Disinvested
Episode 4: College vs. Non-College

Manchester Student Equity Team*: "… Okay, so I guess we're the Youth Equity Squad and basically, right now, we are youth in Manchester that are trying to build a community of youth trying to speak their voice of the problems that we face on a daily basis…"*

"…Some of the students that don't face these problems, on a daily basis they think everything is perfectly fine, like everything is okay. Like we're not dealing with anything…"

"...One of my favorite quotes in life that we use a lot in this group is, 'Get comfortable being uncomfortable.' It's been on gym walls. It stuck with me throughout my entire life and it applies to so many different parts of my life. I think getting comfortable with being uncomfortable will not only help me with this kind of work but a lot of other work like throughout my lifetime…"

Manchester Student Equity Team*: "…A lot of teachers are worried about, how am I going to get my test scores up or how am I going to be a better teacher? When all students feel comfortable in the classroom, when all students feel like they can raise their hand, when all students feel like they can make a meaningful contribution to something, then those test scores will go up, then the district and schools will feel more equitable…"*

Intro Music…

Tyler Johnson: Welcome to DISINVESTED, a podcast about reimagining a city and building a stronger, more inclusive community, created by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. I'm Tyler Johnson.

This episode is about Education.

When we were growing up, students were put into categories: You played sports, or you were in the arts. You were studious or you were the class clown. But perhaps the most insidious of these labels were College vs. Non-College. Every student was one of the two.

If you were college material, your future was set. You'd graduate from a university, get a prestigious job, and have a happy career and life. If you were deemed not college material, you were encouraged to learn a trade as a fallback plan, because that was your only hope of having a decent life.

Nowadays, we realize the error in this type of thinking. For starters, we recognize that all jobs have value. There are many paths to success that don't involve college, and all of those paths deserve our respect. But that's only part of the issue.

Our educational system doesn't exist in a vacuum. The same disparities we've discussed throughout the series — poverty, trauma and a myriad other issues, affect children from the time they're born through their educational career and into adult life. You've probably heard about the opportunity gap.

Music ends…

Many students enter school already facing a number of barriers to success. This creates disparities between students, which show up in test scores, reading levels and more. As students fall behind, they face additional barriers, and the gap widens with each passing grade.

By the time they're choosing between colleges and careers, some of them don't have much choice at all. Many students' options have been severely limited by life circumstance, money and other factors beyond their control. How can we ensure that every student receives the same opportunity at a quality education and a successful career of their own choosing?

We're not naive enough to think that you can fix the American educational system in a 40-minute podcast. What we will do in this episode is share some wisdom from educators, researchers and students, and hopefully challenge some of the assumptions you may have about education.

We'll begin with Jay Williams, the President of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

Jay Williams: So there was a study that was recently published by Georgetown University that sends a chilling message that in our country today, it is better to be rich than it is to be smart.

If you think of that, the message that that potentially sends to our students is that no matter how hard you work, no matter how committed you are – you do all the things that are asked of you – there are colleagues that you have that because they were born to wealthy families, they have a higher opportunity, a better chance to find themselves gainfully employed, and living a successful life simply because of the wealth they were born into.

That's a very chilling and stark message. So to the extent that we can, through our educational investments and other partnerships, begin to address that, begin to focus again not on the achievement gap but the opportunity gap, I think it bodes well and it's an obligation we have to at least try.

Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez: Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez. Hartford Public Schools, I am the Superintendent.

One in 10 of our kindergarten students and even first grade students miss at least 18 days of school, or 10% of the school year, which is the definition of a chronically absent student. That

starts early on in kindergarten and it continues throughout up until high school. So that indicates to us that this is a broader challenge that we have, that it is also a need around the adults and a community challenge that we all have to embrace and collectively address. Only 17% of those students will be able to read on grade level when they get to third grade.

There are inequities in terms of health disparities, access to healthcare. Food insecurity, for example, is something that we not often think about, but it's a reality. Home insecurities. And so it's much broader than what we see playout in our classrooms.

As I think about my own personal mission, that is to foster quality and equitable education, I think about when I was 9-years-old and I came to this country, to Hartford actually, from Puerto Rico, and my mother moved to Hartford. My mother, brother and I lived in a very small cramped one-bedroom apartment.

As an English learner, I remember being afraid to go to school because I identified as having a language barrier. There were times in which my needs as a learner were not met in the best way possible. Because of education, I am able to change the trajectory of my family and generations to come. That is why a high quality education matters in our community.

Beth Bye: My name is Beth Bye. I am the Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood in Connecticut.

All children are born ready to learn and we need a system that makes sure we take advantage of that. Poverty keeps knocking, and what I found as a Child Care Director in the inner city of Hartford and inner city of Boston was that families face so many challenges as they're trying to get out of poverty. I defy anyone to start where a lot of families start and make your way up and out of poverty just because it's so hard.

There are all of these challenges that families face in trying to move toward economic stability that we need systems in place to try to help them take those steps. Because one thing is true: every parent wants their baby to be healthy, wants their child to be well, wants them to have friends, wants them to do well in school, wants them to get a good job, and wants them to go further than they did and that starts in those earliest years.

The first three years of brain development, that's 80% of brain development happens in those first three years. And those critical skills like learning to communicate, like focus and self-control, attention, being able to pay and switch attention, those are skills that children learn when they're two years old. They're they kind of skills that the workforce is looking for.

A manufacturer or a higher education institution that's hiring a professor, they all want workers who have those internal controls, who can take responsibility, who can focus and achieve their goals. That really does start when a baby is young with warm responsive care in infancy and then supporting their development through toddlerhood, preschool, elementary, and high school. It's all connected.

Dr. G. Duncan Harris: Dr. G. Duncan Harris and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Capital Community College.

Last year we decided to conduct a study of our students, qualitative and quantitative, of the issues that were impacting their ability to successfully complete college. The number one reason that students indicated or the barrier was financial.

Most of our students receive aid in the form of PELL Grants, etc. But that, one again, does not account for life expenses. So despite our students being able to manage the cost of tuition, the other life costs are typically what cause them to have financial problems at the college. A lot of the community colleges are taking on food security.

I tend to not be able to focus when I've skipped lunch, so imagine being a student in calculus who hasn't eaten for a couple of days. Once again, a student that doesn't have reliable housing or that might be couch surfing, so once again in terms of the hierarchy of needs, it's kind of hard to concentrate on physics if you're not sure where you're going to be sleeping that night.

We recognize and have adopted a more holistic support to students, recognizing that while our central focus is instruction and learning, students don't leave certain things in the parking lot when they enter into a classroom.

Tyler Johnson: Developmental hurdles in early childhood, attendance and behavioral issues in grade school, and food insecurity in college… these issues are all symptoms of the same cause.

In our first episode, we talked about the disparities that exist in our community, mostly around race, place and income. These disparities play out in our educational system every single day.

Daren Graves is an Associate Professor of Education at Simmons University in Boston. Daren does research on the intersection of critical race theory, racial identity development and teacher education.

Daren Graves: I attended Yale University. I had experiences there that made it very clear of the disparities that exist in our society. I was tutoring at the Youth Probation Center that has a tutoring program. I was partnering up with students probably about 16 years old, maybe 17, and I was probably like 19. It was great. We would come together and it was nice. We'd get work done. We would talk about things, but then at the end when it was time to go home, it was very stark because you sort of leave the building and he would basically go right and I would go left.

Going right was basically going back into neighborhoods that were highly under resourced and I was going back to Yale's Campus, which is pinnacle of the ivory tower. I felt like me and the student I was working with were not too dissimilar, but we were going to like very dissimilar

places. I didn't have all the tools yet to understand how and why it was happening, but I knew it wasn't right.

I had another experience, still in New Haven, while I was working on my psychology research project, where we'd have some kids who were from New Haven, you know 16, 17-years-old, black, lived in the under-resourced neighborhoods, and they were reading three, four, five grades behind grade level. Then we had these other groups of students who were white, middle class, upper middle class who were 12 years old or whatever, in sixth grade and they were reading two and three grade levels ahead. It was so stark the difference in how the students were performing on the basis of what seemed like race, for sure, in class.

Seeing that disparity and how the students were performing on basic stuff, gave some more substance to why it felt unfair before. But yet, how does a school let that happen?

Tyler Johnson: Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng is a sociologist at NYU Steinhardt whose work focuses on the experience of youth of color and immigrants in the United States. He's also a former middle school teacher. He told us about a study on implicit bias in teaching.

Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng: It was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, interestingly with iPhones. The final sample had 150,000 students in the United States, which is one of the largest data collections nationwide. They gave teachers an iPhone to record the lessons that they taught, and the idea was that a team of experts would then grade the teaching that they saw in the videos.

This study was really amazing because, essentially, it gave a large scale measure of how is this teacher actually teaching in their classroom? Not "what are the test score gains of students in this classroom?" It was actually, like, how is this teacher teaching?

The punchline for that paper is that the more black students a teacher has in a classroom generally, the lower teaching quality they manifest. You couldn't go into a classroom, interview a teacher and ask them about their racial biases or their implicit biases. Almost by definition of the implicit part, people aren't aware of it. If you ask them, you will be very aware that they're probably offended that you're asking them.

When I go in and I talk to – particularly if it's teachers – I say, I know that I've failed when there's no questions. I know that I've failed when there's just complacency or boredom in the audience, and if you are very angry and incited by what I've said, that's actually to me, a form of success.

The problem is not among teachers; the problem is among U.S. society. Virtually all teachers and administrators want to serve their youth better; and I think that it's not about the will, it's actually about the knowledge. I'm always quite shocked when a school has more than one or even one conversation explicitly about race and immigration a year.

I tell teachers, if you're not actually talking about race specifically, if you're not talking about gender, if you're not talking about immigration, then I don't quite know what you're talking about.

Background Music…

Tyler Johnson: So now that we understand the problem, what can we do about it?

In our previous episodes, when discussing issues like economic development or community safety, we start with tactical solutions and end by encouraging people to change their mindset.

When it comes to education, a lot of people believe that mindset is the most important thing.

Here's Beth Bye, Commissioner of the Office of Early Childhood in Connecticut.

Beth Bye: Expectations are everything. There's some pretty cool research in the early childhood intervention community around asking parents about their hopes and dreams for their child. Just that question, and someone listening and writing it down, helps a child make more progress. I think we have to ask parents, help them understand that they have to have expectations for their child. They sometimes are so stuck in the day to day, and that's important, but training our early childhood workforce about having high expectations for all children.

I've been in centers where I'll hear, well, these kids don't do well in an unstructured pre-school like this. This idea that some children can be in unstructured environments and others can't is really just flat-out prejudice. I'll give you an example. It's probably not in early childhood, but in West Hartford, which is a community that's fairly integrated in Conard High School, they made a rule that any child can take an AP class. So any student has access to college level classes. The achievement in that high school went up tremendously, and even with some of the families and students with financial challenges, they have raised the expectations for every student at the school and just moved way up the rankings.

I watched that happen as a member of the school board and thought, wow. When I went to school it was tracked, and when I wasn't put on the highest track I went home and cried for three days until my parents finally went to school – because you'd never say anything to a teacher – and they'd say, "Just give her a try because I can't deal with her coming home anymore."

I just think about my trajectory, if my expectations were track three and not track one. We have to believe in all students and that they can make it.

Tyler Johnson: Because many decisions about schools occur within government, the best way for the average resident to make change is to get involved at the local level, such as voting for your school board or attending PTA meetings.

For nonprofits and foundations, there are many ways we can support children's learning and advance equity that don't involve taking on the responsibilities of government. Local nonprofits partner with schools to address issues such as food insecurity. At the Hartford Foundation, we support research and hold convenings for educators to get together and share information.

We've also formed partnerships with a number of schools in our region, supporting home visits, family engagement, play-based initiatives, efforts to improve literacy, and much more. The earlier you can support a student, the better the results.

Here's Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, superintendent of Hartford Public Schools.

Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez: Research does speak to the point that when our students are proficient by grade three, chances are their proficiency is going to likely sustain; their progression into high school on track and to graduate will also sustain. There's a concentration of need that is with us every single day. We rely so much on our partnerships in order to help us lift this work and be able to provide for the needs that go beyond the academic domains.

When we think about the community school model, the essence is making sure that the school is at the center of the community, besides being open beyond the regular school hours, that it really seeks to meet the needs not just of the student, but that it does so within the context of the community and its needs, as well. So for that, it includes health services, mental, medical, and vision screening, for example. Clinical services, case management service provision, not just for the student but family, as well.

In a context of limited resources like often urban school districts are challenged by, we have to do more with less and it requires that we step back and identify those that need more. For us, that means schools with higher rates of chronic absenteeism, for example, will receive additional support. The same with schools who have higher rates of English learners because we know that there are added needs that those specific students have.

Dr. G. Duncan Harris: One of the things that's interesting is, as we talk about partners, we certainly consider the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving a key stakeholder in our success.

Tyler Johnson: Dr. G. Duncan Harris, CEO of Capital Community College.

Dr. G. Duncan Harris: We recently were successful in receiving a planning grant to engage in some equity work here. We are in the midst of developing an equity center. Part of the reason that many of our students may not be successful here are related to inequity that

has impacted their lives for quite some time. So if we're able to, once again, ameliorate some of those deficits that have occurred, through no fault of their own, that's a good thing.

In the Equity Center, it would house all of our community partners, and on Thursdays from eight to eleven, there's a representative from CRT [Community Renewal Team]. That CRT rep could assist that student in addressing the housing and security issues.

Let's say that a student had some other challenges around childcare and that on Mondays we had a representative from the YWCA Career Ladders Program and there are resources available to single parents around support for childcare.

We had the conceptual framework, but we didn't have the funding and access to content expertise, which the Hartford Foundation stepped in.

Tyler Johnson: As you heard earlier, the disparities affecting our students also affect their families. Again, here's Beth Bye.

Beth Bye: One of the great things about the Hartford Foundation is they connect to national resources, to big thinking about how to support systemic change, and then they make investments based on their research. The two-Gen approach to poverty is, really, how do you look at the whole family when you're looking at social services, human services, and other services?

When I'm looking at a policy as a commissioner, how can I see not just how does that policy affect the child, but how does it affect the whole family? When we're building our childcare supports, do we have some of the supports that can work at nighttime if parents have off hour jobs? We've got to be thinking of that and not just build a system built for children. We've got to be thinking what works for families in 2019. I think as a system, we haven't been doing a great job of thinking of the family at the center because the success of a child is tied to the success of the family.

A high quality early childhood program for two years is great, four years is better. But if the family is not getting what they need and continues to experience stress around how am I going to pay the bills, taking jobs that are all off hours at minimum wage, and always worrying, they're not going to be able to support the child the way they want.

Background music...

Tyler Johnson: As we move forward, we need to consider what all of us can do to advance equity in our schools. Again, Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng.

Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng: Anywhere across the United States, you see these videos of someone screaming horribly really racist things at someone, and then they're like, "Why did you say that," and they're like, "I'm not racist."

The racism, particularly in the education realm, that really limits the opportunity for youth of color and immigrant youth is at the policy level. It's policies that say, okay we're going to fund inequitably different schools. I define a racist law as the law may have no mention of race, but once the law is enacted, are racial inequalities created, maintained, or worsened? If the answer is yes, yes, and yes, then that means this is a racist law.

I think that racism is so much bigger than an individual person being a not nice person. I think sometimes when I'm called to go to schools they're looking to be like, "You're a professor of this, are we racist?" I'm like, "Would you trust my answer, because you shouldn't." The idea that once you're given this label or once you are decidedly not a racist that everything that you do from then on is either perfectly horrible or perfectly amazing.

The reality of it is we are complex human beings, and in any given day, we can have incredibly anti-racist, amazing affirming interactions, and we can also have really problematic, probably racist interactions.

In my experience as a middle school teacher, I never saw anything that was screaming out racial epithets; it wasn't aggressive. At the same time, I knew that the school that I taught in, the students that we suspended, the students that were detained, that it was disproportionately black students.

I get lots of questions about discipline. "Our school has a discipline problem. Although 60% of our students are black, 90% of our suspensions are black, what are we supposed to do? We're not racist." But I just say, "Could it be something as simple as every time you refer a black student for suspension, you have some extra step to be like, no, no, no what did the student *do* and what happens if a white student did it? Would you recommend the student for suspension?"

If the answer is yes, I would recommend any student for suspension because this was egregious, then perhaps it's less of a bias issue. But I think oftentimes – and the teachers actually will say to me, "Yeah, if we did that, if we just paused to think about race, I think that not only would we suspend fewer black students, we would just suspend fewer students, period."

So, this is a shift away from saying a school is racist, a principal is racist, an individual is racist, to actually be able to identify where are instances in the school setting when these things can happen? In their own practice, when can they detect these things? I think it's much more concrete. I think it's much less judgmental.

Daren Graves: I would love for districts to engage in processes where they can learn authentically about the history in general, or the specific history of the communities that they're in, around the ways in which communities of color have been resilient.

Tyler Johnson: Darren Graves of Simmons University.

Daren Graves: In other words, like reframing the black and brown communities and kids as things that need to be fixed and more as amazingly resilient folks who we need to draw the best out of. But being able to put that in conversation with the issues that the students are facing now and are navigating now, or things that they want to understand, then I think you get the kind of results you're looking for.

In other words, it really requires the teacher to both feed some authority to the students about what it is we're learning and why, honoring that they might have some valid experiences to bring to the table, and then connecting that to helping them learn the learning outcomes.

MCC: "…It's been very empowering to be in a leadership role like this, and to have people like in administrative positions put so much trust in me is like the most amazing feeling ever…"

Tyler Johnson: Manchester's Student Equity Team was formed last year as a response to some of the issues students were facing in their daily lives. We sat down with several of the students for a group discussion about their experiences, their goals, and what it means to have equity in the classroom.

MCC: …Constantly during school kids are harassed about wearing durags on their heads. These are the kids' culture; they're not wearing it to disrupt school because at the end of the day, wearing a durag on your head isn't doing anything or hurting anybody. Also, white kids were wearing durags and a black kid was wearing a durag in the same exact class and the teacher would only call on the black kid saying, "Well you need to take your durag off," and say nothing to the white kid.

So starting in middle school I started to notice little things like dress code violations would get put on black and brown kids, especially girls a lot more than anybody else. So I started to notice that. Then I would notice the white kids wearing the same exact thing but nothing at all was being said to them. I was like, well what's this…?"

Majesty [sp] and I and a couple of students who joined [part]; we changed the Manchester mascot. Since 1939..?"

"…1949…"

"…Yeah since 1949 it was the Manchester Indians. It was deemphasized but I never really liked the mascot or wanted to be a proud Manchester Indian because it felt wrong to use a racial

identify as a mascot. I'm on the Yearbook Club too, and seeing past yearbooks of white kids or non-Native American kids dressing up in tribal paint or using racial slurs that were just so wrong and so racist it made me pissed off.

We wanted to change the mascot so we got the school behind us, we went to the Board of Ed and eventually we did change the Mascot to the Manchester Red Hawks. So this year we'll be able to start as the Manchester Red Hawks and not the Manchester Indians…"

"…We presented in front of administrators. Some of them were like, "Cool" some of them weren't. Some of them were very – I don't want to say combative because they, they weren't really opening their mouths but you could tell. You know when you just get that vibe off of people when they're just not ready to change…"

"…We have such a progressive superintendent, who is very open to the fact that times are changing and he's very down for the cause. He supports us and I thank him for that. I thank everybody else for that. I've noticed that I've gotten to have more of these conversations based on race, inequity, and how it affects me and students like me with my teachers. I've noticed a lot more teachers being more responsive and being more honest about what they know, but even being more vulnerable as to what they don't know..."

"…Teachers are starting to talk about it. I've had situations where teachers would stop teaching a class and start talking about stuff like that, not only because it was distracting the class but it was a topic on our minds…"

"…Coming from the white perspective, I've been in this group for two years and really just sitting down and instead of – I think it was Lyndon Johnson who said, you're not learning anything when you're talking. I just really stopped talking and started to listen to so many of the other stories. I knew racism, sexism, and all forms of bigotry was big in this country, just hearing personal stories, like my personal peers, people who I got to school with and sit next to in class who have to go through this on a daily basis. It really made me just understand that, as a country, we are not doing anything unless if we're talking about these huge racial inequities in this district, this state, and across the country…?

"…I feel like when teachers make accommodations for all their students and they make all of their students feel welcomed and safe in their classroom, it encourages students to keep their hand up and to feel like what they have to say is valued, as opposed to thinking that they're a burden in their classroom or what they have to say is invaluable…"

"…When they're treated with equity, they feel like they can do more, because when you don't treat them the way you treat other students, they're going to want to stay behind in the classroom, keep their hand down and not answer anything. But when you actually treat them with respect, like they're an actual human being and give them what they need to succeed, you're going to see a whole other side of the student…"

"..So I had a teacher, Ms. Oquazi [sp] for seventh grade. She was actually my first black female teacher that I ever had. It was actually really good to have somebody who looked similar to me teach me, because all my life I've only seen white teachers. Then on top of that, she also made me feel like I actually mattered in the classroom, like my opinion was going to be voiced. Then in that class, that was one of my best classes that I had…"

"…I semi agree with what Saria [sp] said, because I do want us all to have equal opportunities, but some people need equitable opportunities, if that makes sense, in the classroom because some people need certain more needs than others. Like if they need extra help or extra understanding. I hope that teachers understand the different needs that other kids may require…"

Daren Graves: A big layer has to do with resources.

Tyler Johnson: Again, here's Daren Graves.

Daren Graves: We have an education funding system that's tied to residents and property rights. I think of the ways in which we have historically and contemporarily kind of bungled housing equity, right? The ways in which racial housing discrimination was rampant, then created a scenario where the schools themselves are going to be highly under resourced because the communities themselves were under resourced if not divested from.

But it's not just about resources. There's a bigger issue and I think what sort of ties it all together is the way that blackness and brownness has been constructed as not intellectual, not caring about intellectual endeavors, or not caring about school.

The thing that I've come to understand, and what makes this all so tricky, is that, from an academic perspective, and even from a historical perspective, you come to this conclusion that these things are slow. We've got to take our time to get it right, and so these one-off solutions that often get put out there by politicians often seem short sided and crazy.

As a parent, I don't have time for the developmental psychologists and the historians to figure this all this out. I need my kid to be doing well now, so I honor that process. In other words, I think what we owe to the kids is the absolute best that we can give them right now, because anything less is just not enough and not fair.

Alex Johnson: For individuals to be successful, they have to go to high school and then go through four years of college.

Tyler Johnson: Alex Johnson is the President and CEO of Capital Workforce Partners.

Alex Johnson: That's the roadmap to success. I would argue that it should be considered one of many roadmaps to success. All jobs that pay good wages should have value. So if

somebody wants to be a plumber, a carpenter, or an electrician, we need to hold those jobs with the same high regard as we do typical white collar jobs.

I think as we begin to level that playing field, give value to respect to all good jobs. I think that would be my vision for how we would continue to build this city, this state, and this community. But also build it in a way that we're enabling individuals to achieve a level of happiness, and at the same time achieve a level of self-sufficiency by doing what they feel comfortable and confident in doing. I think that's the narrative that I would really love to see us change because I think as we do that, we will enable all individuals to be successful.

Tyler Johnson: Regardless of what path they're on, we should help students find internships and volunteer opportunities. This is a great way for students to gain real-world experience and determine whether they want to eventually work in a specific field. It's especially beneficial for students on a non-college path because many employers still favor college grads and this gives them something to show on a resume.

Leonaldo Mendez: I'm Leonaldo Mendez. I've been an intern for BiCi Co. for about two years now. Mainly what I do downstairs is bike mechanic. I also kind of train interns because I have a little bit more experience, so they kind of count on me. Before I found BiCi Co. I was really out in the community doing not so positive things.

One of my main reasons for coming to BiCi Co. was just my interest and love for bikes. My family, we kind of grew up in not such a stable home, so our main transportation, we depended on bikes. I grew up in a low-income home. My mom wasn't stable enough to support some of our needs that we had.

Just coming over here and knowing that I could afford some of my stuff, and also help out with my mom with some of her bills, some of the clothes that I needed, it's a great feeling. I've learned a seriously good amount of knowledge that I had to learn, whether if it's career readiness, communication skills. I was really a quiet person. I did not want to talk to no one at all, but coming into the program, it was just like I had to talk to people. I feel like without communication, I wouldn't have been good with interviews. I wouldn't have been good with anything.

Also, being downstairs it kind of influenced me to getting my own business, how to properly maintain a business. That's the kind of stuff that I really want to do within the next five years, just go to school and still focus on bike mechanics and stuff, but also do business and see how I can grow and prosper from that.

Tyler Johnson: Here's Jay Williams, President of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

Jay Williams: It is providing a pathway for those who choose to pursue a college whether it's a two year degree, a four year degree or beyond, And for those that choose a

different pathway that allows them to obtain a set of skills, but we also have to ensure that one isn't held as more superior to the other, that they are equally important, that whatever path you choose it's important, that you pursue that path and that you also are supported on that path.

Tyler Johnson: So how does supporting non-college paths tie into overall educational equity? It's about changing the approach, so that schools serve students and their needs, rather than trying to fit students into any pre-determined path or category.

If we want to one day achieve educational equity, it's bigger than any one program or series of programs. We need to look at the students, disparities, the educational system, and how these things are all interconnected. When students graduate from high school, we tell them to never stop learning. It's time we take our own advice.

We'll leave you where we began, with comments from some local educators. Here's G. Duncan Harris, and Leslie Torres-Rodriguez.

Dr. G. Duncan Harris: We accept the top 99% of any graduating class. It's interesting because at one point, there was an impetus to kind of seek college-ready students. So there's been a shift in that, that we now are student-ready colleges, so the students that come to us, we should be able to do some assessment, find out what the needs are, and help address any gaps in order to get them to be able to enter into the world of work order transfer.

We've really shifted. The bar is where it is. We're an accredited institution so the bar doesn't move down, but what are the supports required to help our students get over that bar, and then that's what we try to address.

Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez: We owe our students equity in excellence, and by that I mean to take into account the needs that the whole student has. Yes, there are academic needs that we must meet, but there are also all the other elements of the students' experience.

Being part of a community to me means that we have to face hard truths at times so that we can be poised to continuously improve. Being part of a community means supporting one another, even though it's challenging to do so.

I am so very proud of serving on behalf of all of our students and our families. I love about my job that I get to serve and lead in the community that essentially produced me. I love about my job that I can leverage my role, my voice, my knowledge base, my skillset, and my disposition to change the trajectory of our students, their families, and ultimately this beautiful city.

Background Music…

I feel so hopeful about our future. I refer to our students, each and every one of them, as being beautiful and capable students. That is what I believe makes Hartford so amazing.

Tyler Johnson: Thanks for listening to DISINVESTED. I'm Tyler Johnson.
If you've enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe and share with your friends.

Next week, we'll talk about basic human needs. When you think about basic human needs, you probably think about food and shelter, but there's a lot more to it.

Next time on DISINVESTED.

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