



# ON THE SCENE



The LiveWire panel (l to r): Moderator and Seattle Times Education Reporter Claudia Rowe, 2016 Washington State Teacher of the Year Nathan Gibbs-Bowling, Treehouse CEO Janis Avery and retired state Supreme Court Justice Bobbe J. Bridge.

## Set up to fail: LiveWire event shows the cost of not funding public education

The Seattle Times LiveWire event, “Set up to fail: The cost of not funding K-12 education,” drew 450 people to the University of Washington’s Kane Hall on March 22. The timely forum addressed how failing to adequately fund public education in Washington state costs us all. High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, rely on welfare and end up in the juvenile justice system, leading to incarceration, court costs and social services that burden our economy. A panel discussion with local experts and guest speakers showed how investing in our kids pays off – for them and for Washington.

The LiveWire series, presented by Microsoft, addresses vital issues impacting our region and its people. Principal sponsor University of Washington and event sponsor Education Lab provided additional support. Event panelists included 2016 Washington State Teacher of the Year Nathan Gibbs-Bowling from Lincoln High School in Tacoma, retired Washington State Supreme Court Justice and President/CEO of the Center for Children & Youth Justice Bobbe J. Bridge, and Treehouse CEO Janis Avery. Seattle Times Education Reporter Claudia Rowe moderated the panel.

Seattle Times Publisher and CEO Frank Blethen got right to the point in welcome remarks at a pre-event reception, stating, “We pride ourselves on being a progressive state, yet we tolerate a K-12 levy system that guarantees discrimination on the basis of race, class and geography.”



Mia Tuan, Ph.D., dean of UW’s College of Education, introduced the program, citing the college’s responsibility to “link high quality research with meaningful practices that create quality classrooms, schools, districts and systems.”

Two former Washington students shared their personal stories. Angel Gardner, Seattle’s Youth Poet Laureate, described being placed in 28 different foster homes, all with different school settings where her credits never transferred. She read her poem, “System Logic,” which included the line, “Now the textbooks are nowhere to be found/and homework is a privilege/like phone calls home and shoelaces.”

Omari Amili credits education with turning his life around after he served time in prison for bank fraud. “When I got out of prison in 2008, I was 23 years old with a GED, 30 felony convictions, no work experience and nothing going for myself. I realized that if I wanted to be successful, education would be key.” Amili recently earned a Master of Arts from the University of Washington-Tacoma.

Justice Bridge shared some startling statistics: Washington state spends an average of \$10,000 to educate a student each year, and \$20,500 to incarcerate one in juvenile detention facility. Education is “the best ROI

that I could possibly think of,” she said. There is “no better cost saving than having a child well-educated in an environment where he or she can be successful.” Bridge also noted, “School disengagement is the very best simple predictor of being involved in the juvenile justice system.”

Bowling said, “We’re gonna pay one way or the other – so we can pay to educate them, or we can pay to support them throughout their adulthood.”

The panelists agreed that social services and education must go

increase funding and target funding at our high-needs schools,” Bowling continued.

Avery cited specific concerns for foster kids, who have the lowest graduation rates of any segment of students in Washington state, including homeless students. Her organization, Treehouse, serves foster youth, who number about 10,000 in Washington and are challenged by school mobility and disproportionate suspensions and expulsions. Early intervention is key. Avery also stresses accountability: “It’s not just money. It’s what schools do with it.”

Proposed solutions included early childhood education, trauma-informed approaches, occupational training and extended school days, which Bowling says helped increase graduation rates at Lincoln to 87 percent from just 50 percent seven years ago. The extra time allows for mentorship and help with school work, college applications and AP enrollment.

“Set up to fail” concluded with a rallying cry to the audience: Call your legislator (find yours at <http://app.leg.wa.gov/districtfinder/>) to voice support for full public education funding. See the event video and read related coverage at [seattletimes.com/livewire](http://seattletimes.com/livewire).



An engaged audience of about 450 people attended the event.

hand-in-hand. Bowling said, “I have kids who have to decide, are they gonna go to school or go to work? I have kids who have pressure because childcare is unaffordable, so they get forced to stay home, so attendance is terrible.”

“We know that kids who struggle need more support, but our system provides the exact opposite ... If you gave me the McCleary magic wand, what I would do is I would

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## SEE AND BE SCENE



Seattle’s Youth Poet Laureate Angel Gardner shared her experience with homelessness, foster care and education.



Former Washington State Attorney General Rob McKenna and CEO of HumanPoint Amy Hedin.



LiveWire panelist, 2016 Washington State Teacher of the Year and co-founder of Teachers United, Nathan Gibbs-Bowling.



Anne Martens from the Gates Foundation with Arik Korman from the League of Education Voters.



LiveWire guest speaker Omari Amili, M.A. (center), with Shaun Worthy of IAMWORTHY (left) and Jahmezz Amili of Unlimited Income (right).



LiveWire panelist and CEO of Treehouse Janis Avery.



Seattle Times Publisher & CEO Frank Blethen, Microsoft Senior Director for US Citizenship & Public Affairs Joanne Harrell and Seattle Times Education Editor Linda Shaw.



LiveWire panelist, President/CEO of the Center for Children & Youth Justice and retired Washington State Supreme Court Justice Bobbe J. Bridge.