

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

RE-EMERGING FROM COVID-19:
WHY CHILDREN AND CITIES NEED PLAY NOW MORE THAN EVER

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PARTICIPANTS:

Welcoming Remarks:

HELEN SHWE HADANI

Fellow, Center for Universal Education, Global Economy and Development
Fellow, Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking,
Metropolitan Policy Program, The Brookings Institution

Keynote Remarks:

THE HONORABLE BILL PEDUTO

Mayor, City of Pittsburgh

Panel Discussion:

JENNIFER VEY, Moderator

Director, Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking,
Metropolitan Policy Program, The Brookings Institution

LYSA RATLIFF

Chief Executive Officer

KABOOM!

RIGO RODRIGUEZ

Board President, Santa Ana Unified School District
Chair, Chicana(o) and Latina(o) Studies Department
California State University, Long Beach

YASIN ÇAĞATAY SECKIN

Professor, Istanbul Technical University

Head of Parks and Recreation, Istanbul

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING

1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 600

Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. HADANI: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, everybody, and thank you so much for joining us today to talk about the critical role of play and playful learning as we start to emerge from COVID-19.

I'm Helen Hadani and I'm a fellow with the both the Center for Universal Education, or CUE, and the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking.

For those of you who aren't familiar with our centers, the Center for Universal Education generates evidence to impact policy and practice, to improve both the quality and access of learning for children across the world. We strive to ensure that every child, no matter where they are living, has access to quality learning opportunities that they need to thrive in school and work and in citizenship.

And the Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking is advancing a new integrated practice to build more connected vibrant and inclusive communities, by inspiring public, private, and civic leaders to makes transformative place investments that have both social and economic benefits.

I'd like to take a moment to thank both the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Anne and Bob Bass. The Bernard van Leer Foundation provides generous support to the Center for Universal Education that makes our work possible. And Bob Bass is a trustee of the Brookings Institution and provides generous support to the Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking.

We find ourselves at an exciting and hopeful moment as millions of citizens are getting vaccinated across the world and children and teachers are starting to return to their classrooms and their schools. While the pandemic has been life-changing in countless ways, it has also provided an unexpected opportunity for us to innovate and rebuild our education systems to better support all students. This means supporting new and creative ways to think about learning and education beyond the classroom, including in shared and public spaces. And one innovative approach for bringing education into the public realm is playful learning landscapes, which marries developmental science with placemaking to address learning inequalities and bring educational elements to spaces and places where families regularly go, including supermarkets, laundromats, bus tops, and libraries.

The Playful Learning Landscape Initiative at Brookings is a joint venture between the Center for Universal Education and the Bass Center and is part of a broader movement to transform

everyday spaces into powerful learning opportunities for children and families. At the policy level, Brookings is bringing together city-level decision makers and stakeholders in a community of practice to support the design and uptake of evidence based playful learning landscapes practices and policies. And in collaboration with Temple University, through the leadership of Professors Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek and Roberta Golinkoff, and in partnership with the Playful Learning Landscapes Action Network, based in Philadelphia, we are working to re-imagine cities as supportive learning ecosystems to support children and families in ways that produce both tangible and measurable outcomes for children and the cities and communities where (audio skip) have Mayor Bill Peduto from Pittsburgh kick off us today with some keynote remarks.

Pittsburgh, known to many as "Kidsburgh," has a long and rich history of supporting families and children and those who care for them. Following Mayor Peduto's remarks we will have a lively discussion moderated by my colleague, Jennifer Vey, and three city and community leaders that share our passion for the power of play, for learning, and for healing.

We welcome your questions during the discussion via Twitter using #LearningLandscapes, or via email by sending your questions to events@Brookings.edu.

And now it is my distinct pleasure to turn things over to Mayor Peduto.

MAYOR PEDUTO: Hi. I'm Bill Peduto, the Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh.

In Pittsburgh we have a long tradition of working to create new programming for children and using innovation in order to be able to teach. It goes back even further than Mr. Rogers. And we continue to find innovative ways to remake learning.

If we learned something through 2020, through the global pandemic, it was that parks and open space are absolutely great equalizers for all people. They are free, they are open to everyone, no matter what your age or what your background. And for our children, they prove to be a respite from a global pandemic.

But the other thing that we realized is that our open spaces throughout our city can be re-imagined and rethought of in different ways in order to provide healthy opportunities for our youngest residents. That's why in Pittsburgh we are proud to work with groups like Brookings in order to be able to re-imagine how open space and open areas of public space can be even further utilized in order to create

opportunities for our youngest residents.

We have many challenges as we come out of a post-COVID world, though we have many opportunities to make things even better. Join us and other cities as we discuss those ways of how open space and public space can be utilized for all of our residents.

MS. VEY: Many thanks to Mayor Peduto for highlighting the importance of urban play spaces and the need for cities to center children in their recovery from COVID-19. And thanks to all of you for joining us today.

I am Jennifer Vey, I'm a senior fellow with the Metropolitan Policy Program and I am the director of the Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking at Brookings.

So by now it certainly seems to be quite an understatement to say that COVID-19 has disrupted nearly all aspects of our lives, including in varying ways and to varying degrees, how we work, how we shop, how we play, and how we connect with family and friends.

It has also sparked a lot of creativity in our cities and regions. For example, communities around the country have transformed sidewalks and other public spaces to accommodate outdoor dining and open streets to better support walking and biking and other kinds of recreational activities. Meanwhile, thousands of local education systems were pretty much forced to adopt and implement new innovations to support school based learning. But COVID-19 is also generating new interest in innovations and efforts that complement traditional schooling, with a particular focus on how to provide new opportunities for children in disinvested neighborhoods that were hit particularly hard by the pandemic's health and economic impacts.

Of course, long before COVID we had large educational achievement gaps, gaps that start pretty early. In fact, achievement gaps between cognitive and social skills of middle-income children and their peers from low-income families emerge as early as age three. This sets the trajectory that these children from under-resourced areas to poor academic performance over time.

Early childhood education is one of the most powerful mechanisms for bridging these gaps and increasing social mobility and economic opportunity. Recognizing this, for years policy makers have focused on a whole range of top down reforms to improve formal learning environments. That is, through investments in preschool and particularly in K-12 educational systems. But such strategies, while

obviously vital, ignore the 80% of waking time children spend outside the classroom with their families, a percent of time that in so many communities around the country reached 100% this last year. Because of this, quality childcare, given our interactions which occur outside of the school walls, are one of the most important factors for early development.

Unfortunately, children experiencing poverty just have fewer opportunities to engage in these interactions, as families living in lower resource environments often have low quality public infrastructure and public spaces, less access to high quality childcare, and more limited extracurricular activities than those in higher income communities. Those disparities are also particularly wide among different racial and ethnic groups, given that Black and Brown children are far more likely to live in high poverty neighborhoods than non-Hispanic white children. Evidence is already showing that related learning gaps among these groups have only widened during this past year.

So all this speaks to the really urgent need for local and state and national leaders to advance bold solutions that foster long overdue investment and opportunity within disinvested communities, and to do so in a way the benefits existing residents, including children, within them.

So playful learning landscapes can be part of such a strategy. By addressing educational inequity through a holistic and community based model, this approach sets in motion transformative and structural change at the individual level, at the family level, and at the whole community level, that broadens that economic opportunity and encourages and fosters social mobility. Through fun and interactive installations located in everyday spaces that families frequent, some of which Helen mentioned, bus stops and supermarkets, and laundromats, playful learning landscapes encourages the development of critical skills and allows children from under-resourced neighborhoods to enter more formal schooling on a more level playing field and really to continue to thrive in school and beyond.

So, you know, of course there is no silver bullet for reducing inequality, but playful learning landscapes offers a powerful solution with a whole wide range of outcomes. In the first place, it fosters a mindset shift among caregivers and communities around the role of caregiver and child interactions and play and fostering learning, including literacy and numeracy and spatial skills.

At the same time, playful learning installations, particularly those that are in the public realm, promotes social interaction among neighbors and just makes cities more vibrant and livable for all

residents.

So today we're very fortunate to have a group of panelists who are going to talk about how they are integrating playful learning efforts in their communities and some of the challenges that they face in scaling that kind of work. We are also going to get their thoughts on how, as communities are working to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, people across the fields of child development and education and health and urban planning and design can together be re-imagining just where and how children and families learn together.

So I'd like to welcome Lysa Ratliff, who is the chief executive officer of KABOOM!, Rigo Rodriguez, who is the board president of the Santa Ana Unified School District and the chair of the Chicana(o) and Latina(o) Studies Department at California State University, Long Beach. And he is also a founder and active member of the Santa Ana Early Learning Initiative, which I know we're going to hear a lot about today. And Çağatay Seckin, who is both a professor at Istanbul Technical University and also the head of parks and recreation for the city of Istanbul.

So, let's all dive in.

So what I want to do is I want to start by just learning a little bit about each of you and your work in this space. So, you know, basically let's talk a little bit about just what you're each doing around playful learning and what are the challenges that you're trying to specifically address through these kinds of efforts.

So let's go ahead and start with Lysa. Lysa, I know KABOOM! is really focused on play space equity, working in communities all around the country to help build new and improved play infrastructure rooted in the knowledge that play is just vital to kids and their physical and emotional health.

Can you talk a little bit about the history and the work of KABOOM!, and especially your Play Everywhere Initiative? How and in what circumstances does KABOOM! incorporate aspects of playful learning into your installations and play structures, both in playgrounds, but also in the public realm?

MS. RATLIFF: Absolutely. Thank you, Jennifer. And it's just such a pleasure to be here.

I'm Lysa Ratliff; I'm the CEO of KABOOM!. And just as a backdrop, we are an organization that has been primarily known as one that builds playgrounds. So for the past 25 years

we've been bringing communities and kids together to design, envision, and then build their very own play space. We've used volunteers historically to do that work. And so there really is a sense of cohesion and connectivity through how we work. And I think you've raised a lot of these points in your opening. You know, we exist because there is a history in this country of racialized disinvestment. And so the work that we do is really trying to address the inequities that exist because we have disinvested throughout the history of our country in specific communities.

And so there are three big focus areas for us and one is equity. You know, we want to achieve play space equity. We I think all look around at these amazing fantastic learning rich environments, we want that to exist for everyone. Community, it is important to us that community be the loudest voice at the table, so we work really hard to listen to and respond to whatever is special and unique about that community in terms of what they might need, what might be missing, and then what's possible for them because of the assets that exist in that community. And then place is the third piece. You know, we just want to make sure that we're creating safe learning rich environments that really invite and encourage kids to come out and play. I mean you mentioned that more than 80% of kids' time is being spent outside of the classroom, and so, I say this often, that the currency for kids is play, and so we want to make sure that we are investing in place in a way that focuses on understanding the problem first and then being able to scale it and then creating space where they can learn outside of school.

I want to share my screen, because I think some of the images that I have really speak much better than the words that I can use around how we've adapted over the years. So where we've historically been known for our playgrounds, we have had to adapt along the way to make sure that we are being responsive to making sure that all communities, all kids, have easy access so play is the easy option, so that learning through play is the easy option.

So over time we've done things like partner with (inaudible) to start including panels on our playgrounds. But then a couple of years ago we launched what we call Play Everywhere, which is still — you know, same thing, playful learning landscapes, which is really using our community asset-based model for communities to come together and re-imagine their space.

Really looking at places like vacant lots, bus stops, laundromats, you know, where families and kids are spending a lot of time, but they're not necessarily having that time to be able to

learn. And so here this is -- I'm sharing my screen, here we go -- like just walk through these images with me for a second because they're magic. So, you know, looking here, this is what I'm talking about. These are the everyday spaces that we're used to where families often spend a lot of time. I know I spent a lot of time at laundromats. I was reflecting with a colleague the other day that as a little girl I would -- I'm horrified to say this out loud, but I would play in laundromats by getting in the dryer and having my friends spin me around in a circle -- Rigo is feeling me here -- but spin me around in circles. And now, as a mom and advocate of safe playful learning, I am horrified by that thought. And so for us it's really important to make sure we're going to where kids and families are to create safe spaces, learning rich environments. So looking at these bus stops and train stations and vacant lots and re-imagining them with communities so they look more like this.

So the one with the little kiddo who is kind of doing a handstand. That's a playful bench in Miami. The middle one, you can't quite see it, where there's the white structure, that is a bus stop that is a huge swing. The one on the right is right in front of a school. It's where the kids catch the bus. It's Brightmoor Runway, where kids are now running along the path and getting their time on that little digital sign out there. You'll see learning elements in the bottom where there's numbers and racing. This one here, this is in Mount Clemens, Michigan. This stairway was re-envisioning the stairway where there's learning elements. You see the map there. Apparently there is a secret message in those stairs that I'm too stubborn to ask what it is because I want to figure it out, but there is a secret kind of encoded message within the stairs for kids to even look further beyond the map, beyond the colors, beyond the physical activity, beyond the connectivity that happens while they're learning with whatever caregiver they're with.

This is in Lexington, Kentucky. It's a transit center and it is an incredibly busy hub where families are spending a lot of time. And you look at that one photo that lacks color, that lacks anything that invites kids. They re-envisioned their space so that there's puzzles and mazes and so while kids are waiting for their transit or their bus, they are able to play and learn with their families.

A couple of more here. This is Atlanta at MARTA station. It's an underpass there just re-envisioning -- again what would normally be down time and very boring -- re-envisioning it as a learning rich playful environment.

Miami, this space was designed by the kids, like many of these. I'm sharing this because it's the vacant lot. And so you imagine a lot like this that would attract a lot of crime normally, but when you re-envision it and you put these learning elements and colorful spaces, it says kids belong here, fun stuff is happening here, learning is happening here, and so crime is not happening here because this is where kids come to play.

Just I think there's maybe one or two more here. This one is lovely. This is Rochester, New York. It's a library. The kids wanted to make the outside of the library more engaging, so they brought the full storybook concept outside. And so you see the entryway not just invites people into the library, but really brings the stories and books to life. The path at the bottom is a storybook path that wraps around the library.

And that's it. Let me stop my share. But there was no words that I could speak that would really start to illustrate how we've had to adapt our model where you, you know, envision playgrounds where it's almost like a destination where kids go and families go, which is absolutely important. You need to make sure that those are in our schools, in our communities. But we needed to adapt to make sure that we were bringing play to communities where kids were to make play the easy option and allow them to learn through that play.

And so we've done more than 300 of those installations. No two look alike because they are truly designed by the community and with others that are in that space.

So, you know, for us that's kind of been our evolution and we know -- well, I think all of us know what happens through play, the learning that can happen both physical, academic, you know, we learn to negotiate relationships, we learn to take our first risks, we learn to do math problems and decipher logic and literacy in learning. That all can happen through literacy rich learning places. The trick is making them more accessible to kids in communities.

MS. VEY: Thank you so much, Lysa. And I just loved all those images. You're right, I mean it's really hard to almost, you know, wrap your head around a lot of this until you actually see it in action and so many of these photos you actually see the kids. And I especially liked the one with the running because my family has been known to actually try that on streets where they have the speed limit signs up for cars and seeing if it actually works for running. So it's great that somebody actually figured

out how to do this for kids in the public realm. It's really neat.

All right, I'm going to turn over to Rigo. So you're a professor. You're also president of Santa Ana's School Board, which gives you a really great perspective on these issues, but you're also really involved in the Santa Ana Early Learning Initiative.

So can you tell us a little bit about how SAELI came to be, who does it serve, and what are some of your key goals?

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Sure. Thank you, Jennifer.

Again, my name is Rigo. And I am so glad that Lysa started this off because those images are powerful. They're powerful in the sense that they give us possibilities that unless you know about these playful learning landscapes and these concepts, then at the local level, here in Santa Ana and in other cities, we just don't know that these options exist. And so I'm so glad that Lysa started first and that she shared some personal stories about the dryer, which reflects, you know, experiences that happen down here in Santa Ana as well.

Santa Ana is also an example of a racialized under-invested city, like many in the United States. And so others created a physical landscape, a built landscape for those of us who now live in these places and that these built environments, essentially that are park poor and have very few opportunities for folks and for our little ones, they essentially are robbing the childhood from our children. And so this is really — today's session is really important in that we can imagine innovative ways of making sure communities and our children have developmental opportunity.

So in terms of Santa Ana, SAELI, which stands for the Santa Ana Early Learning Initiative, started back in 2016 and we're basically a coalition of parents, nonprofit organizations, schools, elementary schools in this city that are dedicated to promoting the well-being of children 0 to 8, with an emphasis on 0 to 3. So 0 to 8, but 0 to 3 is really our entry point. We're a very active coalition.

Let me just say a little bit about our accomplishments and then I have more comments that I'll infuse in later questions. But just to give folks — so the — from 2016 to about 2019 our focus was really around school reform, not so much open space. We know that 80% of the kids' waking life is out in the community, but we really wanted to mention that the school system was operating well. And as a school board member I took the opportunity to make sure that my fellow board members were also

invested in early education. And I must say, there was no opposition on the school board to do this work. So folks that are school board members elsewhere, it's really hard to say no to children 0 to 5, especially because they're going to matriculate into your preschools and kindergartens and your teachers are going to love the fact that those kids come in much more prepared, right.

So in 2017 we gently pressured the district to adopt a comprehensive early learning framework, and that led to increasing our preschools from 16 to 27 of our 35 elementary schools. In those preschools we also increase the pay for our preschool teachers. We also reduced the class size for kindergarten and we also increased from half day to full day kinder, but we made sure that the full day included lots of play activities, so it's not just like hammering and drilling more, you know, math and -- but we did that, but it was through playful activities. And then we did extended day from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., parents could have their kids in our schools, again, with very thoughtful active learning, especially for the young ones. We also established wellness centers in all of our elementary schools where parents, even if their kids didn't go to those schools, they could still access those. And, lastly, we created a \$3 million 3-year initiative to incentivize creative innovative ways of connecting preschool, kinder, first, and all the way to third grade.

So we launched all this work and by the end of 2019, using the Early Development Index as our primary gauge -- I'll talk more about that assessment later on -- we were able to show that we were -- at least statistically reduced the child vulnerability in the target neighborhoods.

And so the last thing I'll say is throughout this whole time we heavily, heavily invested in parent leadership development, because what we wanted to do is make sure that those parents that were active in those -- in this case it's 13 schools -- that they became the anchor for our neighborhood leadership teams, because those same parents, when their kids finish elementary school, they're still in that neighborhood. We do all this investment in parent leadership development, but once their kids leave our schools, we don't care about them, right. But, no, what we thought is, no, let's invest in parent leadership because they remain in their neighborhoods and they can form a neighborhood leadership team. And I'll say more about what we've done there because with the neighborhood leadership team and those active parents, that's how we then bridged over to the playful learning landscapes in our parks, in our neighborhoods, etc.

So that's kind of a snapshot of the Santa Ana Early Learning Initiative, or SAELI.

MS. VEY: Great. Thanks so much. Wow, what just an amazing array of efforts that SAELI is really working to undertake.

So, Çağatay, I'm going to turn to you. You teach at the university, but also fairly recently became the head of parks and recreation for the city of Istanbul.

So what are your department's major ambitions around increasing play and learning through play, particularly in the city of Istanbul?

MS. SECKIN: Okay. Thank you, Jennifer.

Actually, one of the basic principles of our, you know, Play Istanbul concept -- actually, I would like to start with main focus for us, so I'm sorry.

Our main focus through the COVID-19 pandemic was establishing playful learning communities and to provide a new vision for play. And our priority as Parks and Recreation Department was increasing social awareness on the importance of natural areas and the need to protect ecosystem diversity in the city.

In this regard, digital tools on learning through play were an unbeatable part of our program during these challenging days when gathering in a physical environment was impossible. We organized several playful events in the team of sustainability, especially putting on focus learning sustainable development goals through children and adolescents.

Also, the need for a long-term approach for the public realm resulted in the Play Istanbul Initiative. What is Play Istanbul actually? Play Istanbul is a local government initiative established by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Departments of Parks and Recreation in 2020. It's a new model for local planning that determines outdoor play and learning through play. Model accepts recreation and play as the focal point for creating more livable city and happier Istanbul.

What we have to consider primarily in the planning for play is the good level of coordination within the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Departments and cooperation with the public and communities.

And another great issue for us during the pandemic was the establishment for orienteering activity in the -- some are spaces such as urban forest, Atatürk Urban Forest, which provides

a high sensory play experience because of the natural landscape and gives the opportunity to get in touch and learn basic ecosystem competence to children and individuals.

Based on increasing demand and interests, we aim to further develop orienteering crews in green spaces, as well as urban environment to create inviting recreation services for all users.

I would like to continue with Play Istanbul because one of the basic principles of our Play Istanbul concept is inclusion, it's very important for us. In this sense we address increasing awareness on the right to play and leisure. But we realize that not every district in Istanbul has the same opportunities. And spinning the game around the city will — don't be that easy when we confined it to playgrounds. For this reason, we started to meet with children by establishing mobile playgrounds with various equipment and playmakers where we can set up the game.

So we did it several places during the pandemic. And mobile playgrounds are prioritized by considering the districts, but there is a lot of need.

Enhancing consciousness on the right to participate in design and planning decisions and, most importantly, to include children in various ages in the process have been important points for our department.

I would like to give you a particular example actually from (inaudible) Park. It's very important for us. Maybe I can show you this video right now. Just a moment please. Excuse me. I'm sorry, I wasn't able to do that, so I will continue with the words.

What we aim is actually in (inaudible) is to enhance the attractiveness of our outdoor spaces and encourage children to go out and experience the physical environment and also to choose exercising instead of playing in front of the computer.

So we know that participation in decision making is particularly important in order to increase the sense of belonging, responsibility, tolerance, and relationship. In this regard, surprising playful learning landscape as hotspots that boost social interaction in the city is within our reach as well.

So considering all of this, our main objective on a Play Istanbul is to create a play culture within a playful, tranquil society and to change stereotypes around play and recreation in the city. In a Play Istanbul, play — according to our decision, play has no age, no gender, no constraints. So we would like to design spaces for everyone. So maybe I would like to put emphasis on another thing, the

challenges we experience regarding inclusion and access of disabled individuals to recreation and play services. And this is a very important thing and this has been one of the most challenging issues for us, to address communities while planning and designing green spaces.

Jennifer, if you don't mind, I would like to try one more time to show that video. Can you see that?

MS. VEY: Yes.

MS. SECKIN: Yeah? Okay.

(Video Playing)

Actually we are looking to children's park at (inaudible). We are trying to — actually we are trying to change (inaudible) and we would like to design with the children, this park, our departments, and our children from Istanbul. They get together and it's — started to design together with children. Actually, the name of this project, Children of Istanbul Are Designing Their Parks.

MS. VEY: And I think we might not be able to be fully seeing the video. It's not advancing, at least on my screen.

MS. SECKIN: I didn't hear you. I'm sorry.

MS. VEY: I don't think the video seems to be advancing for some reason.

MS. SECKIN: Okay. I tried to show you the video because on the video actually are students, are children from different schools that got together and they worked with their teachers or playmakers and they started to design some playground equipment. And then at the end of the story, they all designed this — maybe I can show some pictures. You see those pictures? Okay.

And they came together and they started to design their project with their — this is our mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, and these are our playmakers and those students. And those are — they designed all this park, all drawings with our architects and designers. And at the end of the project they built their designed. And this a very exciting project for us and we open the 23rd of April last year.

It's — how can I say — it's a big festival for us. The children stayed. And so we got together with our children and opened that park on that day and we designed it with community participation, especially children's participation.

Okay, that's all right now and maybe — I'm pretty sure I can say more words.

MS. VEY: Absolutely. No, thank you and thank you for sharing some of those photos. It's great to see kids actually getting involved in the design of these spaces.

MS. SECKIN: Thank you.

MS. VEY: So I want to pivot a little bit to talk about the impacts of COVID-19. I think all of you referenced them in one way or another, and I want to hear from you all how — you know, while all of your efforts pre-dated COVID-19 clearly, over the past 14 months how have you really seen the pandemic affecting opportunities for both learning and play?

We know in some ways many of the challenges of COVID-19 on play, but how has this also maybe opened up some new thinking, some new opportunities in the communities in which you work, or how have you — you know, what does this mean for you even moving forward?

So let's start this time with Rigo. How did the Santa Ana schools respond to COVID-19 and what were some of the disparate impacts on the communities served by this school? And then how in turn did this change SAELI's approach to its work? You know, what are some of the innovations in the school system itself regarding play and learning, but even outside of that, particularly in the public realm?

MR. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, so Santa Ana, in the context of Orange County down here in Southern California, Santa Ana was hit really hard by COVID-19. So when the stay and shelter order came down in March of 2020 by our governor, the parks were immediately closed and the schools were immediately closed, meaning that two places where children spend their time were closed. And we are one of the youngest cities in the country, meaning we have a larger proportion of younger kids, so we were disproportionately impacted. And we're also one of the most park poor cities in the country. So when you layer all of that you can see the disparate impact that closing schools and closing parks has on a city like ours.

In addition to that, Santa Ana is where many of the essential workers are located and where they live that serve the rest of the county. So folks who work in the grocery stores, people who work in other places that still involve — farm workers, for example — that still involve everyday work. We are also one of the most overcrowded. In other words, number of people per household.

And so the COVID-19 rates just shot through the roof in Santa Ana. And so school became first responders. So I as a school board president, along with my colleagues on the board,

focused on making sure we had a system of food delivery for our children seven days a week, through the summer. We had to make sure that our family and community workers -- I mentioned the wellness centers that we established. So we also hired family and community engagement workers. And so our wellness centers were closed, but then our family and community workers were linking parents and families to unemployment, resources, information about housing, because there was a lot of eviction happening at that time. So we became basically first responders.

But at that same time we invested in the platform, the distance learning platform. So we basically got Wi-Fi to our kids, meaning our families were also able to get access to Wi-Fi, which they didn't have before. And you'll see that's a really critical pivot point for us in what I'll say later, because we had to go to distance learning on a dime, right.

And then we also became one of the primary sources of information around social distancing, masks, that sort of thing, to be able to -- we essentially launched an educational campaign that really -- the responsibility was of the county to do that, but we basically just took it upon ourselves to really deal with the essentials.

And now, what we're also doing is we're coordinating the vaccination campaigns because the county -- and this is true in most cities in the United States, for underinvested cities, it's also where resources come to us last. And so we've been doing a lot of advocacy.

Now, having said that, like so how does that impact SAELI. Well, SAELI is a private-public coalition, right. So we're not the school system, we are a coalition. And so we were able to move a little bit more nimbly as well as shift gears quickly. So there's three ways in which we shifted gears. And all of these shifts happened on the basis of the virtual platform, right, because we couldn't meet face to face. So all those investments that the school did to make sure that our parents and our families had access to devices and to hotspots and that sort of thing, we then built on that so that we could keep our meetings going as -- and if you can see the virtual background, that's -- these are the parents that are involved in SAELI. We used to be able to meet together once a month, 125 parents, and really do coordination. Well, that was taken from under us, right. So this shift to the virtual platform was crucial, but that was enabled by a school district investment, if you're following me here.

And so three things, one is we began to coordinate our services virtually. So service

coordination was critical, but that's something we were already doing. We just shifted over to a virtual platform. But the second part is really new, and that is we started to focus on the co-design for playful learning landscapes using that virtual space as well.

So Dr. Andres Bustamante from UC Irvine, who has a lot of experience and background on playful learning landscapes, he got a grant and when -- he had gotten the grant prior to COVID -- so we were thinking how are we going to do this. And so about 35 to 40 of those parents that you see in the background have been involved in similar to what Play Istanbul is doing, but instead of involving the children in the design of playful learning landscapes, we're involving the parents. So at home they get their kits and so they develop their vision at home and then virtually they share it and then they talk and they learn. This is really important because often parents, particularly marginalized parents, are simply asked to do this and that, but they're never also invited to be creative themselves, right. It's almost like, oh, they're not kids, they're not going to be engaging in playful -- right. But no, the active creativity -- I think it was Lysa who said that, or someone, that it's all of us, it's not just contained to children. That was really -- that's probably the most innovative piece because I think through that process of creating images of what a playful learning landscape could look like is where we've begun now to go into our third innovative and last kind of strategy.

We have added to our service coordination, we've added an advocacy arm. So those same people that are involved in thinking about creative space are now involved in advocated to make sure that the city and the school district invest in these installations. And so we already have some wins. For example, there is a lot of work that the city is doing around Main Street Corridor. Well, they've already invited us to give ideas for an installation, right. So the city is already paying for that, so now we're infusing that into that project.

And then lastly, we also passed a bond called Measure I, about \$245 million. So we are now infusing playful learning landscape concepts into our modernization projects.

And I should mention one more thing. A fraction ball. So Dr. Andres Bustamante is basically teaching us how to turn a basketball court in our schools in to fraction balls. Instead of just shooting one pointers and two pointers, we actually create fractions. So one shot counts for a third or one half, right. And so all of that is being built into our schools. We're implementing that in one

elementary school. The idea is to scale that up across all of our elementary schools.

So I think that these three ways I think have been really instrumental in kind of shifting ourselves towards designing playful learning landscapes and then infusing them into our daily operations, both for the city and for the school district.

MS. VEY: Thank so much. And, you know, I really appreciate hearing about kind of the intersectionality between all of these things and how they've all built on each other.

So let's turn to Çağatay. Sort of the same thing, how did COVID-19 influence the Parks Department's efforts and Play Istanbul and the other efforts that you have going on? And if you can talk a little bit too about, you know, as you've been making these shifts what are you up against? What are you finding are some of the biggest barriers to just get what you want to get done in the city?

MS. SECKIN: You know, actually the biggest barrier is the financial barriers. But during this period, actually the common point, the common barrier for all of us maybe was the limits and the rules due to COVID-19.

At this point, nature is -- according to our approach, nature is actually the only play that can open its arms to us. So we tried the solution working in nature. We started, for example, a new campaign called Hug a Tree and Embrace Nature, for people to share their moments of contact with nature with everyone and observed that people's awareness about importance of nature has increased.

And also, you know, COVID-19 pandemic has evidenced the result with an increase in demand on public spaces, but the pandemic was characterized also as a period of opportunities to increase social awareness on the importance of public and green spaces and to develop fresh ideas and projects on the public domain. In this sense our department focused on engaging the communities through playful learning activities that put a strong emphasis on the sustainability of green and natural areas in the city.

What further developed during the pandemic is the idea that open green space could be as classrooms and potentially integrated the idea of mutual playful learning landscapes. For example, before the pandemic period we had a project for schools called A Great Breath in Recess. And we wanted while doing this project to create awareness about urban culture and nature love by touching the soil where students can plant something during their play time and (inaudible) and as you (inaudible) the

soil. This was also another important project during that period and we continued it during the pandemic period.

Also as COVID-19 is a very turning point on the importance of — as I told you before, the elements of green and natural spaces. First of all, it surely increased, as mentioned before, its demand on financial capacity for investment in green spaces. By spurring more investment in green spaces, COVID-19 made us realize more how accurate our goals actually were. So this encourages us to issue our goals regarding to play (inaudible).

To deal with this issue, we motivated on developing alternative ideas and implementation for recreation services to meet demand on open play activities within the city. For example, we created mobile play equipment and traveled around the city. We also accept play as a cultural experience, a learning tool that can touch the history and identify of the urban spaces.

And also, for example, one of our projects for disbursing play throughout the city is Gateway to Dreams. In fact, it's a project where we can make people smile when they look at a cheesy underpass below the concrete pile of the city. I will show a picture of that. Especially in this period, our main goal basically as to show that there are details that can make people happy. Right now I will show that picture immediately. Yes, this one is fine. Can you see this one? It's a bridge and we made some paintings on it. You see? We put some graphics. This is the previous and (inaudible). You all remember those figures from cartoons and — so we try to create some places like that, as I told you before, we would like to create some details to people that can make people happy.

So these are all done during the pandemic process.

MS. VEY: That's great. I love the pictures. Thank you for sharing them.

MS. SECKIN: Thank you.

MS. VEY: So, Lysa, you know, I know early on in the pandemic, you know, a lot of outdoor places were closed. KABOOM! was really trying to respond by providing guidance for how they could safely reopen around the country. But when you look for how has the pandemic real shaped KABOOM!'s kind of longer view of its approach. Has this really been a real pivot point for you all? And as you think about that long approach, if you could talk a little bit about what you think you're up against in terms of the barriers that you might face in implementing this vision.

MS. RATLIFF: Yeah, absolutely. And this time I'm really glad that Rigo and Çağatay went first because for us at the beginning of the pandemic it was important for us to step back and make sure that we were creating space for our community partners to focus on the immediate needs, the health needs, the food needs, all of the needs that they might have. And then we did, we spent that time bringing a task force together, knowing that the pandemic would only exacerbate disparities that already exist. So we brought a task force together to look at creating guidelines that would be accessible to anybody who needed them to be able to safely reopen. And we used those guidelines with some of our partners, like in Baltimore and in San Francisco, to help them safely reopen.

But, I mean, you talk about a pivotal moment in our history, and I would put that in all caps with about a thousand exclamation points. And so we have this 25 year strong history of doing great work with communities. We had been spending the past couple of years just really looking at the role that we would need to take in making sure that we were truly focused on achieving play space equity. And so we used a lot of the time thinking about how do we reorient ourselves around data, because it is like the ultimate currency. And so on the front end, how do we need to reinvest and build out our organization to make sure that we are using assessment to identify where we work so that we're closing disparity gaps and would hold us accountable and hold our partners accountable to going into community and staying until the problems was solved at the scale it exists.

And then on the back end, to really start to build the partnerships, the external partnerships that would allow us to measure the outcomes of our work. And that's showing up in all ways with playful learning landscapes, it's looking at the laundromats that -- the playful literacy rich spaces that we're doing in laundromats, to hire research to study the impact and outcomes of that space to look at the playful learning landscape that we're doing in Philly to go back to community and first do a baseline and then look at what has changed in terms of learning and cohesion in that space.

We also had been doing a little bit of government affairs work, but we doubled down on our government affairs work and we partnered with the independent sector to form an advisory group of more than 50 nonprofits and philanthropic peers that could really focus on advocating and advising federal government on investments that they would make in infrastructure, equity, civic infrastructure, because though we're doing great work without that federal prioritization of putting money into

communities through an equitable lens and prioritizing kids in those infrastructure decision, we wouldn't be able to meet the moment of moving the needle at the scale we need to.

We do a lot of other things. We adapted our verbal approach. Like I said, we had kind of stepped back to make sure we weren't overburdening communities, but when we went — we had been doing playful learning landscapes, play everywhere challenge in Western New York, in Southeast Michigan, and when we went to our partners there they said, no, don't stop. We need this more than ever. We need to make sure that this continues because our kids can't be indoors. We need to be creating these spaces out for them to either come back to or to have in the meantime. And so we continued our playful learning work in Western New York, Southeast Detroit, Bay Area, Philly, just to ensure that we were appropriately and continue to appropriately work with communities to address space needs for kids right now.

And then, lastly, you know, we had been spending years just really looking at all of these things that are special about us where we are amplifying community voice and we are engaging volunteers in our process, in a way that is meaningful, but we acknowledge that the volunteer engagement piece might be getting in the way of us focusing truly on impact. So we wanted to be able to position ourselves to do — moving on project level work and move toward on kind of program impacts that will work.

And so we spent this past year really reorienting ourselves around being able to do that. We still built 41 playgrounds last year, so we engaged virtually. I think, you know, everybody is using Zoom or the equivalent of. We engaged virtually with our communities to make sure they were still informing design, we engaged virtually with our volunteers, and realized just how important it was to continue to build those spaces because I think we all recognize that we have to have alternative solutions for our kids to still be able to be kids and to learn and to grow and to do the things that they need to in times where they're not able to go into confined spaces or into the classroom. So it was a big year for us. I could go on and on. It was a big year and I think a really important year as we think about truly being part of making an impact in partnership with our peers and with communities.

MS. VEY: Thanks so much.

And unfortunately I see that we are out of time. There's so many more questions to ask,

there's so much more we could talk about. Rigo, I know you have a lot to say about this issue around measurement and impact, for example, because you're doing a lot of it. And we'll look for other ways to get you to tell that story certainly.

But, first of all, thank you all so much for participating in this panel. I know I really learned a lot. It was so wonderful to hear about all the efforts that you're involved in towards just making our cities, making our spaces more playful and just to be better for children and families, which of course we know is so important as we're looking to recover from what's been a really long and difficult 15 months for everyone. So thank you all again, thanks to our audience for joining us, and keep following the work. We'll look for more opportunities to hear from our panelists, to do more writing. We're doing a lot in this space, so please continue to follow this work because there are a lot of exciting things going on around the globe. So thanks very much and enjoy your day.

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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