I could do with if I didn't have to spend that money on that where I could spend more money on something that is more research-based. So I definitely think it's important that they stay current and that they are thinking about what does each teacher need to know and be able to do starting day one.

Victoria Schaefer:

Thank you, Jason.

Jason Glass:

Yeah, I'll add to that I recently spent a couple of years in higher education at Western Michigan University, which has a great teacher education program and love that experience developed a great respect and admiration for our partners working in higher education. But I think it is true that that individuals working in higher education have the same biases and desire to go back to the things that reinforce our current beliefs that everybody else does. This is a human trait. We seek out information that confirms what we already believe and that is true with academics as well.

And so I think we have in higher education, teacher education in higher education must acknowledge that that bias exists in work to get back to the scientific principles that undergird the evidence that you're constantly seeking new information and trying to disprove what you already think and find out if there's a better prevailing theory or concept or approach that you should be substituting for the way you used to think. That's how science and evidence moves forward. And the enemy and enemy of that is the cognitive bias of seeking out confirmation of what you already believe. And that's part of what Carey's talking about with the literacy wars that we went through just after years of information coming out, demonstrably showing that there's a better way you still have people hanging on to this. And again, I don't fault academic academia just for that. This is a human quality that all of us have that we need to be on guard for.

Victoria Schaefer:

Thank you both. So here's another question. So simple one, but a really important, what's the best way to get important research to educators and school leaders? What's the best way to get the research to educators and school leaders? Who wants to go first?

Carey Wright:

Jason, you go first this time.

Jason Glass:

Yeah. Well, firstly I don't think I know, but I think right here's the complicated answer is it depends probably. So there is no best way. You're asking how do professionals learn? And professionals are human beings too. They learn in different ways. I think the best way is for the state agency to think about what are multiple ways in which information around research can be delivered, conveyed, supported, experimented with practitioners. I just want to touch on the previous question just one more second as well. Because I think it relates to this, and that is even though our new practitioners come out with a bachelor's of master's degree and pedagogical practice and content practice in theory and a practical experience, teaching is a profession.

It is something that you craft over many years and are always improving and getting better at. So I think it's important that we recognize that we should not expect the educator that the twenty-one-year-old to coming out of the teacher preparation program to be ready to do all this. This is someone that's going to require support and continue development, has to commit to that over the course of their lifetime. And that's part of what being a professional is.

Carey Wright:

I agree with that. Totally. And I also think to Jason's point, it really does vary. I think that a lot of people learn by seeing and by doing. And so are you having them observing classes where you know that the expert teachers or the mentor teachers are doing exactly what you want them to do? Are you making... Are that they can watch? If you're asking them if you talk about the science of reading and the various components of the science of reading, what does that look like in a classroom? What does that really look like when you say, this is what I want you to do, but it's different when you can see it. I'll me give you the perfect example very quickly. I know we're running out of time, but I had this amazing kindergarten teacher that I was, but every time I was in her classroom, she was doing whole group instruction, whole group instruction, whole group instruction.

So I said, have you thought about meeting in small groups with kids? They all have different needs. So then the next time I observed her, she had divided the class into three groups, but she taught the same lesson to all three groups. So it was just whole group instruction divided by three. So finally I thought, you know what? Let me take her to another kindergarten teacher who was another amazing kindergarten teacher that I work with. I said, "Let me take you... Let's go watch together." Well, it was an eye-opener because the teacher had her tablet and she was saying, I want to meet with you, you and you while you go meet with the assistant you and you go to centers. And then within about 20 minutes she goes, "Okay." She clapped her hands and she goes, "Now I want to meet with you." And it was like the aha moment.

And this was a seasoned teacher, a seasoned teacher, and she finally said, "That's what you meant by small group instruction." So she interpreted it as just small group instruction, not the fact that you start moving kids in and out of groups in order to better meet their needs. So sometimes people just need to see it in action and through no fault of their own, because sometimes student teachers got to love them. They're also dependent on who their supervising teacher is, and if you're hoping that their supervising

teacher is an amazing teacher, but if they're not, then that's what they're coming away with. So we want to make sure that they have as many different exposures to as many different kinds of things so that they see what it looks like, see what it feels like and can exercise that in their classroom.

Victoria Schaefer:

Thank you. So I'm mindful of the time. I think we have time to answer this last question and I'll read it to you. What do you see as the role of state mandated education service agencies and independent intermediaries in supporting consistent equitable implementation across LEAs, especially considering the different resources available locally for finding, paying for and working with different partners?

Carey Wright:

Can you repeat that question that I kind of lost it at the beginning? Go ahead.

Victoria Schaefer:

Yeah, so essentially I think what they're saying is what's the role of, you might find a RISA or an independent intermediary like a local TA provider or a foundation that's playing a key role. Some states are co-ops, so depending on the state, they're called different things. What's the role of that service agency related to education in bringing about what they've called consistent equitable implementation?

Carey Wright:

They can be some of your best partners. I mean, the RISA in Mississippi, we partner with them all the time to deliver on professional learning or to meet with teachers and leaders in various ways, because we all needed to be in sync. The last thing I wanted was, depending on what RISA you went to, you might be getting a different message. And so we wanted to make sure that all of our RISA partners were aligned with us as well. I think they play a key role if they're partners, if they're true partners, I think they play a real key role. But it's our job as state agencies to ensure that they understand the vision and mission of what we're trying to get accomplished and the research strategies that we're trying to employ as well. And not just assume that they know what that is. Because I think everybody, as I said before, everybody needs to be rolling in the same direction in order to get things accomplished.

Jason Glass:

I absolutely agree with that. And Carey's been masterful at pulling those organizations, getting them to row in the same direction everywhere she's been. That's a true talent that she has. But I would say what she's described is also more rare. What's more common is that they're not rolling together. In fact, they're trying to undermine each other. Sometimes the things that the state agency is doing, you have intermediaries that are trying to do something opposite or to deconstruct with the state agency or vice versa, or as I mentioned, the orbit of all these nonprofits and foundations and groups. They can also be working in adversarial relationships with each other too. And that unfortunately I think is a common occurrence in states where what you can get to and what Carey's talking about. When you can get all of that pulling in the same direction and something that everybody's excited about, then you really have something powerful. You got all of the resources in the system moving in the same direction. That's what you want to work toward.

Victoria Schaefer:

On that note, thank you. Thank you to everyone who raised a question. Thank you to our audience who joined us today. A special appreciation to Carey and Jason also want to give a shout-out to The LEARN

Network team who made this possible and facilitated behind the scenes. And then quickly, I want to make sure that all of you here, there are three more conversations that are going to take place this summer. There's a link in the chat now. Please register even if you can't make it live. You can tune into the recording. And then one final point, we at The LEARN Network will be taking everything that we learn and developing a product. So watch for that to be released this fall. We'll share or follow the people who registered for our summer conversation series. Have a wonderful rest of your day.

Carey Wright:

Bye.