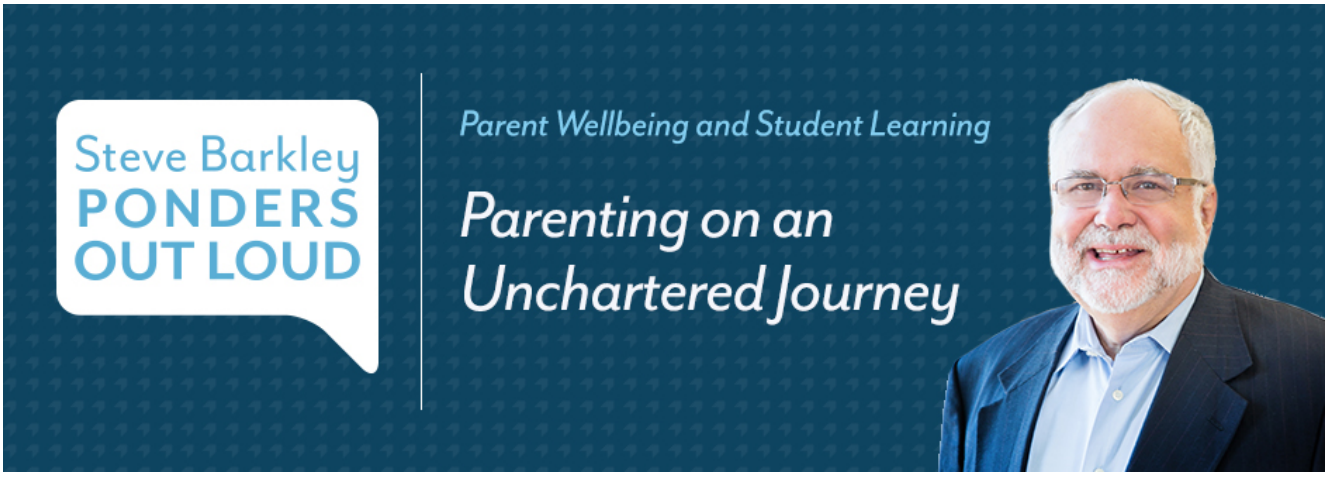
Podcast for Parents: Parenting on an Uncharted Journey



Jeff Kubiak, the author of, "*One Drop of Kindness*" and "*It's Me*" explores the impact of the quarantine on children and young people and how we as parents and grandparents can best support them. A discussion around building characteristics of kindness and compassion is included.

Find Jeff's books and resources here.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPTSteve [Intro]: 00:01 Hello and welcome to the Parent Wellbeing and Student Learning During School Closures Edition of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. With the extended closing of schools, we as parents have entered into a new territory regarding what we have known as "school learning." With this and future podcasts, I'll look to share my experiences as a teacher, educator, parent, grandparent, and continuous learner.
Steve: 00:33 Parenting on an uncharted journey. Today, we're joined on the podcast by Jeff Kubiak, a current school administrator, parent, and the author of children's books that

share stories of failures, success, resilience, and empowerment. Jeff, can you share a little bit about your background and the personal wishes or goals that you have for your engagement in the writing work that you're doing?

Jeff: 01:04 Definitely. First of all, I want to say thank you for allowing me the opportunity to hang out and chat with you. So, you know, as a current educator, a former teacher, a coach, a parent, a brother, a son, you know, I've experienced a lot of different things that people have, but perhaps don't share. And so, you know, I struggled with school as a kid. I was a bully. I was bullied. I was a successful athlete. I've had a lot of successes, a lot of failures, and I always believe that we can do better to help others do better. And, you know, kindness is such a kind of an easy word to use, but it's not as easy to find and we all do have kindness in our hearts. Some people have to dig a little bit deeper.

Jeff: 01:54 And so, I love blogging and I love sharing words and trying to help others become better. And so I decided to try to write a book and, you know, talk about failure – I sent out the manuscript to tons of different people.
Steve: 02:09 [laughter]

Jeff: 02:09 – lots of rejections. And then I was blessed to connect with Sarah – Dr. Sarah Thomas of edumatch and we took a chance with each
other. She really hadn't done any children's books and this was my first book. And so, you know, you go through all these iterations and months and months, and boom, you have a book. And "The Power of Kindness" was quickly embraced by a lot of people. And my second book, "It's Me" are true vignettes. There's 21 little vignettes, poems, stories written by real students, people, educators, that have been prejudiced, labeled biased, and you know, in groups that have been oppressed and trying to bring voice and empowerment and really see each other through the lens and get rid of our colorblindness. And so, my main reason for writing is try to

make the world a better place. You know, I make about 2 cents a book and that's not the reason I do it. I want to make life better so…

Steve: 03:12 So Jeff, as a school administrator and as a parent with your own kids in school, I'm wondering how you're seeing the whole pandemic quarantine impacting children and young people. And I guess along with that, how should we as parents and grandparents be consciously doing the best weekend to support our young people?

Jeff: 03:45 Yeah. You know, it's not been easy and it's been terribly difficult for many. And, you know, I see it through a lot of different lenses. I see it as a parent with both my children, a sixth and a 10th grader getting by, but struggling. I see it as an educator on campus every day with, you know, we have two small cohorts that actually come on campus, but the work that these teachers are doing just to – they work so hard. They're doing so much to navigate. The view of those students. You know, when a student puts their camera on and allows teachers and other students to view and be inside their house, it's not easy. What about the student that has 10 people living in their one-bedroom apartment with trauma going on, right?

Jeff: 04:36 And so, we have to be able to be really super graceful and compassionate. As a parent, am I going to yell at the teacher because they make a mistake or do this or that? Well, that might be a good venue to have a one-on-one conversation. Not in the middle of class. I need to help give my students grace. Look at our teen suicide rate right now is going through the roof. We have kids that can't connect with their friends, they can't hang out, they can't normalize, and we have to find ways to help them do that. Exercise, vitamin D, you know, humor. Like, we got to find different ways for them to kind of reach out. And then parents, let's educate yourself, talk to other people, reach out. And, you know, let's have some grace. Like, don't yell at people like, "hey,

I think schools should be reopened for students." And remember that there are teachers that are afraid, there are students that are afraid there are parents – there's no one way to do it, right? So the vaccine is going to help, you know, herd immunity through vaccination and other ways they're going to help, but we have to be graceful. We have to see our way through it because there's no one's done this and there's not one right way. And so…

Steve: 05:52 I'm hearing empathy all around as I listened to you. And I'm wondering about the critical role of the parent modeling that empathy that the young folks see their parent there with that as a model.

Jeff: 06:11 Yeah. You know, we model behaviors that are good and bad and desired and undesirable and we have to be willing to own our mistakes and say, "Gosh, darn it. You know, I shouldn't have yelled. I shouldn't have called out the teacher. I shouldn't have posted that blog or Facebook post." And so, you got to have that critical conversation with your children because you know what? It's okay to be afraid. It's okay to make mistakes. And it's okay to try new things, but you know what? We have to own our mistakes and say, "wow, I reflect on that. I'm going to grow and learn and hopefully not repeat it."

Steve: 06:49 Yeah. On your website, I noticed that you had a COVID kindness checklist and I thought that might be a neat piece to share with our listeners.

Jeff: 07:00 Yeah. So, you know, at jeffkubiak.com, there are lots of free resources and downloadables. You know, my wife is amazing. She helps with the website and does a lot of these things and just – they're kind of, you know, fun, different ways to kind of get out there and do intentional, random acts of kindness or intentional acts of kindness in our COVID world. And while things are hopefully heading to improved and you know, betterment, we still have to kind of be aware of our

challenges and so different ways to explore spreading those ripples of kindness.

Steve: 07:41 I, as a grandparent, was lucky enough to have my daughter share with me early in the pandemic happening, my grandkids went out on a walk and found rocks and painted kindness messages on them and had them delivered to the hospital workers near where they live and that it was great therapy for their grandfather. Maybe as much as it was as the kindness act to the people at the hospital.

Jeff: 08:18 Totally. That's the neat thing too – like, I had three fifth graders at my old school start a kindness club, right? And so, one of the things was, you know, they hid kindness rocks throughout the school and, you know, that's something you see within the community and schools, and it's just another opportunity to go like, "wow." You know, make a difference, make someone smile.

Steve: 08:37 Yeah. So as parents, we're certainly anxious to build kindness and compassion as characteristics in our children and I'm wondering if you have a few words of wisdom here for us.

Jeff: 08:53 I think a big part of that is facing our own fears, our own prejudices, our own biases, and failures, right? And so, if we give ourselves grace and are compassionate with our perhaps inability to be perfect and to not navigate in a way that we feel is the right way, it's okay. And so our kids, by having those conversations, they have to see that imperfection is perfect and we need to be okay with it and using our heart and taking time out and, you know, give yourself five minutes and turn the lights off and just really try to connect with yourself. But open and honest and being real with each other and especially the kids nowadays, you know, they learn in a different way than we did and that's okay. But having them explain and help understand while they feel, this is a great way for them to thrive or

learn is important too. So we share our fortunes and misfortunes and we have to be able to learn with them too. So that's the neat thing about being a parent.

Steve: 10:06 My wife is an elementary guidance counselor.

Jeff: 10:09 God bless her.

Steve: 10:10 And when she comes home and talks to me about the conversations that she's having with very young people, I mean, preschool and
lower elementary grades, I'm actually blown away by the depth of the kids understanding and conversation about what's going on in the world around them. Much deeper than I think I was as a kid. And just sensing – really important for the parents to be able to listen. And I guess question is the word that comes along with it. If you listen long enough, you'll get to that spot or ask the questions that get you there. But I'm just really amazed with the things that that these young people share with my wife.

Jeff: 11:10 Yeah. There's no doubt. You know, we have to be able to listen to our children and our students and kids are so much smarter than they're given credit for and let them drive the conversations. Let them, you know, navigate some of their own learning and different things like that. But they're amazing, you know, they really are.

Steve: 11:32 So Jeff, want to tell folks a little bit about the things that are on your website and how they can find you there and give them the names of your books again, so they can go looking for them?

Jeff: 11:41 Yeah. So my first book, "One Drop of Kindness," the second book, "It's Me" – those and other resources can be found at jeffkubiak.com. The books are available also at Amazon, Barnes and Nobles, and GoodReads. But you know, the website has different resources for kind of the themes of the books, you know, random acts of kindness and kindness

activities, and inclusion, equity, compassion, and focus. And, you know, I'd love to hear from you, I'm going to be putting up a forum soon so that people can write their own "it's me" vignettes and share them and send them in. And so connect with me. Let me know, can I help your school? Can I help your book group? I'm working with a group of 50 women tonight through their sorority and they're doing a book group and I'm going to kind of help them out. And so it's just fun. It's fun to share and I love to help out. Thanks for the time Steve, this has been a great chat.

Steve: 12:44 Well, thank you for everything that you shared here, and know that I'd like to stay in touch with you. So I'll be coming back to your site from time to time and maybe we can revisit and do another podcast on the road.

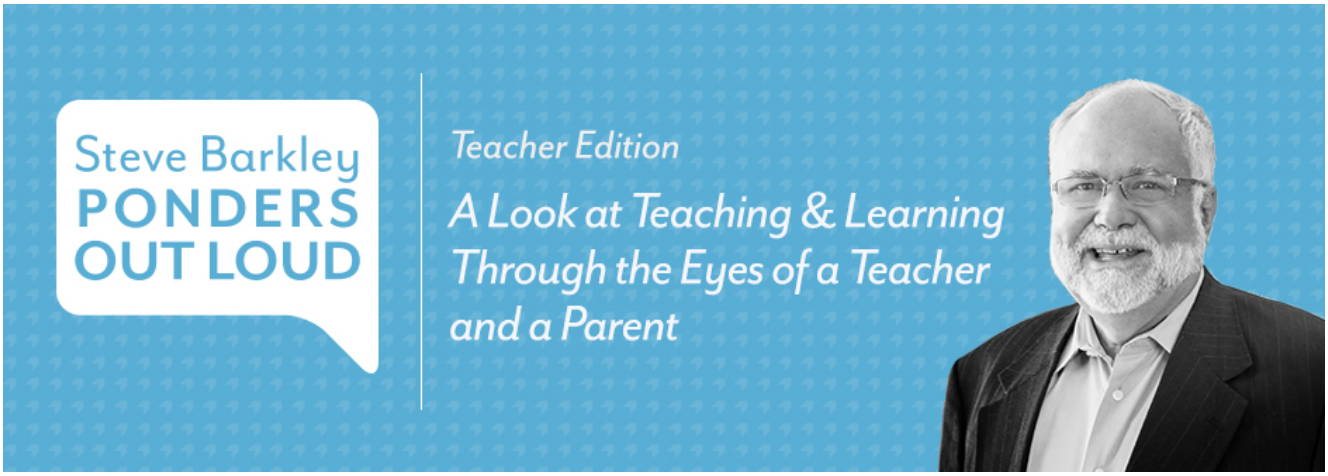
Jeff: 13:01 That'd be blessed, my friend. Thank you so much and God bless you and your wife and have a great day.

Steve: 13:07 You too. Take care.

Steve [Outro]: 13:11 Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley, ponders out loud on iTunes and Podbean. And please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter @stevebarkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.

Podcast for Teachers: A Look at Teaching & Learning

Through the Eyes of a Teacher and a Parent



Listen in as a teacher and parent share with Steve their experiences with hybrid and virtual learning through both lenses. Hear the importance of their communication to support each other in maximizing learning opportunities.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Steve [Intro]: 00:00 Hello and welcome to the teacher edition of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. For over three decades, I've had the opportunity to learn with teachers in and out of their classroom settings. I have a great respect for the complexity of teaching and I know that all great teachers are continuous learners. I invite you to join me as I explore my thoughts and insights on a variety of topics, connected to teaching and learning. Thanks for listening in.

Steve: 00:33 A look at teaching and learning through the eyes of a teacher and a parent. For today's podcast, I'm joined by my colleague at PLS 3rd Learning, Andrea Brown. Andrea is a past special education teacher and at PLS 3rd Learning, now

she’s a program leader and learning designer. And joining us is Andrea’s kindergarten daughter’s teacher, Joanne Loewerr. Joanne is a teacher in upstate New York. Welcome Andrea and Joanne. Joanne, I wondered if you’d start us off by telling us a little bit about your pre-COVID teaching background and experience?

Joanne: 01:21 Certainly. I have taught here at this elementary school for 28 years. 10 of those have been in kindergarten and 18 of those were in third grade. I hold degrees in elementary education, special education and a master’s in library science.

Steve: 01:38 Great, great. I did do five years in first grade so I’ll have a little piece of understanding there, although, that was at a time when probably first grade was more like what preschool is is today going back in my history. And so, know that you’re here because Andrea has bragged on you as to what she’s seen you do working virtually with her daughter. And so, I’m wondering if you can tell us a little bit about the the thinking and planning that goes on in your mind as you’re preparing to teach in this virtual world.

Joanne: 02:27 Yes. In the spring it was different because it came on so fast and we had very little prep time and a lot less guidance as to how we were approaching that. So I’ll speak to my time with Andrea’s daughter now, which it started in September, and we had a lot more time to prepare and think about how we would handle these four and five-year-olds starting instruction if it went virtual and what it looked like actually in the classroom as well. So it was a lot of adapting. Adapting our physical enviroment, removing a lot from a kindergarten classroom that it breaks your heart to take away. You know, play corners and dress up clothes and sand tables. And then, you know, installing plexiglass and desks six feet apart and trying to make that engaging and fun so that first learning experience for little ones was exciting. And I think that we succeeded in that being that

this was their first elementary experience and I don't think they really knew any better.

Andrea: 03:30 My daughter loved her truck or car.

Joanne: 03:30 Yes. One day my aid was telling a student while I went to kindergarten and I was in this classroom and he looked at her and he said, "really, what color was your car?" And then I knew we had done it right because they thought that was the norm. And we had taken the plexiglass and created it into a car front with the windshield being their view out to the front of the room.

Steve: 03:52 Oh, very cool.

Joanne: 03:52 Yeah, yellow tape on the floor so they follow the lines to follow the traffic and get through the classroom safely. So, you know,
that in and of itself was a whole new experience for me. Once we thought about what does that look like if we go virtual, our district, and I know every district was different, but ours was looking at two half day cohorts and those would be about two hours and 45 minutes.

Joanne: 04:16 And if we went remote, they would remain two hours and forty-five minutes. And that two hours and forty-five minutes was really dictated by our district. How much wass ELA, math, science, and social studies and special areas and breaks in between if we could fit them in. So we were really using that as a guideline but you're looking at a five-year-old in front of a screen for two hours and forty-five minutes and trying to maintain their interest to build an activity for them while not losing them. And their focus when they're at home where all their toys and their dogs and their grandmas and grandpas are, that was a challenge. So that became actually, a whole lesson and reprogramming ourselves to organize our instructional materials because we said, okay, if we're going to do two hours and forty-five minutes of

instruction, we need kindergarteners to have glue sticks and scissors and crafts and, you know, hands-on activities to build all that fine motor and keep them interested.

Joanne: 05:21 So actually I have a file system in my classroom. I went out and purchased tubs and I have four of them. And each of them has a file folder with the child's name and crafts were pre-prepped and put into plastic baggies and sorted by name. And we did the same with science and social studies and math and word study and reading and writing. And so that became, pull everything out, put it into a folder that has that child's name so we now can get that to them when we went to remote instruction. But they came home that last day with two big envelopes full of a lot of things.

Andrea: 06:01 Sure did.

Steve: 06:01 Yeah. A lot of things for parents and students to manage, and it was a little bit overwhelming. So that was our start to that. And then, you know, how we manage and the children manage all those materials at home became a whole new problem.

Joanne: 06:15 Now I know I'm going to teach tomorrow for two hours and 45 minutes. How do I let the parents know what they need and how to find it? So that's where programs like Seesaw and e-mails came into play. And I would set all the materials out once I planned it out on a table, snap a picture, send it out through Seesaw with a detailed list of what they would need so that they could prep the night before because essentially they were doing my teacher prep at home pulling everything out and having it ready. And also having that workspace with the colored pencils and crayons and the scissors and the glue sticks. It was a lot to balance both here at school and for families at home.

Steve: 06:59 I just finished doing some work with pre-school and kindergarten teachers in a large district and they have a

rather large school
that’s just preschool and kindergarten. They’ve been virtual since March and they haven’t been back. And they don’t think likely they’re going to be back very soon. And one of the conversations we were having was that the teachers had to build parent education into their preparation. And I’m wondering if you could respond to that a little bit?

Joanne: 07:37 Absolutely. For many parents, it’s the organization part and having those materials prepped and ready but it’s also in the moment. Parents being able to jump in and assist with what they need or help them locate items. But I think probably the hardest one has been maintaining their focus and attention and behavior. In the spring I had some children who were really struggling making the switch into remote learning. Behaviors were way off, they weren’t complying with parents at home. So it became creating behavior programs with parents. And that meant sticker charts that were dropped off at the house or whatever happened to be that helped. It meant driving out and leaving prizes in the front yard as they earned them. Whatever would work to help these parents find a comfort level in what they were doing to help maintain the behavior. Because I think that was probably one of the most difficult things was the children who could not maintain the focus and were really starting to emotionally act out.

Steve: 08:47 Andrea, I’m wondering if you’d want to jump in and respond to some of the things that Joanne has pointed out in her planning and her delivery as you saw through the parents’ eyes.

Andrea: 08:59 Absolutely. One of the things that’s been so, so beneficial and helpful has been those messages every night that tell me what to get out for the next day. I’m not running around in the morning, or if I am, it’s my own fault because I didn’t do it last night. And Joanne has sent us a photo every day so when the things have names that don’t make sense to me

because I’m not a kindergarten teacher, it’s okay because there’s also a photo so I can match.

Steve: 09:26 [laughter] I was wondering about parent education. I hadn’t thought of that being part of it but it totally makes sense to me now.

Andrea: 09:32 Right. So when I’m looking for the sight word page, it’s in the sight word folder and whether it’s something that makes sense to me or not, I can always find it because there’s a photo that comes with it. And even the crafts are in that photo so I can kind of match up what the bag looks like. This morning, I know I was going, “everything is brown. I don’t know. I’m pulling out bag after bag.”

Joanne: 09:57 Sorry. [laughter]

Steve: 09:57 That’s okay, it was gingerbread day.

All: 10:00 [laughter]

Andrea: 10:00 And just knowing that that’s there and that piece of – that I can hold on to it, that’s been so wonderful. And the support of being able to send a message and say, you know, I’m sorry, I’m in a meeting all day today. I can’t help it, whatever she does, it’s it’s on her. And then knowing that Joanne is backing that up. I know that I was presenting one day and I heard later that she was saying, you know, I know mommy’s busy. Can you put the hamster back?

All: 10:29 [laughter].

Joanne: 10:32 True story. Yeah. That communication between parents really was a big part of the success. And as a teacher on this end, being able to know that parents who didn’t sign up for this, because there was a big difference in our district of parents who signed up for remote, knew it fit into their world and knew that they could commit to it. And the parents who were thrown into it and trying to manage jobs and

multiple children and everything else going on. So it's been key to communicate with each other.

Andrea: 11:07 Absolutely.

Steve: 11:07 Joanne, another piece ghat's emerged is the discussion of the independent learning skills that kids need to develop to be to be successful in the structure. And with some of the folks, we've talked about that being a piece of the education to the parents. So part of it is having the parent know what to do and I guess at the same time, what not to do. You know, when does the parent help actually interfere with having the child engaged in the behaviors that you're looking to have developed?

Joanne: 11:49 Interesting questions, lots of information there. At the beginning, this school year, we knew that we were going to need to provide programming that parents could utilize friendly and that students could too. So having the children here was really helpful to get them used to using Seesaw programs. These are kindergarteners who really needed to learn how to push a lot of buttons and find apps and then figure out how to send the picture to their teacher. And then they had to teach their parents as well. So creating little cheat sheets for parents was one way that we were able to get them into those apps. You know, Andrea talks about pictures, I mean, I remember us taking a picture of every app and printing it out and putting it onto documents so they could see what the app looked like and then our explanation words made a little bit more sense.

Joanne: 12:37 So that was really, really helpful. One of the funny things, and we were just – I was just talking with my aide about this today because hopefully with luck, the children will be back in January. And it's very interesting to see how different I'm going to use writing as an example, their independence and writing is right now because they're home and there's someone supporting them. And often the

parents are like, “no, no, you spelled that word wrong.” And the teacher in me wants to go, “no, no, no about them spell it wrong. It’s okay.” You know, so I find myself just hearing what’s happening at home and then just building it into my instruction. “Oh, you know what, your words don’t have to be all spelled exactly right.” Listen for the sounds that you hear and let’s write what we hear.” So that information built into my instruction, I quickly learned that parents were mimicking what I was doing and saying a lot at home. So it made me more aware of what I was saying and how I was presenting it so that it was being carried out at home in a way that wasn’t building more frustration for parents or students. Building that in and saying, “you don’t need to do this all the time at home. It’s just a skill we’re learning to use today,” helped parents to understand they didn’t have to push that.

Andrea: 13:52 With a teaching background, sometimes I feel like I know what they’re supposed to be able to do in kindergarten, but sometimes I’m
wrong and it’s nice to be reminded. Like, I know she doesn’t have to spell her words all right. But when she was writing Christmas cards and notes for the student teacher, it was really hard to just like, let it go and let her spell Mary with all of the E’s.

Joanne: 14:17 And I did – that one I did ask, I specifically in an email said to parents, please let the children write it as they would normally. Let it be genuine and let it be who they are in this moment because I knew my student teacher would embrace that and love that and she did.

Steve: 14:35 It’s interesting that you used the word mimicking because that early childhood group that I was just working with, talked about giving kids feedback so that the parents would begin to hear the teacher gave the feedback and begin to copy that feedback. So I see that as a
powerful modeling strategy.

Joanne: 15:01 Yeah. It’s interesting from our perspective because you’re looking at a screen of eight little faces and that’s who you are presenting to. But you have to remember that there’s a whole stage at every house. And in that stage on the sidelines, are grandparents and parents and brothers and sisters, and it is – when you think of that whole big world that the remote teaching opened up, it’s a little nerve wracking to think that everyone is listening to you and kindergarten and preschool, I mean, you’re standing up and you’re singing songs and you’re doing silly dances and you’re wearing ridiculous clothes and you’re hoping nobody’s judging you.

All : 15:40 [laughter].

Steve: 15:43 Increased vulnerability in the openness of your classroom.

Joanne: 15:50 Yep.

Steve: 15:50 Joanne, I know that one of the difficulties during this virtual time is teachers figuring out assessing where students are at and I guess, to guide where the teacher should go next. Got some responses to how you’re coping and dealing with that?

Joanne: 16:09 Yes. Well, luckily, before we went remote this time we have quite a good schedule for assessing kindergarteners and it happens multiple times throughout the year. And we were fortunate that we were coming up on our report cards and looking at possibly going remote. So we worked like little busy bees to get all of that in because in kindergarten it’s very, very much a one-on-one assessment in many, many ways. You know, you’re flashing their letters and their sounds and their sight words and that’s difficult to do over a computer because you can hear someone whispering in the corner.

All: 16:48 [laughter]

Joanne: 16:51 And you're like, "no!" So here at school, we got lucky enough to at least get that assessment in the fall prior to going remote. And we're hoping we come back come January and are able to do our next assessment rotation here at school, because that is a bit of a challenge to try to do your ELA assessment, your math assessment based on that. It does help to have programs like Seesaw, where the children are sending me pictures of their math each day. And sometimes you cringe and you go, "oh, why'd you do that in crayon or marker…

Andrea: 17:26 I did, I did. [Laughter].

Joanne: 17:26 But then you're like, let it go, let that go and just, you know, take a look at where that child is and note to yourself, I'm seeing the reversals again in the numbers or I can tell they're not forming their M's correctly.

Joanne: 17:43 And for me, it became knowing that I'm hopefully coming back in person. Those are the little that I need for where we pick up when we come back. If we stay remote, that creates a whole new world for me of not necessarily breakout rooms, but maybe individual meetings with students so I'm one-on-one with them and a really deep understanding with parents, let them get the wrong answer and let me get an accurate insight as to where they are right now, because I do worry about how much our lower children are losing not getting intervention here in class that they were getting every day and not having the guidance that the classroom and I were able to provide at home.

Andrea: 18:29 Yeah, absolutely. I think it's so hard to watch them get things wrong. Like, I know she needs to because she's only five. She doesn't know what she's doing yet, but it's hard to remember that it's okay and you need to know what she doesn't know or you can't teach her effectively.

Steve: 18:47 Exactly.

Joanne: 18:47 Very well put.

Steve: 18:50 As I move to to close out the podcast here, I kind of wanted to look at giving you both an opportunity to explore something. So,
Andrea, I'm wondering if you have a question you'd like to ask Joanne, and then Joanne, I'm going to give you a chance if there's a question you'd like to ask Andrea as we move to wrap up. So Andrea, you're up first. You got a question you'd like to put to Joanne?

Andrea: 19:14 I guess I'm just interested in how different what the instruction online is from what it would have looked like in the classroom. So they are going for the whole two hours and 45 minutes and they just – she holds up her hand for a glue stick or a pair of scissors and they're moving. And is that what it looks like for you in the classroom? This year, I know this year is different, but in general, how different is it?

Joanne: 19:40 It is a pretty fast pace. It's a surprisingly quick pace. And being that we went to a half day, we found that we are engaging them in every second we have. We have no minutes to spare. And as a kindergarten teacher, that's a bit painful too, because that means there isn't time to play and to explore and so we've tried to build that into our instruction. The instruction definitely looks different online. I think it's easier for me to do math online. I think giving them tools and they can manipulate and they can draw is a little bit easier, math-wise. I worry about the reading and writing more. I feel like that instruction looks very different here in the classroom than it does when they don't have a physical book in their hand and they're not working with me conferencing as they're writing and really at this critical stage where they're taking those letters and sounds and beginning to independently write them and explore them. So that I think has been one area that I'm curious to see how we are able to pick up in January.

Andrea: 20:43 Yeah. I think that's – writing is the thing I

think hardest for Amelia. You know, she's able to – she knows so many words that she gets really upset when she thinks the words are wrong and she really just wants me to spell it for her.

Joanne: 21:00 Yeah. And Amelia is a very high functioning child when it comes to reading and writing.

Andrea: 21:04 Right, and I know that, it's just so frustrating for her and I don't have the time to sit with her and help her sound those words out while I'm trying to work and manage my son and do everything else all at the same time. So I think that's one of the things that I've been sorry about that it's just hard for you to do it and it's hard for her to do it online.

Joanne: 21:24 Yeah. It's a very – it's not so concrete. Math is much more concrete at kindergarten level. Those letters and sounds and blends, stretching words and gripping your pencil right, those are the things that put us into panic mode. How are we going to proper pencil grip? How am I going to know if they're holding the scissors right? What do I do when they start crying because they can't get the glue to come out? I just want to crawl through the wires and help.

Steve: 21:52 As I'm listening to that, I'm thinking about the – I describe the need to get the struggle at the Goldie Locks spot. So as a teacher in the classroom, you know, you're watching the struggle and you're knowing when to move in and help and you're knowing when to hold back and that's almost impossible for you to do over the the internet trying to watch the eight kids and then difficult for a parent to do because they're not sure what that spot is.

Joanne: 22:28 That's exactly right. And then there are times when, you know you need to help them and you can't. You can't get there and help them because they need you physically within their space to do that.

Andrea: 22:41 I will say though, that I think you do a really great job of catching them when they're about to need help and saying like, "hey, you know, it looks like you're using the wrong crayon" or "you don't seem to have your scissors and I think you might need them." And, "do you know where those are?" And, "is there an adult who can help you find them?"

Steve: 22:58 We got another definition of a teacher with eyes in the back of her head, huh?

Andrea: 23:01 Exactly.

All : 23:01 [laughter].

Joanne: 23:03 And that probably, I will say 100%, my biggest frustration has been technical glitches. There are days when I am staring at my monitor and I have eight frozen faces or eight black screens. If I did not have my classroom aid at home being my extra set of eyes, I would have been sunk. And I appreciate that my administration was smart enough to know we've never had an aide with us all day in kindergarten, but she was smart enough to know that if we go remote, you're going to need this support. And I cannot thank her enough for that safety net because I'm sure has heard me a million times, "Mrs. Kaufman, I can't really see anybody right now. Can you let me know if everybody's got their glue stick?" Imagine just teaching into a black abyss and you don't know who's watching and you can't see them. It's frustrating.

Andrea: 24:02 Right.

Steve: 24:02 Joanne, did you have a question to give to Andrea?

Joanne: 24:06 Andrea, I have been so curious – it's interesting to hear your input as a parent and you always wonder, am I doing enough, have I given enough, was there a way to have made this easier? Is there anything, I mean, insight that you could give us that you are going along this

process would have said, “oh, I wish they would have just done this?” Anything that we could use.

Andrea: 24:29 You know, the things that we need at home are not things that you could have given us. Like, I need a better workspace for her. I need, you know, more glue sticks because we have glued all of the things and I keep forgetting to buy more. But your organization has been so fantastic, like with everything labeled in the envelopes and in the right folder, it’s been so easy to find things and that I’ve really, really appreciated. I’m not sorting through a stack of unlabeled papers going, “which one is that? The three snowmen – is that a story, is that a worksheet? I don’t know.” So I think that you’ve really done the best you could have in this situation.

Joanne: 25:13 That’s really great news to hear because I have to say that my team, my grade level team here at our school is fabulous. And putting that brain power together and figuring out the best way to meet student needs, parent needs, teacher needs, administrative needs, assessment needs, it’s huge snowball to try to put together. So I appreciate that input.

Andrea: 25:39 You know, the day that we heard we might soon be going remote, that every kid came home with stuff in their backpack, hers was so organized and so well labeled. Like, I knew exactly what I needed to send back and forth until we went remote and I knew exactly what I could keep at home. And it was just so clear and that wasn’t necessarily as clear with my son so I was just so thrilled to be able to say, “oh, this goes on the shelf. We’ll clear off the shelf. This will be your learning shelf. We’ll keep this here. This goes back and forth.” And then when we came home, it was obvious what I needed to pull out for her.

Joanne: 26:18 And that is a good point. We had to really, as teachers had to say, “okay, they have to take it home, but you know what, if there’s school tomorrow here, they need it all.” So what do we do? So these poor little babies had big

envelopes labeled, November, December, sight words, reading, writing, and it had to sit next to their desk every morning when they brought it back from school and we would literally walk around and pull out everything we needed for the day anticipation that tomorrow we would be remote.

Andrea: 26:45 Right. And I think that period of confusion and when we weren't sure what was happening was hard for them but she knew she had everything and she felt pretty comfortable about that.

Joanne: 26:59 Excellent.

Steve: 27:01 Well, thank you to both of you for sharing your insights and your stories with me here. I ran through some of my old memories back in my first grade classroom as I had a chance to listen. I'm just gonna say to listeners, if you have a question that you'd like to get to Joanne or to Andrea, just drop a note to me at barkleypd.com and I'll get it off to them and get a response back to you. Thanks for listening folks.

Steve [Outro]: 27:36 Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud on iTunes and Podbean and please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on twitter @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.

Podcast for Parents: Parents & Homework

Dr. Cathy Vatterott, The Homework Lady, tells how she started a 20 year career researching the impacts of homework when her own child learned in a different way from what assignments his teacher provided. She shares myths about homework and gives guidelines for parents including suggestions regarding communicating with teachers about your child's homework impacts.

Visit Cathy's website here.

Subscribe to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast on iTunes or visit BarkleyPD.com to find new episodes!

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Steve [Intro]: 00:00 Hello and welcome to the Parent Wellbeing and Student Learning During School Closures Edition of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. With the extended closing of schools, we as parents have entered into a new territory regarding what we have known as "school learning." With this and future podcasts, I'll look to share my experiences as a teacher, educator, parent, grandparent, and continuous learner.

Steve: 00:33 Parents and homework. Today, I'm glad to have Dr. Cathy Vatterrott join us. Dr. Vatterrott is a author of books on homework. She's been studying the research on homework for over 20 years, and she has a a website called "The Homework Lady," that you might want to check out after you've heard

some of Cathy's comments. Cathy, you want to tell us how you got started in studying and researching homework?

Cathy: 01:08 Well, I was the frustrated parent of a fifth grade boy with learning disabilities and I started looking at some of the tasks coming home and I said, oh my goodness, what is the value of what I'm doing? And so I started doing the research about homework and, you know, I realized that teachers had never been trained in homework and no wonder I was getting some of the tasks I was getting. And as a former principal and a professor, I saw this as kind of a mission. I really didn't think at that time that I was going to be doing it for 20 years, but it seems to be a perennial issue that just won't die.

Steve: 01:53 Cathy, I know you've written about myths about homework, and I'm wondering what myths you think have been out there that parents need to know about.

Cathy: 02:06 Well, I think the first myth that we have is that is that homework teaches responsibility and that, one author said, oh, homework is the job of childhood and I'm like, do kids really need a job? I think they have a job just being a kid. So I think there's a myth there. I think that kids learn responsibility in many other ways. But I think the one that probably gets us in the most trouble is that rigor equals load. In other words, if a parent says to me, "oh, my kid goes to a really good school, they get a lot of homework." I'm like, well, that could be really good or it could just be a lot of busy work. And so I think those are the two biggest ones that we look into and maybe a third myth would be that it's the parent's job to – if the kid doesn't do their homework, you're a bad parent. I think that's another myth it's out there that we need to squelch for sure.

Steve: 03:11 I actually did a earlier podcast just on the term work related to learning and I liked the writing that Alfie Kohn did on this, where he said, when we brought that word

work into into school, we really messed up. So homework seat work, classwork…

Cathy: 03:38 Exactly. Yeah. Is it work or is it learning?

Steve: 03:41 Yeah, yeah. You know, mom and dad go to work so they can so that they can raise the money they need to pay tuition because they want to go to community college and learn. It's not something something new and we carry that we carry that word that word work way too far and probably a lot of myths just come off of that word.

Cathy: 04:07 Oh yeah, definitely.

Steve: 04:09 Cathy, how do you see the role that parents have had to play with the with the quarantine and students moving their learning activities that they did in school into the house and onto an online system?

Cathy: 04:28 I think the role of parents in remote learning should be exactly what their role would be if students were in school and doing homework. And the hardest part for me to articulate to parents is that you really are not expected to be a teacher. And I think parents feel a lot of guilt when they are not able to get their kids working or to get their kids learning online. So I think that is, that is the first part is to, let's all lose the guilt. And then secondly, I think our job is to be, I think you used the term more of a learning coach, or to be that mentor and not to be hovering over kids with the task, but to be more of a facilitator on the side.

Steve: 05:26 Cathy, I'm wondering how you would describe the communication that might be most appropriate between parents and teachers around the topic of homework.

Cathy: 05:39 Well, I think first of all, the interesting thing is that we talk about that we want this to be a partnership between teachers and parents and in some schools, it doesn't

feel much like a partnership. It feels like the teachers are dictating what they want you to do as a parent. And I think in fact, parents need to take more control in that sense and treat that more like a partnership. And if it is a partnership, then that means I have the ability to communicate back to you what my concerns are about this assignment or about how much the student is working. And so I think what we want parents to do is to be less involved with the task and to be more involved in communicating with the teacher. So when I was doing this as a parent, as a frustrated parent, I got to the point where I did a lot of back in the day, note writing, but now it could be a voicemail or an email message to let the teacher know that this is how much time we spent on this and this is what my student is confused about, this particular thing – would you please go over that again, and really do that communication instead of feeling like, this is my job. The teacher gave me the homework and it's my job to make sure that it gets done.

Steve: 07:11 Gotcha. So it really is – the parent has information that could be valuable to the teacher. And I need a way to communicate that information without it raising a defense on the teacher's part.

Cathy: 07:29 And that's really what you just said is communicating information. And that's what we are – that's what we need to be doing as parents. And so yes, if your child is distressed – my joke was, you know, it's eight o'clock and one of us is crying and I'm not gonna say which one. So if you're having those teary battles, if you're having that kind of distress, if your child is saying that they hate school or they hate math or whatever, then that is information that needs to be communicated to the teacher. I don't think any teacher wants their students to be stressed out. I think a lot of times they just need more information from parents. And if I could say one more thing, teachers tend to underestimate the amount of time a homework task takes by about 50%, because

they’re really good at what they’re assigning. So I’m really good at math, so this won’t take me more than 15 minutes. And actually we’ve found that teachers way underestimate the amount of time that things take. So if the teacher thinks it takes a half an hour and your child is spending two hours on it, that’s not what they wanted, but you have to tell them that. They don’t know that.

Steve: 08:56 Very important. I can just see it where as a teacher, those times are striking me at worst as an average. You know, so I’m seeing what the average student might need to to do this. And I’m thinking as I hear you, that the reverse can also be just as important. And that is a student who can zip through an assignment with with with no effort is an equal, important piece of information for a teacher to have.

Cathy: 09:28 And do they need to do it? I think that piece of it too, that an assignment is given for a student who’s already mastered a concept and you, as the parent are saying, he knows this. So the line I heard a teacher say one time, “well, if they already know it, they can zip right through it. I’m like, “hey, they already know it, they don’t need to do it.” And so let’s spend their time working on something else.

Steve: 09:56 I love it. I love it. Well Cathy, as we close out here, I’m wondering if you’ve got one or two last words of wisdom, pieces of advice you might you might share with parents who are listening?

Cathy: 10:10 Yes, my newest area of research right now is about student stress. And I think parents now need to really prioritize the balance between academics, sleep, downtime, or play time and family time. And we want our kids to be able to lead a balanced life. And I guess the other thing I would say to parents is don’t be afraid to just say no, that you are within your rights to excuse your child from homework if it’s compromising their wellbeing or remote learning. And you’re saying that this kid cannot do five hours of remote learning.

This is all he can do. And then communicate that back. And I just will say in closing, my favorite story is, a teacher got a homework assignment back from the parent with a note on it that just said, “no, thank you.” Which I loved. I thought that was great. No, thank you. We’re not going to do this. And if you in fact make those decisions as parents, you need to understand that you are not alone, that parents all over the world are pushing back on things that they think are not in their child’s best interest in terms of balance.

Steve: 11:28 Well Cathy, thank you so much. You want to tell the parents a little bit about your your website?

Cathy: 11:33 Yes. The website is homeworklady.com and there are articles that I’ve written and there are links to, I think, maybe a couple of other podcasts that I’ve done and we’ll put a link to this one up there as well. And there’s also on there, surveys for students, parents, and teachers. If you wish to do some advocating, there are links to where you can buy my books and so there’s quite a bit of quite a bit of information on there.

Steve: 12:02 Well, Cathy, thank you so much. This is a important topic and I appreciate you joining us.

Cathy: 12:07 Great. Thank you. Enjoyable.

Steve [Outro]: 12:10 Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud on iTunes and Podbean. And please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on twitter @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.

Podcast: Parents as a Natural Resource for Schools

Alejandro Gibes de Gac, the Founder and CEO of Springboard Collaborative, shares that the power of parents to positively impact student learning success is often overlooked. He shares how goal setting and supporting parents in coaching learners can gain rather quick learning success and set the stage for longer term educational outcomes.

Visit Springboard Collaborative here.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Announcer : 00:00 Steve Barkley ponders out loud is brought to you by PLS Classes, online and on-site graduate classes and professional development opportunities delivered by master facilitators from eight accredited college partners. Visit plsclasses.com to find out more.

Steve [Intro]: 00:16 Hello and welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. For over three decades, I've had the opportunity to learn with educators at all levels, both nationally and internationally. I invite you to listen as I

explore my thoughts and learning on a variety of topics connected to teaching, learning, and leading with some of the best and brightest educators from around the globe. Thanks for listening in.

Steve: 00:44 Parents as a natural resource for our schools. Today on our podcast, I am joined by Alejandro Gibes de Gac. He is the founder and the chief executive officer of Springboard Collaborative. I discovered his work when I was writing about the role of parents as a learning coach and he was featured in a Forbes article on parent involvement in student learning. And when I had a chance to to read his thinking and to visit his website, I dropped him a message and asked him if he'd join us and and he agreed to so welcome Alejandro.

Alejandro: 01:33 Thanks for having me.

Steve: 01:35 I want to read a piece that I pulled from your bio to kind of set the stage here for us. You wrote, "when I was seven, my family immigrated to the US escaping political persecution and seeking educational opportunities. In my upbringing, I learned firsthand that parents' love for their children is the single greatest and most underutilized natural resource in education. After graduating from Harvard in 2009, I joined Teach for America and spent two years as a first grade teacher. There, I became frustrated that our school system treats low income parents as liabilities, rather than as assets." I'm wondering if you could start the conversation for us with that first line where you said that parents' love for their children as the single greatest and most underutilized natural resource in education.

Alejandro: 02:38 Yeah, I mean, that is springboards founding insight. With my own family and my parents, my dad had written a play in protest of the dictator, Pinochet in 1973. It didn't go over especially well. So he was a political prisoner, was lucky to make it out alive. Met my mom while living in exile,

she was the of 13 siblings, first one in her family to go to college. Eventually, they decided to immigrate to the US so that my sister and I ended up better educational opportunities and growing up in a home with little money but lots of love, that's where I learned that ultimately parents' love is the single greatest natural resource in education. And by that, I mean, whereas teachers change every year, parents accumulate a wealth of knowledge about their children as learners. Nobody loves them more deeply than than parents and they're the only folks that, that have access to kids in a one-on-one setting.

Alejandro: 03:35 There's no smaller classroom than a family's living room, and there's no better way to personalize instruction than through a parent. What can be more personal than a parent and child sharing a book at bedtime? In my family, the only reason that my sister and I were able to set expectations for ourselves and ultimately, she went to Columbia, I went to Harvard and we each started our organizations within the education sector. That was only because my parents knew how to set goals with us and how to help us to achieve those goals. And often in the face of roadblocks that were put in our path by the education system.

Alejandro: 04:33 I still remember meeting with my guidance counselor in high school. and my parents had fought hard to rent the tiniest small home in a wealthy community so that we could go to a high-performing public high school. Mostly white kids, mostly affluent community. And even in that context, my high school guidance counselor tried to talk me out of applying to Harvard saying why set myself up for disappointment. There's this great program for Latinos at a different university. It was really only because my parents believed in me and they had enough knowledge within the system to consistently set goals and help my sister and I moved from one goal to the next, to the next to the next. That's what put us on a path. And even though my parents may sound interesting and erudite the way that I tell their story, to my teachers

growing up, my teachers wrote them off as pushy immigrants with bad English that shouldn't necessarily play a role in the school system.

Steve: 05:37 So I guess that's where you lead into this this line that you wrote that said, "school systems frequently see the parents as liabilities rather than assets."

Alejandro: 05:54 Yeah. That was certainly my experience growing up. And again, I saw it as a teacher within a school in Philadelphia. I was teaching in a Puerto Rican neighborhood. I easily saw myself in my students. I saw my parents and their parents and pretty soon, I realized the connection was deeper than just our shared language and culture and experience of childhood poverty. It was a look. My students' parents looked at their kids the same way that my parents look at me. With the same eyes that my sister looks at my nieces. Eyes full of all the love, commitment, and potential that any parent sees in their kid and yet, my school and our system wasn't welcoming parents into the into the classroom or the instructional process and it felt like a big missed opportunity.

Alejandro: 06:45 Kids typically spend 75% of their waking hours outside of the classroom. In the COVID era, lots of kids spending all of their time outside of the classroom and if we don't have a mechanism to bring parents into the teaching process and capture instructional value from that time kids are spending at home, then how are we ever going to close the achievement gap, let alone the opportunity gap? In the classroom, I began to picture my students' time as an orange, and it dawned on me that I only have them for a wedge, for that 25% of time that they're in my classroom and try as I might to squeeze more and more juice from that wedge, I had to find a way to juice the rest of the orange and then we weren't going to move the needle and it's no coincidence that the last 25 years, however many billions of dollars we've spent on classroom intervention, we don't have a lot to show for it in

terms of closing the literacy gap.

Steve: 07:47 So what do you see schools needing to do to reach out and tap that parent as a resource?

Alejandro: 07:57 Yeah. I mean, the good news is parents and teachers have a common goal. They both want kids to be successful learners and they need each other in order to make that happen. Teachers are the experts on instruction. They know what their students need and in order to make progress, but the classroom setting makes it difficult to individually support every child. I remember having 31 first graders in my classroom and wishing that I could multiply myself and sit down for 45 minutes a day with every single one of them and I just imagined how much progress we could make. Parents as we talked about, are the experts on their own kids. They understand their children more deeply than anyone else and they're the only folks that have access to consistent one-on-one time. And in that way, you can build a sustainable partnership where teachers share instructional strategies and resources with families, families use those one-on-one with their kids for at least 15, 20, 25 minutes a day as learning coaches, to use your phrase, and they come back to teachers with observations and that way, they're supporting one another in reaching that goal that they have in common.

Steve: 09:14 When I first read the interview that Forbes had done with you, it caught my attention when you described that the work you were doing through Springboard, that you could have a parent who was not able to read the book that their child was reading, support and encourage and improve the child's reading. Can you fill us in a little bit more about that?

Alejandro: 09:51 Yeah. About a third of the families we work with can't, themselves, read the book their child is holding either because of a literacy or a language barrier. And our guidance to them is that their role is to be the coach not the

player. Their child is the one who's reading the book and they're asking questions before, during and after reading. Even if they can't answer the questions that they're asking, that the fact that they've engaged their child in thoughtful dialogue consistently around a book, it puts them in a position to still be an effective teacher and coach at home.

Steve: 10:30 So is that motivation? In other words, the child's motivated to keep reading to do the work of the process because of the parent's interest?

Alejandro: 10:43 I think it's related to motivation, but I think the motivation actually comes primarily from the goal. If there's an active ingredient in our secret sauce, it's goal setting. We've done a lot of learning over the last decade now of doing this work and helping teachers and parents to team up and we've distilled it into a method that we open sourced, coincidentally, just a couple of weeks before school started closing. We call it family educator learning accelerators or FILA for short. They're 5 to 10 week cycles during which teachers and parents share a game plan in order to help kids reach learning goals. We've learned that any shorter than five weeks, and it's not quite long enough to produce a habit. Any longer than 10 weeks, and the finish line is too far away to motivate behavior change.

Alejandro: 11:40 Teachers and parents, they need to see the light at the end of the tunnel in order to willingly march through it together. We've learned that you need to begin with relationship building between the teacher and the families that they're working with. Typically, we've done that through an in-person home visit. Of course, as you can imagine, that's currently happening through a virtual team building huddle is what we call it. But some moment to form a team and build some relational trust. And right at the outset, you set a goal. As I mentioned, the goal is the fuel that the engine runs on and it's gotta be winnable within that 5 to 10 week period. And then over the course of the cycle, practice, practice,

practice. Kids are practicing with their teachers, whether that’s in person instruction or virtual, kids are practicing with their families at home.

Alejandro: 12:28 We built an app to help guide that daily interaction so that even if a parent only has 15 minutes to sit down with their kid any given day, they can feel confident that they’re doing it right. And then finally, teachers and families need to practice altogether as a team at least four times over the course of that 5 to 10 week window, whether that’s an in-person workshop or virtual, that’s what creates the skill sharing and mutual accountability. And at the end of all that practice, you measure progress and see how you did relative to your goal, and you celebrate. Experiencing that quick win with your team, your teacher, or your parents, or the student, that’s what crystallizes the longer lasting habits that that we see even six months after one of these relatively short cycles is over.

Steve: 13:14 The word team was in my mind before you got there. That, really what you’re doing is, the goal creates a team. So the child, the parent, and the teacher have that goal which now puts them as a team working to achieve that goal and each person has their part to play.

Alejandro: 13:37 That’s exactly right. When we do focus groups with families and we ask them, of everything you had access to as part of
springboard programming, what most helped you to support your child’s learning at home? When we first started asking that question, we wondered, is it the strategies? Is it the app? Is it the relationship with the teacher? Is it the relationship with other families doing this with you? What is it? And it’s none of those things. Families consistently say it’s setting and achieving a goal with my kid. And especially the families that we work with, they’re often having that experience for the first time. And it can be a transformative experience as I talked about at the very outset, that got my sister and I

through to a place where we could set expectations for ourselves rather than accept expectations being imposed on us.

Steve: 14:33 So learning to set a goal and learning the power of goals is another element that the student leaves the process with.

Alejandro: 14:43 That's exactly right. I think it has all kinds of implications beyond even the reading gains that we measure pretty closely. It also creates a multiplier on the teacher's time. For every hour that a teacher leads a family workshop, parents delivered 25 hours of one-on-one coaching at home to try to replicate that amount of individual coaching in the classroom setting would be cost prohibitive. But parents are willing and able to teach for free because they love their kids. And many of the families we've worked with, they've learned the hard way just how important it is for their kid to have a better educational outcome than than they did. If you give them a pathway to be a part of the process and you arm them with skills and strategies to be able to do that role with confidence and pride, consistently, we get 91% of parents on average to attend that weekly workshop and coach their kids for 26 minutes a night in reading.

Steve: 15:46 Would you would you share one or two of the strategies that you that you provide for the parents?

Alejandro: 15:55 Yeah, as you can imagine that they're going to look different based on the reading level ranges of kids. A basic strategy
that we use for families to determine if a book is just right, too hard, or too easy is the five finger rule, right? Where the kid reads the first two pages and the parents keep track of how many words they have trouble with. If it's just one or two, that book might be too easy. If it's three or four, it might be just right. And it's five or more, that book is either too hard for them to read independently, or it will require additional support from the from the family member.

It’s basic, but for our parents to be able to use that strategy with their child in the library and come home with an armful of books that that they can dig into together, it makes a difference.

Alejandro: 16:47 Another one is doing a picture walk. Before reading, parents are often eager to just start at the first word and flip past the cover and get right to it. But as you know, having taught first grade, if you don’t activate prior knowledge, and if the kid isn’t ready for what they’re about to read, then they’re not going to be as successful as if they flipped through and the parents just asked them all kinds of questions about what they’re seeing in the pictures, what they think is going to happen next, making predictions. All of that before the child’s starting to read, sets of families up to have a more successful experience together. And importantly, by asking all those questions consistently before, during and after the parent is modeling what a thoughtful and critical reader does. You ask yourself questions and children begin to internalize that over time.

Steve: 17:44 Very cool. It’s interesting because when I talk about the parents as coach, I use an example from my experience that I didn’t realize until I I’m listening to you now, again, the connectedness of it. I use the example of my granddaughter coming home the first day that she got her flute at school, and she had to get the flute to make this noise for 10 seconds. And I absolutely know nothing about a flute or what she had to do to get it to make that noise, but as her grandparent, timing her and and saying, try again, try again, that’s that that’s five seconds, you’re halfway there. You know, when she got to 10 and we celebrated, and I said do you want to go for 12, those are all the coaching behaviors without me having any of the any of the background of specifically what it is she she needed to do and I’m just seeing that kind of example fit in here.

Alejandro: 18:55 That’s exactly right. And the, the FILA

method that we cautified, we use it in literacy. Our mission is to close the reading achievement gap by fourth grade, but it can apply that to any subject area. The president of springboard, Aubrey, she used this with her son's basketball coach to help him improve his layup. He was getting really frustrated and wasn't playing as joyfully as he typically did becuase he couldn't make a layup. And so she got together the basketball coach, they set a goal, here's how many layups you can make in a minute today, in a month, in five weeks. Here's how many layups I would be thinking you can make it a minute. That's your goal.

Alejandro: 19:46 Once a week, she'd come to practice and kind of team up with their coach, they'd support one another. Every day at home, she'd with their kid for 10 minutes on his layup. He would still go to basketball practice on his own and having a direct coaching experience from the from the official coach. At the end of it all, they saw how many lamps you can make in a minute he'd reach this goal, they all went out for pizza together. It's all the same principles really, for any educator and any family member that want to work together in order to help kids reach a goal of some kind.

Steve: 20:21 It's interesting when you said the pizza – the celebration is part of it. A goal sets up a celebration then.

Alejandro: 20:28 Exactly. The celebration is what kind of crystallizes the the habit. Just like the flute recital, right? It's some end point
where you feel excitement. It increases the stakes to an extent. It's the practice before the championship game. But kind of having that crescendo at end and leaving that experience with an experience growth, even if you didn't quite hit your goal, the feeling that you really worked hard and made progress. That's why when we do a follow up studies six months after one of these cycles is ended, parents should still coaching their kids in reading every bit as much, every bit as often. And it's because of that relatively short, but

intense goal setting cycle. We liken it to it's more like interval training than marathon running. It's a short, intense experience, but it produces these lasting gains.

Steve: 21:29 Could you close us out by telling us a little bit about what what listeners can find on your website as resources? So kind of first label for them how to find you and then what they might look for when they go there.

Alejandro: 21:44 Yeah. So the organization, again, we're a nonprofit, it's called springboard collaborative and our website is springboardcollaborative.org. And there's really three ways that we work with schools and districts. And then there's about 700 schools across the country that that we've had the honor of working with. One, is that we we've got, for anyone and everyone that wants to use the FILA method, we've open sourced it, it's on our website. There's a bunch of free resources that that can help you and your teachers to get up and running with these goal-setting cycles between teachers and families independently, on your own, and at no charge as we want to make that accessible to everyone. Where a school or district wants springboard support in running a FILA in literacy, then we've got two ways of doing that. There's both kind of a high touch model, we call it our flagship program where we come in, we run the program, we do a lot of intense capacity building. There's also a low touch, do it yourself version. Some folks that want to operate more independently and they prefer to do so at a lower price point. So it's a bit of a choose your own adventure. But whether you want free resources or you want our support, our website is the place to go.

Steve: 23:07 Well, thank you very much. And we'll we'll post your website on the lead-in to this podcast so folks can can look back there and grab it. I'm just really impressed with the work you do and thank you so much for sharing it with our listeners here today.

Alejandro: 23:25 Thank you for having me.

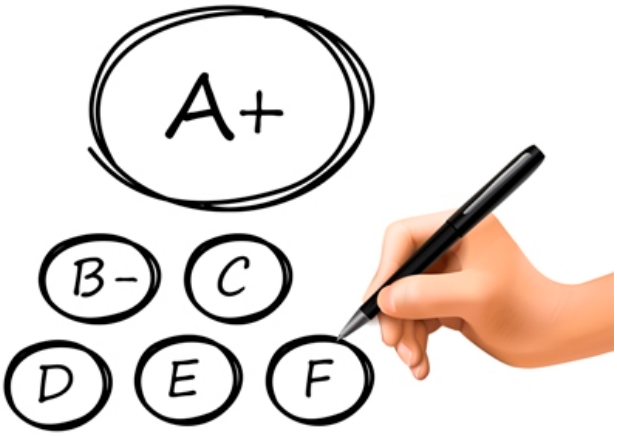
Steve [Outro]: 23:27 Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud on iTunes and Podbean. And please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.

Grading, Learning, and Parents

In 1972 I was a teacher on the staff of a new K-8, open concept, multi-level, team-teaching, non-grading school. As we met with parents we would share in great detail their child's most recent skill mastery and current areas of study on a grade level continuum of skill development.

There were no report cards. We used carbon paper (Many of you won't know what that is… it created a copy as you wrote.) to record our plans for next steps for student, teacher, and parents. Very often parents would listen intently and then ask, is that an A, B, or C. They struggled when I said I didn't know.

In a few short years, the school implemented report cards and as teachers we created grades. Parents became comfortable as we provided "meaningless feedback."



Across the years I have facilitated educators' conversations about how a district's grading policy worked against what they as educators knew would advance student learning. Continually, they reported that parents force us to keep the existing grading structure. A thought that I have always shared is that the students in our classrooms today are the parents we are conferencing with in the future. Without a change, parent pressure for "what they are comfortable with" will continue.

I recalled all of these experiences as I read a recent article in ASCD Express by Pooja Patel, titled, **Working with Parents to Take the Focus off Grades.**

Emphasizing grades sends the wrong message to students. To facilitate strategic behavior and academic growth, experts recommend using descriptive feedback that is actionable, tangible, and transparent and helps students plan a course of action for their next assignment (Wiggins, 2012).

Patel's students set specific, measurable, and actionable goals based on explicit feedback. They discuss their feedback with her to ensure that they fully understand it. Then, they loop in their parents.

"Once students have had an opportunity to process the feedback and compare their work to the exemplar and rubric, they take the assignment home with the rubric, the exemplar, and a discussion guide. I ask them to discuss the skill that we are developing by explaining the exemplar and rubric to their parents. Discuss their current performance by comparing their work with the criteria presented in the rubric and exemplar. Target their future performance by setting a specific goal with their parents.

Commit to the goal by writing down their next steps and signing the discussion guide."

Patel describes the payoff of her approach:

"Parents are grateful to be informed and included. They not only learn the skills, criteria, and methodology we use in the classroom but also assist on making instructional decisions for their children. No longer do I get e-mails from parents asking me questions about the curriculum or standards. No longer do I experience miscommunications during parent-teacher conferences about progress, feedback, or grades. Parents see the value of descriptive feedback over grades."

ASCD has published a book by Cathy Vatterott titled, **Rethinking Grading**:

"Standards – based grading requires us to let go of our grip on control and to trust students' intrinsic desire to learn. To implement the standards-based grading paradigm, we must move from a demand model, in which we use grades to control and coerce learners, to a support model, in which we provide the support necessary for learning to occur (Kohn, 1993). The teacher must become more of an advocate and less of a judge

(Guskey&Baily, 2001)"

The need for change in grading is illustrated in an Edweek blog, **Why a 'Growth Mindset' Won't Work,** by Peter DeWitt. He highlights that John Hatti's research shows a low effect size for schools implementing a growth mindset with students.

"……the reason why growth vs. fixed mindset has a low effect size is due to the fact that adults have a fixed mindset and keep treating students accordingly, so right now the effect size is low, and will continue to stay low unless we change our practices in the classroom."

School leaders, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, teachers in PLC's must push to implement feedback structures that assist students and their parents in extending learning…it's unlikely most grading and report card structures will do that.

Parents as Coaches

Working with schools inTurkeythis week I had two opportunities to meet with parent groups examining how they support (coach) their children's school success. The large number of parents who attended and the interest of those staying after to ask questions suggest that this is a topic for continued exploration.

We began by having parents explore their beliefs about ability being fixed or growth oriented:

"In the fixed mindset, people believe that their talents and abilities are fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that; nothing can be done to change it. Many years of research have now shown that when people adopt the fixed mindset, it can limit their success. They become over-

concerned with proving their talents and abilities, hiding deficiencies, and reacting defensively to mistakes or setbacks-because deficiencies and mistakes imply a (permanent) lack of talent or ability. People in this mindset will actually pass up important opportunities to learn and grow if there is a risk of unmasking weaknesses. "
Carol Dweck
We then explored beliefs concerning the role of student effort and it's impact on student learning. I presented that with a growth mindset, **effort multiplies ability**.

"Study skills and learning skills are inert until they're powered by an active ingredient.. Students may know how to study, but won't want to if they believe their efforts are futile. If you target that belief, you can see more benefit than you have any reason to hope for."
Carol Dweck
Video from Carol Dweck

From **Tapping Student Effort …Increasing Student Achievement** we highlighted how parents could discuss and even have their child rate their effort on various projects or in studying.
On a scale of 1-10 how much effort was extended.
Consider:
the amount of time invested,
the amount of repetition and practice,
the presence of perseverance and patience
the continuation of practice after initial success
Parents also examined their communication skills for engaging children in conversation. They practiced forming open ended questions and confirmatory paraphrases in response to children's statements or questions.
I am hopeful that the combination of ideas about effort with

the communication skills of opened questions and paraphrases leads to some promising family conversations.
My power point on this presentation is available here.
Contact me if you'd like a copy in Turkish.
Teachers can find similar training from Performance Learning System's course **Designing Motivation for All Learners**.