Transcription for

THE KEY WITH INSIDE HIGHER ED

EP. 11: THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON EDUCATION AND WORK FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR

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VOICE: This episode is sponsored by the ECMC Foundation, which supports building a postsecondary education system that works for all learners through its grant making focus areas of college success and career readiness.

PAUL FAIN: Hello, welcome to The Key with IHE. I'm Paul Fain, the host and news editor at Inside Higher Ed.

Traditional colleges were facing plenty of scrutiny about their role is helping to perpetuate inequity even before the pandemic and the current unrest over racism in society. But these crises have exposed those problems in an even harsher light. For example, data from the Strada Education Network's public viewpoint survey show the disproportionate impact on work and education for people of color. Almost a quarter of black and Latino Americans have been laid off so far during the crisis, the survey found, compared to 15 percent of white Americans and 13 percent of Asian Americans. Likewise, black and Latino Americans are much more likely than white Americans to have changed or canceled their postsecondary education plans.

A quick note about that data before we get into the conversation--IHE and Strada have partnered on the public viewpoint poll. Strada provides funding to support our coverage of the survey and related

workforce issues. IHE, of course, maintains editorial independence in this coverage.

All right, this is an important topic. I spoke with Johnny Taylor about these issues. Taylor is president and CEO of SHRM, the Society for Human Resource Management. He formerly was president and CEO of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund and was appointed by President Trump to chair his advisory board on historically black colleges and universities. We're fortunate to get Taylor's broad perspective on higher education and the workforce, with an equity focus.

JOHNNY TAYLOR: So a focus on students, which is really a very personalized experience, is incredibly important. And I know HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions have the ability to do that in a way that large institutions, particularly...they just don't do that. They don't have to do that, by the way. So they have not done it. And with a society that's becoming browning and graying at once, in the future, that is your future student.

PAUL FAIN: I also spoke with Lorelle Espinosa, vice president of research at the American Council on Education. Espinosa has researched how minority-serving institutions serve as engines of upward mobility. She's an expert on equity in higher education and talked with me about how colleges can and should do better.

I'm going to get out of the way and get this one started. Thanks very much for listening.

So I'm speaking with Lorelle Espinosa. Lorelle, thank you for making time for me.

LORELLE ESPINOSA: Thanks for having me.

PAUL FAIN: So even before the pandemic, you had done some research on social mobility with a specific focus on serving underserved student populations. Can you talk a little bit about where you've looked into this issue in the past?

LORELLE ESPINOSA: Yeah, so this issue of social mobility is an interesting one, right, because we have a higher education system that does an enormously positive job on keeping people upwardly mobile. I

mean, if you look at any of the data, and you look at the income of individuals that have a college degree, it always surpasses those that don't. I mean, there's a lot of positive stories for higher education here.

On the other hand, and I would love to just point your listeners to a new book by Tony Carnevale and some others called the "Merit Myth." I think they do a great job laying out the flipside to that story, which is that higher education continues to actually perpetuate the problems that we have with mobility. And, you know, I like what they say, it causes as much as it cures what ails this nation, higher education that is, including widening income gaps and social divisions. So that's an interesting statement to make, certainly in the current moment of division, but it's really true.

So, you know, we have to really wrestle with both sides of that story. And you can't have one part of that story without mentioning the other.

All of that said, we did look at a mobility at ACE a little while ago, but specifically looking at the role of minority-serving institutions. So these are also the institutions that serve the most students of color in our country. They serve the largest proportion of low-income students and first generation to college students. And so we were very interested, okay, this is where the students are. What are the outcomes there? And we've done a couple of reports on that, but this one really does show, and I'm pleased to say, that MSIs by and large to a better job on social mobility than non-MSIs. And a big part of why we wanted to do this report was to point to the fact that these institutions need more resources. They need greater investment. You know, we talk about higher education, we're often talking about the elite schools or perhaps the more selective. MSIs are largely two-year institutions. They're open access institutions. And they're very tied into their communities, so perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise, and certainly if you work at an MSI or went to an MSI, it shouldn't be a surprise that they have such great outcomes on mobility. But, you know, I think they're not the schools that policymakers or other types of leaders look to or think about when we talk about mobility. And we wanted to change that.

PAUL FAIN: Well, they're also unfortunately institutions that depend a lot on public funding that's threatened right now as well, which....

LORELLE ESPINOSA: That's right, especially now.

PAUL FAIN: You know, so what are some of the... You mentioned they're often really integrated into

their communities. What are some of the reasons that you think these institutions tend to do better in serving their students and helping them enter the middle class, getting well paying jobs?

LORELLE ESPINOSA: Yeah, well, one thing you'll hear people that work at MSIs or study them like I do, is you hear this saying of student-centered, or you might hear the term meeting students where they are. These are institutions that approach their student body with an incredible level of what I've called in another report with National Academies intentionality. So the culture and the fabric of the institution, the people that work in it are there to cultivate talent. They're not there to lead talent out. They're not there to, you know, watch the cream rise to the surface as you often see in more selective institutions, this attitude that, you know, it's merit alone. They have a different understanding of what merit is, and it's multifaceted.

And their students come with a lot of strength and resiliency, and experiences that I think other practitioners and educators don't see as such. And so these school are just known to serve their community, that piece of being community-centered, many of them because their open access, because they're two-year institutions, have a different mission, you know, a different vantage point on their communities. And that shows up in how they teach, how they support students, and, you know, really the student experience.

PAUL FAIN: You know, obviously, these challenges were severe before we had 20 percent unemployment and a rolling pandemic, but only more intense now, not to mention the big story right now, the racial unrest, unrest over police brutality and racism in society, which, of course, is affecting higher education as well. When you look at the numbers, the impact thus far of the pandemic has obviously hit people of color much harder than others. How does that complicate the challenge for traditional higher ed as it seeks to do a better of job of helping underserved students make it?

LORELLE ESPINOSA: Yeah, it's, wooh... This is a tough time. It's incredibly complicating. Before we came on to do the podcast, you had mentioned, I think it was Rich Reeves, who had said that... So what did he say, that our economic system was a pre-existing condition?

PAUL FAIN: Yeah, the US political economy is a pre-existing condition itself.

LORLLE: Yeah, I love that because you can apply that here. Equity or inequity in higher education in higher education is a pre-existing condition.

And, you know, that things that I really worry about in this moment is that, many of the students who will fall away, and the data that you released with Strada really shows that students of color are falling away from higher education in this moment of the pandemic, and then, yes, layer on top of that a national racial crisis. I'm really worried that those students won't come back at all, or they might come back much later, which means that few of them will do so. Even if they stay, the educational experience may be really disruptive and misaligned with their learning needs.

So when you think about sort of traditional higher ed, working to go online and try to do what they do in person online, that worries me. There are many deans that I talked to that said, you know, 80 percent of their faculty had never taught online. So this is a really important moment to reinforce the equity equation when it comes to online learning, which, you know, really is not easy to do.

And I'm also worried that students will go into more debt over this crisis. I mean, we already see, for example, black students in the work that we do on race and ethnicity in higher education at ACE, that's a group that is already taking out an enormous amount of debt, higher percentages taking out debt than other students, and they're taking out the most. And when you put that on top of an already existing wealth gap, you know, that really concerns me.

And then there's the financial sustainability, like we were saying a moment ago about the schools that serve students of color that most being the minority-serving institutions, HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges, these are also the communities themselves that are being the most impacted and their institutions therefore will also be the most impacted, sort of the compounding nature of these crises that we're going to. So I'm worried about that sustainability of these institutions, about public-funding. When you look at the last recession that we had, and you look at where disinvestment in higher education happened the most, it happens at these institutions. So how are they going to meet the needs of student body that's really been traumatized by the pandemic, by the racial crisis... What position will they be in to meet their needs, just as I wish this wasn't true, but I fully expect them to face disinvestment by policy makers. And just given the financial climate over all, just have less giving, less philanthropy coming their way. And you, you know, that's all really concerning.

In terms of what to do about that, I mean, we mentioned online learning and really having an equity lens, being intentional with your students the way that we learn from minority-serving institutions. But, you know, there are lots of things that sort of traditional higher ed can do, like you said. We see that more institutions, more and more, are responding to this current moment, but specifically the pandemic, when it comes to making sure that there's emergency aid available... We do a survey of

college presidents. And we found that 63 percent had said that they already had an emergency aid fund, but they're now making more funds available. And another 14 percent said they were considering putting emergency aid into play. And another small percentage said that they were starting emergency aid programs for the first time. So there are things that campuses can do to at least, you know, serve their small part.

This issue, like you started with, is societal, however . So higher education is just one piece of the solution, which only goes to say that higher ed also needs to be collaborating across the many societal institutions that we have to really make sure that we don't see more students fall out of the system.

PAUL FAIN: So a theme of this podcast is I tend to ask ridiculously nebulous challenging questions. That was certainly one of them. You know, among the really interesting points you made, institutions that do a good job of serving minority students at scale often are, you know, very cash-strapped. And with the best intentions and best practices won't cut it if there's not adequate support. And we're both in Washington, there's... You know, another stimulus aimed at states and local governments may not happen.

But despite the incredible financial barriers, both for institutions and those students, you know, I feel like in this podcast, I talked to a lot of open-access college leaders, and there is a bit of optimism. I think you need it for the job, but we know communities, we know we can retool, we can adjust programmatically and with things like emergency aid to help students through this time. I mean, what's your level of optimism about a pivot by higher ed to do a better job amid all this challenge?

LORELLE ESPINOSA: Yeah, well, I am an optimistic person. I actually feel like I have to be if I'm going to do DEI, diversity, equity and inclusion, where you have to have hope and optimism. And I would say on the racial crisis that we are in as a country, I actually have a good amount of optimism in how higher education that pivot in this moment. I've seen, I mean, we'll all seen all of the statements and the open arms around coming to terms with anti-black racism, police violence. That has translated into presidents and cabinet leaders and deans, and, you know, other people in positions of power, really questioning, well, what does that really look like on our campus? All the work that we've been pushing out on race and higher education has been, you know, really taken in higher rates than I've seen in terms of those that are responding to us, asking for resources.

So in terms of the moment, I do have some hope. And I would just encourage more leaders to speak truthfully, speak with an open heart right now, go to the ground, do some self-examination of their own

leadership and of the leadership at their institution, shore up their capacity for DEI, which, again, is something that I'm seeing more institutions do, because they're looking forward to the fall for those that are quote-unquote "reopening." And, you know, of course, they should expect a study body that comes back fatigued, and also demanding, right?

I mean, before we went out, last year, I mean, ever since 2015, we've seen student protests and students demanding, literally through a list of demands, that campuses get serious about diversity, equity, and inclusion. And we have no reason to think they're not going to come back and continue to demand... In fact, they will and they should take advantage of this current moment. So I have some hope there, and it's unfortunate that you have to go through a crisis often in higher education to get serious about something, but I see that we have the potential to get serious right now.

PAUL FAIN: Do you think... You know, obviously, the challenges, the barriers that students face, that, you know, Strada data exposes, were there before, but it's more stark than ever. To your last point there, do you feel like there is a growing acknowledgment that these barriers cannot persist? I mean, they're not new, but they're worse now.

LORELLE ESPINOSA: Yeah, yeah, and I think... I do think there is a growing acknowledgment. What we have yet to see is, is there a growing appetite for action? Because there's a really difference between acknowledging a problem and acting on it. And thus far we haven't seen enough action. And, you know, that's the question. Will there be action? The group that, you know, not surprisingly, the group that stands out in our data on race and ethnicity as having just really disproportionate outcomes to others... There's actually two. One is African Americans and the other is indigenous communities.

And when you think about the pandemic, you know, I'm sure listeners have read different news reports and stories, but those are the two communities that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic, and, you know, when you already have that pre-existing condition that we talked about, and then you layer on a pandemic, you know, what do you think is going to happen? I mean, this is it. This should surprise nobody, actually. Anybody who is surprised by this, they should take a big step back and examine their assumptions and the lens through which they look at the world. This is perfectly, really something we should have expected. And so the question is, yeah, where is the action?

And, you know, I would challenge leaders to think about what they should expect for the fall, you know what they should expect for the next several years, and be real about that and start to create solutions before they get to the crisis, before, you know, we're at the end where you can hardly turn back.

PAUL FAIN: Lorelle, thank you so much for indulging my questions. Those were definitely not softballs.

LORELLE ESPINOSA: Happy to...

PAUL FAIN: We'll let you go here, but before we do, can you tell our listeners, you're at the American Council on Education, obviously, but you've got a new role.

LORELLE ESPINOSA: I do. I have a new gig. I am starting at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation in late July and I will be directing their programs on DEI and STEM higher education. If any of your listeners know me, know my work, you'll know that diversity and STEM is a topic that I've worked on most of my careers, so I feel like I'm a bit full circle now and going back home to [LAUGH] DEI and STEM. I'm really excited. I can't wait to start, and, you know, it'll be another avenue by which to pursue change, which is really exciting to me.

PAUL FAIN: Well, good luck in that. We'll want to keep in touch, and thanks so much, Lorelle.

LORELLE ESPINOSA: Thanks so much, Paul.

We're going to take quick break now. Please stick with us. We've got more to come.

All right, I'm speaking with Johnny Taylor. Johnny, thank so much for making time for me.

JOHNNY TAYLOR: Glad to be here, Paul.

PAUL FAIN: So a big understatement to say that we're seeing a lot of troubling data about the impact, particularly on people of color, both in their education and training, and in the workforce. What are some of the trends, the data points that you've seen that are most alarming right now?

JOHNNY TAYLOR: So there are two that stand out. And as you pointed out, there are many, but the two that stand out now, and one if more immediate, that is, and we jokingly kind of say in the African American community particularly, we say when American gets the flu, we get the pneumonia, or if America gets a cold, we get pneumonia-- but the point is whatever is happening in the rest of America is even worse and multiplied in terms of its effect on Black America, for all of the reasons that we know. And frankly, that's the root cause of a lot of what's going on, the social unrest that we have. You know, I'll have to get off into that...

But I for one am confident that this is a lot bigger than police brutality. A lot of the frustrations that are playing themselves out are because of a lot of inequities, a sense of lost opportunities, that are really making people kind of frustrated as they experience the American dream, or at least attempt to experience it.

So I think the most immediate challenge is that minority-serving institutions, HBCUs in particular, were already under-resourced. And I'm talking financial resources, human resources, by the way, and so from a faculty, from an administrative standpoint, etc., there were some challenges there. And so what that has done, even technology infrastructure, the number of our schools , when I was the president and CEO of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, where the entire campus in 2017 was not wired, where you would just assume in 2020 that every college campus had the infrastructure necessary to compete for grants and to service their clients. And they just didn't, you'd be surprised.

So the immediate problem is they didn't have the resources before and now they surely don't, and a result, they are, and often times even when competing for students, the student who says, listen, I can go to this majority institution, which can provide me a better, frankly, higher quality remote education, versus my HBCU that I love, and I love my teachers, but they're not trained at it, don't have the infrastructure...

We are losing students, just bottom line, because the students are consumers increasingly of higher ed, and they're saying, if I'm going to spend that money, then I want the results. And while I'd love to

support a black school, I want the school that I can get the best return on my investment that hopefully will lead to a job. That's number one.

The longer term concern for HBCUs is sort of related to that, but it's right now when other schools are as a result being able to invest, you're trying to catch up, and then employers, who are in an environment that's not 3.5 percent unemployment but is 14 percent unemployment, can now be more selective. If you think is was bad before, we don't visit these minority-serving institution campuses because of yield, imagine what the situation is now, when 30 million people are in the market looking for jobs, I don't need to do any campus visits, right? And I surely don't need to visit your campus now, because the talent is plentiful.

So I think you have a longer-term problem, which is going forward, you'll have an even tougher time making yourself attractive, at least in its current state, to employers. And in the short-term is how you going to make yourself attractive to students?

PAUL FAIN: So looking beyond HBCUs and MSIs, obviously, you raise a good point about existing inequity in our society and resource problems that are only likely to get worse, unfortunately, for that sector. And yet the sector does do better than the rest of higher ed in certain ways in preparing students to enter the workforce. What are some of the lessons that you'd like to see the rest of higher ed taking away from MSIs and HBCUs, and do you see an urgency there at this point?

JOHNNY TAYLOR: Yeah, three things that I think HBCUs, amongst a host of other things, but namely they were very student-centered. And not just student-centered from the perspective of providing nice dorms and nice events because they had budgets, but the nurturing and the focus on the student, taking students where they are and taking them to some desired state. So a focus on students, which is a very personalized experience, is incredibly important, and I know HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions have the ability to do that in a way that large institutions, particularly...they just don't do that. They don't have to do that, by the way, so they have not done it. And with a society that's becoming browning and graying at once, in the future, that is your future student, right? And so you've got to do that better.

The second thing that I think the minority-serving institutions, including HBCUs, do and have done particularly well, is about inclusion. So it's not just diversity. Diversity is about getting different people together. Got it. Almost anyone can do that if they choose to do it, and the majority of institutions better over the years, but they've not been able to deliver on the inclusion side, the sense of belonging

once you get there. So sure, I'll go there, I'll labor through these four years and get a degree, but I have no fondness, no sense of that was a great experience. And so that's what majority institutions don't deliver on that HBCUs do deliver on.

And then the third area is ultimately, it's about and it's really tied to... I'm going to say a third area, but it's an extension of the second area, and that is this sense of fondness. You know, Gallup and Strada did some research that talked about whether or not when you ask students, would they either go back to their institution? Do they regret? It was essentially a study around regret. I don't know if that's the language they used, but it's about regret. And HBCUs fared very well. HBCU graduates, if you remember, there were headlines about that HBCU alums have a far more favorable sense and less regret than mainstream institutions do. So I think that's the third thing that they've got to do well is somehow you could learn how to reduce the level of regret, with not just minority students but all students, because that is what was the major aha! moment out of the Strada education report.

PAUL FAIN: Absolutely. I'm glad you brought that up. So again, you straddle hiring and higher ed in a pretty interesting way. You mentioned the problems that were there before we were 3 point something employment, now we're 14 and going up. But, you know, I did feel, at least episodically among big employers , particularly in tech, there were some sincere efforts to diversify and get creative in the talent acquisition. Do you see that sustaining as there's a scarcity of jobs?

JOHNNY TAYLOR: It's going to be hard. I mean, I might was well be as blunt as I can be. A lot of that, not just racial minorities, and gender, and all of that, but even the work we were doing with untapped pools of talent around age and the formerly incarcerated, which, you know, overly indexes black and brown disproportionately, I think we did that because we were in an ultra-low unemployment environment. I'm not so sure that continues at the same level, because a lot of organizations are not hiring right now at the levels, in fact, many of them are still, we're expecting the second leg to drop in terms of this, because we thought 2020 or 2021 was going to lead to a recession, even without COVID, right? So we think COVID may just lead to an extended one. And so we were already seeing some softening in hiring, frankly, and I think this is not only going to make it worse.

But here's something that I hope we get to talk about, and that is the longer term view for higher ed, period. Like, and especially, we have a birth-rate problem that started in 2000, fewer people, and we were all talking about this when I was in higher ed, that fewer traditional students are coming into the workplace. There's also a narrative problem, that because of student loan debt topping 1.2, .3 trillion dollars, people are like over it and for the first time, I think, in modern history, questioning whether or not there is value in achieving, in earning and obtaining a college degree. Frankly, at any cost. I heard

Tim Cook and Ginni Rometty, IBM and Apple, say 50 percent of their new hires last year didn't have college degrees.

So there is a total sea shift right now in terms of how the value of a college degree, coupled with debt, coupled with a birthrate problem... I'm not sure this bodes well for higher ed, period. And we as employers are simply responding. That means that the 18-year-old in times past would have gone to college for four years, and we had to begin recruiting them in year two or three of their four-year journey.

If that person has said, I not going to college at all. Recruit me out of high school. I'll go to college or community college, or some online college part-time. Meanwhile, I get job experience with you, so I can finish with a debt, no degree, and work experience? Guess what, higher ed, your value proposition, with the exception of the truly sort of elite institutions where some portion of the population is going to want to pay to have a Harvard-Yale degree... I mean it is what it is, right? But broadly, the industry and the sector could be in trouble. And we as employers for so long sort of drove the demand for you because we required the college degree, and now that we're not requiring it, I'm not so sure you have a lot of offer.

PAUL FAIN: You know, again, glad you brought that up. The Strada data that we're reporting on this week shows, obviously, the impacts of job loss, hours lost, are much worse for people of color, Latino and black Americans, but they're also likely to say, I'm going to need more training to get back in. And then when you ask them what they're looking at, what they're interested in, it's more likely online, community college and employer training than four-year college. Is that a moment for employers to seize on too, to maybe partner with community colleges more? They're already doing it, I know, but is there some synergy there that you could see between upstart providers and employers?

JOHNNY TAYLOR: Oh my gosh, that is the moment, right? And, frankly, I think the traditional four-year colleges and universities are going to have to look to that too. So community colleges, I was just yesterday, I gave a talk to the American Association of Community Colleges, AACC, and spoke to a group of community college presidents. They know it. They know this is their moment.

In the past, I don't have to tell you, community colleges were like where the kids who couldn't go into colleges went. Or the kids who get into four-year colleges but wanted a discount for the first two years, and then they spent the last... So now they're saying, wait a minute... We're going to go directly to employers. We're going to respond to their needs. Some of them are more vocational in training, you

know, welders, less technical jobs, and technical--I'm only using that term in a more generalized sense. But also they're saying, we can also provide that continuing education, because jobs are changing so much now. And that wasn't the case so much in the past. In the past, you got a degree and you could kind of rely on being that engineer for 30 years. And you'd have some skilling up. But now we've seen the paradigm shifts occur where the job you have today either won't exist five years from now, or will be so significantly different that the education you received is not relevant.

So this life-long learning thing, community colleges are jumping into it. Online providers are jumping into it and saying, you don't need the dorms. You don't need any of that stuff. Come to me at a fraction of the cost and I'm going to give you highly relevant skills, that you can now take back to solve for the skills gap. That is real, and the community colleges, I can tell you, are all over it.

PAUL FAIN: So I've asked you some pretty broad questions here. Anything I didn't ask that you want to add before I let you go here?

JOHNNY TAYLOR: Yeah, I think one of the things that concerns me most, and I don't think enough people are talking about this, is that the shutdown of America's schools, K through 12 schools as a result of COVID, no one sees how that is going to play itself out in the next four or five, seven, eight years, as those students, many of whom, particularly black and brown students who were already educationally challenged because of their socioeconomic status, you know, college-going status of parents, everything...

You've got some kids who, while the schools did their best to provide continued education for this semester, let me tell you, a lot of those kids literally have been on summer vacation since February. And what that means for the quality of student coming into college, fast forward that, someone who's in the sixth grade now, six years later, they show up on my college campus. They are underprepared. So higher ed hasn't really thought about how I'm going to deal with the kid who is not ready... Frankly, they were likely to be unprepared anyway, but, now, my God, they're behind! And so how am I going to do that in four years, in a cost effective way?

This is what's coming is, it's very scary to me. And I think higher ed needs to think about in the short-term what are we going to do, but the problem that's coming is you're going to, your new class, there's a very good chance...

And again, I'm not talking about the elite institutions. The top 100 institutions in this country where my child is going to go to school, she's going to be fine because I've hired tutors and all of good stuff, and so everything's fine.

I'm talking about the overwhelming majority of America's students who have lost a semester. And then, they didn't just lose a semester. This would be different, Paul, if they lost the fall semester, and then we came back in the spring. But you're talking about spring and summer. We already knew there as summer loss.

Right? We know that concept before this. So you didn't lose summer, you lost a year. You're going to bring kids back in August. I'm hearing in some parts of the country because of the fear of a double spike, they're going to continue online education through the fall, which means a total year out of a kid's education. This is disastrous.

And I don't think there's enough of a conversation being had about what you're going to need to do when that kid shows up on your college campus. And you can't just say that I won't admit them, because there's already a shortage of students coming to college anyway because of the birthrate problem. Higher ed has got to figure out now what it's going to do. Because the PK to 12 problem is going to become their problem very soon.

PAUL FAIN: Good points. Johnny Taylor, thanks so much for sharing your time and expertise. I've learned a lot and I hope we can keep in touch as these challenges play out in coming months.

JOHNNY TAYLOR: Well, I appreciate you, my friend, and we talk about the two E's here at SHRM--education and employment. They're inextricably intertwined. More and more, and if we can't have these conversations, employers are going to start doing it themselves. That's the real take-away.

I was talking to a CEO of a major company. It was IBM, and they said, listen, we're going straight to high schools. We're going to by-pass your system altogether. So this is... And it's not because we don't value higher education. Most of us are products of the traditional higher education system. It's just that we need the talent fast and we need them skilled. And so we're going to go around you if you haven't figured out how to do it.

PAUL FAIN: That was the story before all of this. And it's even more so now, so we'll be coming back to SHRM and you a lot.

JOHHNY: Thank you, Paul. Appreciate it.

PAUL FAIN: Take care. Cheers.

JOHNNY TAYLOR: You as well. Bye-bye, cheers...

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PAUL FAIN: That's it for this episode of The Key. Thanks for listening. I'll be back next week and I'll continue to cover these issues in coming weeks and months. Catch you later.

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VOICE: This episode is sponsored by the ECMC Foundation, which supports building a postsecondary education system that works for all learners through its grant making focus areas of college success and career readiness.