
EDUCATION FOR ALL: AN EVENING WITH AUCD

PROGRAM TRANSCRIPT

March 2, 2016

Liz Weintraub, AUCD

Hi everyone. I am so excited to welcome my friends, my colleagues, and others to AUCD's Education for All event! My name is Liz Weintraub and I am the advocacy specialist for AUCD and the host of "Tuesdays with Liz: Disability Policy for All." Before I introduce you to our performer for the evening, Blessing Offor, I would like to tell you why I am so excited about tonight's program. When I graduated from high school, I wasn't encouraged to go and get a future education. However, I feel so lucky that I found AUCD, because they believe in me, as well as other self-advocates. And that's what tonight is all about – believing in people.

...APPLAUSE...

Enough listening to me, let's get down to enjoying this wonderful evening!

Now I would like to introduce you to Blessing Offor. Blessing was born blind in his left eye and eventually lost vision in his right as well when he was very young. Turning to music and education, he found his calling as a performer and speaker – often discussing the transformative experience of his blindness and how he became who he is today. Blessing has taken his talent to great heights by becoming a second place contestant on NBC's "The Voice." Opening for legendary acts such as the Temptations, and was a Young Soloists Award recipient at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Please join me in welcoming Blessing Offor as he plays for us this evening!

...APPLAUSE...

Recording Artist Blessing Offor

(Singing) I hope you have a wonderful evening. You guys ready for a couple of songs?

APPLAUSE...

This is a favorite of mine, this is Adele! This song is so beautiful. (Singing) When the rain is blowing in your face, and the whole world is on your case, I could offer you a warm embrace, to make you feel my love. When the evening shadows and the stars appear, and there is no one there to dry your tears, I could hold you for a million years, to make you feel my love. I know you haven't made your mind up yet, but I will never do you wrong. I've known it from the moment that we met, no doubt in my mind where you belong. I'd go hungry, I'd go black and blue, I'd go crawling down the avenue, no, there's nothing that I wouldn't do, to make you feel my love. The storms are raging on the rolling sea, and the highway of regret, the winds of change are blowing wild and free, you ain't seen nothing like me yet. I could make you happy, make your dreams come true, no, there's nothing that I would not do. Go to the ends of the earth for you, to make you feel my love. To make you feel my love. To make you feel my love.

...APPLAUSE...

(Singing and playing piano) This is another one of my favorites. Bill Withers is one of my favorite writers. And I figured this seemed appropriate! This song is called "Lean on Me".

(Singing) Lean on me, when you're not strong, I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on, for, it won't be long, till I'm going the need somebody to lean on. If, there is a load, you have to bear that you can't carry, I'm right up the road, I'll share your load, if you just call me. Just call on me brother, when you need a hand, we all need somebody to lean on. I just might have a problem that you understand, (clapping) We all need somebody to lean on. If there is a load you have to bear that you can't carry, I'm right up the road, I'll share your load, if you just call me. Just call on me brother, when you need a hand, we all need somebody to lean on. I just might have a problem that you understand, we all need somebody to lean on.

Oo... (playing piano)... if you just call me. You just call, me, you just call me. You just call me. Just call me. Well you just call on me brother, when you need a hand, we all need somebody to lean on. I just might have a problem that you'd understand, we all need somebody to lean on. Just call me. Just call me. Just call me.

...APPLAUSE...

Listen guys, I see you — I'll see you guys a little later on in the program. But it's wonderful to be here, if there's anything I can ever do for any of you, please come say hi, I'm right over there in the corner. Have a good night.

...APPLAUSE...

Karen Edwards, AUCD President

»» Good evening, everyone. I'm Karen Edwards. I'm the President of The AUCD Board of Directors, and from the University Center for Excellence and Developmental Disabilities at Westchester Institute for

Human Development in New York. I want to thank Blessing Ofor for being here, and for sharing his wonderful gifts with us tonight.

...APPLAUSE...

On behalf of the AUCD Board, and my fellow directors from around the country, I want to thank our sponsors, our wonderful planning committee, and really, all the staff who helped to make this night what it is. And so, thank you also to our guests for joining us tonight.

As AUCD celebrates 45 years as a national organization, and as many of our oldest centers are marking their 50 year anniversaries, it's critical that we reflect on the role that our network has played to help open up inclusive education for millions of children with disabilities across the United States, and the territories.

We've done this for millions of children. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that we still have much work to do if we're going to realize the vision of laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Developmental Disabilities Act. I was delighted to serve on the team that hired our next speaker Andy Imparato —(Cheers) — as executive director of AUCD two years ago. Andy is a disabilities rights attorney who came to AUCD from the U.S. Senate Committee on Health Education, Labor, and Pensions where he served as Chairman Harkin's disability policy director.

Andy succeeded a very successful 14 year term by George Jesien. Andy's energy can be across the network, this event is one of the many things big and small that Andy has brought to AUCD, so please, join me in welcoming Andy to the podium. ...APPLAUSE...

Andy Imparato, AUCD

Thank you Karen. So I'm going to start by trying to get folks to quiet down. Shhhhh... Shhhhh. Thank you. I know people are here to network, I promise this is going to be a short program, but I appreciate folks quieting down.

First I just want to thank Karen Edwards the President of our board for that kind introduction. I feel very honored to be able to represent this network with support and guidance of the dedicated and talented board, and staff of AUCD. Since starting my job in October of 2013, I have visited about two-thirds of our Centers around the country, and we have in the room tonight Directors of university centers literally from every state and territory.

Everywhere I go I'm inspired by the values, vision, passion, and creativity that our hundreds of university—based leaders bring to their work. As someone who experiences recurring depression, I'm happy to say that visiting you all and seeing the difference you make every day is one of my strongest antidepressants.

...APPLAUSE...

Whether it is pushing for quality early intervention and preschool programs, promoting the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports for students with and without disabilities, cultivating parent leaders, conducting interdisciplinary leadership training for professionals who work with children, or partnering with community colleges and universities to open up higher education to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, AUCD's network members are helping to translate federal policy into reality so that more children and adults with disabilities can participate fully as valued integrated members of their communities.

Tonight's event is focused on our work we are doing in the area of education, because in many ways, this work is the building block on which everything else depends. We are grateful to our event planning committee, led by Merrill Freidman of Anthem, and Naomi Camper and Rodney Hood of J.P. Morgan Chase for convincing us to focus on education our first event. So we start with Education For All. Tonight we start with Education for All - yes, Education for All!

...APPLAUSE...

On behalf of the planning committee I'm delighted to report that we have raised over \$150,000 with this event, which ——APPLAUSE... —— which translates to over \$100,000 of unrestricted funds to support the mission of AUCD and our strategic goals. We are grateful to all of tonight's sponsors lead by Anthem, J.P. Morgan Chase, the Ruderman Family Foundation, Centene, the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities at the University of Colorado, Comcast/NBC Universal, EducationCounsel, the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, Walmart, Pam Smith, Will Ris, and Nancy Dorn. Please thank you me in joining these and all of the sponsors whose have been rotating on the screen for their generous support.

...APPLAUSE...

As Karen mentioned, AUCD turned 45 this year, and I've had the pleasure of attending 50th anniversary celebrations at some of our oldest centers in the last two years.

In the area of education, our country has come a long way in five decades, but we still have a long way to go. Federal laws like IDEA, which turned 40 last November, and the newly passed Every Student Succeeds Act do not implement themselves.

The labor force participation rates for young people with disabilities continue to lag far behind the rates for their non-disabled peers, and we have still have way too many students whose spend most of their day in segregated settings without access to the general curriculum. If we want every student to succeed, we need to invest in training for teachers, parents and administrators and make sure that schools are held accountable for helping all of their students progress academically, and prepare for college, and careers.

The AUCD network represents a 50-year investment with capacity in every state and territory to implement the high expectations in our federal policies. In order for our network to be successful we need strong partners in federal agencies like the Department of Health and Human Services, and I'm delighted that Ellen Murray, the Assistant Secretary from HHS and Aaron Bishop the Commissioner for the Administration on Disabilities are here with us tonight. ...APPLAUSE...

Along with former Harkin staffer Adrienne Hallett-Urban who's at the National Institutes of Health. We're also delighted to be joined by a number of folks from the Department of Education, including Assistant Secretary Michael Yudin, who I'm about to introduce, Deputy Assistant Secretary Sue Swenson, Chief of Staff for the Acting Secretary of Education and Department Assistant Secretary for Policy and early learning, and Libby Doggett from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Let's hear it for the folks in the Department of Education!

...APPLAUSE...

We're also honored to be joined by Chairman Tom Wheeler from the Federal Communications Commission; Chairman Sachin Pavithran from the U.S. Access Board who's at our Center at Utah State University; Claudia Gordon from the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, and Taryn Williams from the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the Department of Labor, both of whom serve as Chief of Staff for their respective offices. We also appreciate Maria Town from the White House Office of Public Engagement for her attendance tonight and the work she does every day to make sure we are part of the President's agenda. Let's hear it for all the Obama folks who are here!

...APPLAUSE...

So before I introduce Assistant Secretary Yudin, I want to give a quick shout-out to tonight's honorees, Wade Henderson from the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, and the team behind Understood.org. Wade has been a passionate voice for quality education for all children were several decades in Washington. We all owe him a debt of gratitude for leading the most diverse, and at times cantankerous, coalition in the nation's Capital. I had the honor of serving on Wade's executive committee when I was at AAPD, and I've always been impressed with the way Wade recognizes that disability rights are civil rights. ...APPLAUSE...

Wade will be retiring at the end of this year, so I'm delighted to have this opportunity to thank him for being a good friend to the disability community, and for using his gifts to open opportunities for our community in education, and so many other areas.

Our other honoree the team behind Understood.org is demonstrating how to use technology to connect families with information that will help them learn what they need to know to be good advocates for their children, with learning and attention related disabilities.

I've been so impressed by this campaign, a collaboration between 15 national organizations that has reached over 10 million families in less than 18 months. As we think about our efforts to disseminate what we know to key stakeholders, I think we can all learn from the approach of Understood.org. So without further adieu, it is now my distinct pleasure to introduce Michael Yudin Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, and his Deputy Sue Swenson from the U.S. Department of Education. ...APPLAUSE...

Last week Michael and Sue's unit released proposed regulations to address disproportionality of students of color in special education, and their overplacement in the more restrictive settings. ...APPLAUSE...

These proposed rules will help address bias towards groups of students and ensure students are receiving the services and supports they need when they need them. It is a great example of how the department is addressing the needs of all students, and we thank them for their efforts. Please join me in welcoming Michael Yudin and Sue Swenson to the stage.

...APPLAUSE...

Michael Yudin, US Department of Education

Hello everyone, how are you? It's great to be here. Thank you Andy, AUCD for your leadership! Oh my goodness-- I've had the opportunity to work with a number of UCEDDs over the years, and I'm consistently blown away and impressed with the work that they play the role they play in their communities is so unbelievably powerful. So thank you for your leadership. I'm thrilled to be here, to be even close to standing next to Wade Henderson and he's being honored tonight.

The first time I met Wade, I was working for Jim Jeffards back...15 plus years ago. I was absolutely blown away by Wade's commitment and dedication to equity, improving equity for education disadvantaged kids. Understood.org – outstanding! They are empowering parents every day.

Two minutes I'll speak and I'll turn it over to my buddy right over here. In the OSERS Office of Special Ed and Rehab Services, we have a set of values that guide our work: inclusion, equity, and opportunity. That drive our work every single day, promoting inclusion, ensuring equity, and creating opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

It starts with our babies. Just a few months ago we released jointly with the Department of Health and Human Services, some of you may know, a joint policy statement on inclusion for early childhood programs. Making sure that as states and communities are expanding access to high quality early childhood programs like, preschool, and Head Start, and childcare, that they have to be including kids with disabilities. And we provided a whole set of resources and research about it. It's really been powerful, and we're thrilled about that.

We know setting the trajectory for inclusion is so important from those early, early days. When we get to school, we know that kids need to have access to the general curriculum, regardless of the nature of the severity of the disability; we must make sure the kids have access to the general curriculum, they have the opportunity to make progress. On the 40th anniversary of IDEA, by the way, we released some guidance to ensure that IEP's are actually aligned to grade level standards. ...APPLAUSE...

So that all kids regardless of the nature or the severity of the disability, their IEP goals and their IEP's must be designed to enable these kids to be involved and to make progress in the general curriculum on grade level standards. We're really excited about that.

At the end of the day it's about equity for us, ensuring all young people have the opportunities to succeed. We know for kids with disabilities of color, the outcomes are far worse. We know kids of color are disproportionately identified as using special ed in a particular category, they're in self-contained settings or segregated settings. Kids with color were disability disproportionately identified with discipline patterns and excluded from the classroom. It was just published in the Federal Register the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to address significant disproportionality in special education. We're really excited about that.

Finally, inclusion, equity and opportunity -- I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the incredible opportunities that exist under WIOA. We have a new law, the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, to ensure that individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities and those with the most significant disabilities, have the opportunity to enjoy high quality competitive integrated employment. ...APPLAUSE... Yes, right, the opportunities are great! To ensure that individuals with disabilities not only get the supports and services they need, strengthening VR, strengthening transition, but that they can go into a one-stop system, a one-stop center and get the supports or the job training, or the educational training that they need to advance in their careers and their lives.

I'm thrilled to be here, and I'm going to turn it over to my partner in crime Sue Swenson. Everybody in this room knows Sue!

...APPLAUSE...

Sue Swenson, US Department of Education

It is such a pleasure to look out in the room and see all of these faces of people who really know what they're doing and have been doing it for a long time, and who are helping a new generation of people figure out how to do it. Michael, as you can see, is a very honorable man, and someone I'm very honored to work for, who never loses sight of kids who have the most significant disabilities and really intensive medical needs, all of the kids you serve, whether you're in a UCEDD or a LEND or an IDDRC. He is right there, thinking of the kids that you serve.

That's rare. It's easier to peel off these kids and say, "Well, we're just not going to deal with them. We're going to deal with those kids later." And it's so valuable to have someone whose heart is in all of this work and really making sure that our kids are there.

Raise your hand if you were born in 1975— or if you were at least alive in 1975? (LAUGHTER) Raise your hand if you had graduated from college already in 1975? Raise your hand if you were already Director at a program in 1975? (Laughter) Somebody's got their hand raised back there! I can't see who it is. (Laughter)

1975 was one of those years; you know in '73 we had the Rehab Act, in '75 we had IDEA, we had the DD Act with all of its parts. You all remember when your programs were funded in HEW [US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare]. When HEW broke apart you went with Health and Human Services, and we, in Education, were supposed to pay half of your costs. Whew! Lucky we didn't have to do that. But, the connection to Education has always been there. It's always a part of everything that you do. I think when I look at the history of education of children with disabilities in the United States, I see the crucible being: what did we do for children with developmental disabilities? Those children who were at first left out. Those children for whom IDEA was first written. The kids who were in church basements or being educated by their parents. YOU forged a path for how do we think about educating those children. That path frankly, is unique in the world. There aren't countries that have universal right to education that reaches as far as the United States does.

So you have so much to be proud of. I'm so proud of you and everything that you've done. I'm so proud to be even associated with, or even know so many of you. So thank you so much for what you've done. And keep doing it, and make sure that the younger people among you who will be leading soon, make sure that they understand the values, not just the techniques. Because the values is what you have driven, and what has made such a difference over the years. So thank you so much for including us.

...APPLAUSE...

Michael Gamel-McCormick, AUCD

One more hand for Sue and Michael. ...APPLAUSE... Thank you. Thank you guys. Hi, guys I'm Michael Gamel-McCormick, and I get to make the two wonderful introductions right now. But first, I want everybody in this room who worked on the Every Student Succeeds Act to put their hand up. There are Congressional and organization staff here who did a wonderful, wonderful job on the Every Student Succeeds Act. They need some real love, they need some thank yous. So please give it to them.

...APPLAUSE...

The person I get to introduce now actually did a lot of work on the Every Student Succeeds Act, as well as many, many, other things. I have the pleasure and the privilege of introducing Senator Chris Murphy

from Connecticut who has been a champion, really all of his legislative life, from the time that he was in the House and the Senate, in Connecticut, all the way up through his time currently in the US Senate.

Not only did he care for things like the assessment rule, the 1% assessment cap that we saw on Every Student Succeeds, but really working hard around the accountability provisions in that law that passed-- to the point where he got together with two other Senators and said, "We have to have a strong accountability system in place for students with disabilities."

He's a real champion. He cares about not just kids with disabilities, but disadvantaged kids, about preventing students from traveling through the school to prison pipeline. He has been great health advocate as well, and it is my pleasure to introduce him to you tonight, Senator Chris Murphy.

Senator Chris Murphy

Thank you very much, Michael. Thank you to everyone here for making time to come here today to support AUCD and all of their member organizations. I want to send a specific and special shout out to our Center at the University of Connecticut, led by Mary Beth Bruder who's here tonight. They do fantastic work. Congratulations to everything they do.

I want to thank Michael Yudin. He is making a difference, every single day on the ground. All of us who pushed him through what was an incredibly torturous painful confirmation process are so proud that he is there doing great work on behalf of children all across the country, but specifically those with disabilities.

I want to take the liberty of telling you one quick story before I hand out some well-deserved awards today. To the extent that I have dedicated a big part of my Senate career working on behalf of kids with disabilities, it's because my wife, Kathy who did this work in Connecticut, and who works nationally with the EducationCounsel. She brought me stories of these kids. One story I've told down here more than once. It's a young man who went to a big urban high school in Connecticut. At the beginning of his sophomore year he had the habit of walking out of class, in the middle of class, and wandering the hallways. He would get picked up by the security officer or a teacher, brought down to the Principal's office and suspended. This happened over and over again during the beginning of that year, to the extent that by about November, he had been out of school for more days than he was in school. One day he was particularly upset at how he had been treated as he was walking the hall. He got into a verbal altercation with an Assistant Principal. The Assistant Principal called the police. They came to the school and arrested him. This young man, because he was technically an adult, now had a criminal record. You know his story. Because, as it turned out: this young man couldn't read. He had a learning disability, which frankly mortified him every day, sitting in class not understanding anything that was going on. And out of embarrassment, he walked out and wandered the hall. He happened to be an African American boy, fairly large in stature, who would never hurt a fly, but that all somehow escalated to his arrest.

Now, if the provisions in ESSA aren't in place, if the original bill that came out of the Senate and the House had passed, there would have been virtually no protections for that young man. There would have been no ability to track his performance, a subset of disabled kids in school, there would have been no mandate on schools to actually start getting serious about reducing rates of suspension and expulsion. But because of the work of AUCD centers all across this country, because of the work of the people in this room, this version of ESEA has in it a continued oversight provision to ensure that children with disabilities will get the supports they need. Expectations are in place that if schools are not meeting the needs of students with disabilities, then the schools must have a turn-around plan to address the needs of students with disabilities. We were also able to make sure there is a specific focus on the issue of the school to prison pipeline, which overly affects kids with disabilities.

...APPLAUSE...

I was proud to help lead the fight when it came to those accountability provisions and protections for students with disabilities, but I know it wouldn't have happened without the people in this room, and in particular, without one of the people who I get to present an award to tonight.

First, I'm pleased to recognize both Kevin Hager and Priscilla Rodriguez who are the force behind Understood.org, if they could come up on stage and receive their award. I'll say a few things about them, then give Kevin and Priscilla a round of applause. For parents of children with disabilities, understanding their children's needs, identifying the best resources and advocating for them can be absolutely overwhelming, sometimes very difficult emotionally psychologically, Understood.org is an essential resource for this community, it empowers parents with expert information and a supportive online community. Kevin serves as the managing director of Understood.org. He was previously the chief communication engagement at the National Center for Learning Disabilities where he led successful efforts to increase fund raising for the organization. He scaled brand awareness, relaunched their awareness and their signature. Priscilla led the team that designed and developed this website, this tool for families and now she co-leads this amazing resource for families. We can't do it all. When I say "we" I mean those in the room who are service providers on the ground. This is an innovative, ground-breaking new tool that families for generations are going to be able to enjoy. Give a big round of applause to our first award winner, Kevin and Priscilla.

...APPLAUSE...

Kevin Hager and Priscilla Rodriguez, Understood.org

>>Kevin: Wow. Good evening!

First, thank you so much to Senator Murphy for your incredible and tireless work on behalf of students with disabilities, including students with learning disabilities. And particularly, your work ensuring that the Every Student Succeeds Act continues to focus on equity, that makes a difference in the lives of millions of children every day. Thank you for continuing to be a champion for all students. ...APPLAUSE...

I also want to say, I wrote down that it's humbling and I can't think of a more humbling word than that, it's beyond humbling to be given an award alongside someone like Wade Henderson, who's remarkable commitment to civil rights has been a model for all of us. ...APPLAUSE...

>>Priscilla: We'd also like to thank the many people here tonight like Michael Yudin from the U.S. Department of Education, the Department's commitment to improving education for all kids is absolutely incredible. Your support of Understood, since before day one of Understood, has allowed us to reach millions more parents and educators, so thank you so much for that.

And to AUCD's fantastic executive director, Andy Imparato! ...APPLAUSE...Your inspiring leadership has taken the critical work that AUCD does to new heights. Your career remains a testament to your deep commitment to people with disabilities. We thank you so much. ...APPLAUSE...

>>Kevin: We're incredibly honored to be here representing Understood tonight with all of you on behalf of the 15 non-profits who came together to build and develop it for parents. Tonight's theme of "education for all" couldn't be more perfectly aligned with Understood's mission.

We believe that an empowered and informed parent is a child's best advocate, and that once they're armed with information and support, they are able to partner with educators, medical professionals, and the community to make sure that their child, regardless of the severity of their learning and attention issues, will go on to thrive in school and in life.

>>Priscilla: I don't think we need to tell this room that the need for AUCD and for Understood is incredible. One in five children struggle with brain-based learning and attention issues in this country. Like issues with reading, and math, organization and attention issues. These kids are just as smart as their peers, but without the right strategies and supports, we know that the outcomes for them can be incredibly dire. We created Understood and made it available in both English and Spanish, so that all patients have access to the very best information out there, and the top experts in the Country.

Understood launched just 16 months ago, if you haven't checked it out, I hope you do. As of today, in the last 16 months Understood has been able to serve over 11 million people. And, while Understood was created for parents, more than 20% of those people identify as educators. So we know the need there is great as well.

>>Kevin: We also feel really fortunate to be working with the Ad Council, the folks behind Smoky Bear and McGruff the Crime Dog; they selected learning and attention issues and Understood specifically as one of their new national public service awareness campaigns. So far in our first 16 months they've already secured Understood over \$49 million in free ad space, including billboards in Time Square and full page ads in *The New York Times*! The credit goes to the Ad Council for sure.

As thrilling as it is for those of us that work on Understood, the reason they actually matter is because they make parents across the country, and educators across the country aware that Understood exists

as a place for them to turn for help and information. One the coolest things that Ad Council does, they don't get enough credit, they track the social impact of each of their PSA campaigns. For ours they've told us just in the first 12 months of tracking that the needle has moved in statistically significant way, on behavior change, parents taking action on behalf of their children and stigma around learning and attention issues which is so hard to change. Just as one little data point, since our campaign launched, more parents have agreed with the statement that children with learning and attention issues are just as smart as their peers. For those us in the room, that's such an obvious and basic statement, but we take that for granted. The research we did before Understood launched, you would be dismayed at how many parents disagreed with that statement. So we're excited to see the needle moving.

>>Priscilla: We want to invite everyone if you haven't been to the Understood room over there, the team would love to meet you and show you about the resource recreated. We think it has incredible power to decrease stigma and increase empathy which we know is so vital. Ultimately this is what we want. We want a world where there's no stigma associated, everyone recognizes the signs and seeks help early, where people know where to go to find help so their children can thrive in school, and in life. Raising awareness of the one in five kids with learning and attention issues is core to Understood's mission, and that includes incredible grass-roots efforts that we've just kicked off across the country, and here in DC.

We also want to thank the policy team at the National Center For Learning Disabilities who have been wonderful partners.

>>Kevin: So in closing, we want to thank you all of you for your commitment. And we want to thank you Senator Murphy, and AUCD for this honor, especially this early in our Understood lives. We're so humbled by everything that you all do, day in and day out, and it will inspire us as we move Understood forward to help millions of parents. So thank you very much. ...APPLAUSE...

Senator Murphy

Congratulations again to Kevin and to Priscilla, all of their work, even at these nascent stages of Understood.org. Our second award goes to someone that's not unfamiliar, our great friend Wade Henderson!

...APPLAUSE...

Thank you I could speak, obviously all night about the contributions that Wade has made to the civil rights legacy of this city and of this country. But since we are celebrating tonight, the contribution that Wade and have made specifically to those living with disabilities in the context of education, I just want to tell you what LCCHR and Wade Henderson's work, specifically meant with respect to the victories that we ultimately achieved.

There were two moments in the debates surrounding the new education law that were absolutely critical. The first in the Senate when myself and Senator Warren and Senator Booker offered an amendment to add back the accountability protections with students with disability and for minority children, all across this country.

There were a lot of people that thought that that amendment would fail miserably. Our hope was to have enough members supporting it, a filibuster-proof majority of Senators, to second a strong message to the conference committee that it needed to be included. The second moment was in that conference committee when despite accountability not being included in either the House or the Senate version, we needed it to magically appear again in the Conference Report. Without Wade Henderson's leadership with advocacy organizations to step up to the plate and push for those accountability provisions, they simply wouldn't have been part of that law. Given all of the other issues that Wade personally, or those groups represented under the LCCHR umbrella, could have been working on during the time, with all of the supports on voting rights, with all of the assaults on civil rights protections around the country. The fact that they were able to muster enough oxygen in order to get this victory across the finish line says an enormous amount about Wade's commitment, and about those who rely on his advice and LCCHR's commitment to providing students with disabilities access to an equal education. So it's my --really, it's my humbling privilege -- that I get to give an award to Wade Henderson. Congratulations to the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and Wade Henderson specifically, on receiving this award for Education for All! Congratulations.

...APPLAUSE...

Wade Henderson, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Wow, Wow, Wow. Good evening, friends of AUCD! Good evening all of you. First of all, I've got to thank Senator Chris Murphy, both for presenting this award and for his extraordinary leadership especially on the Every Student Succeeds Act. As was said, he was a champion for students with disabilities, and he was fearless and committed from the time the bill was introduced until it was signed into law by President Obama. So let's give him another round of applause; he was phenomenal! He has also done so much to lift up the issue of gun laws in our country, because of his experience of Sandy Hook. He understands! He understands! Yes, there is respect for the second amendment of the constitution, but there is also respect for human life, and common sense!

...APPLAUSE...

Senator Murphy, thank you so much. Thank you so much for your extraordinary leadership. And lastly, he sits on the Foreign Relations Committee, guys. One of our biggest disappointments was our inability to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities! CRPD! CRPD! That's right!

...APPLAUSE...

Senator Murphy was a leader on that effort. A guy who knows: we want to bring that treaty back. Name it after Bob Dole, and try to run it through at the lame duck this year! We're not giving up on that. Senator Murphy was a huge, huge supporter.

I also want to acknowledge Ms. Murphy, Kathy, his wife, a disabilities lawyer, who certainly helped lay the foundation for his work in the community. I want to acknowledge my wife, Marsha Henderson who is here. She is the Assistant Commissioner for Women's Health at the FDA. Baby, I love you! Thank you for your support. I appreciate it very much. ...APPLAUSE...

Guys, I have to say, I'm deeply honored by this award. Now, for those of you who know me, I'm going to be uncharacteristically brief. These events should end on the same night they begin, right? (Laughter) So everybody agrees with that. I'll try to be brief.

I can't begin to tell you how humbled I am to receive this honor from AUCD. And my good friend, Andy Imperato, AUCD is a critically important organization, guys. It is a resource to agencies, to organizations, and policymakers concerned about people living with developmental and other disabilities, and their families. And it is truly, tremendous honor to receive this salute by AUCD. I've had the great pleasure of working with Andy for many years. Not only since he's been at AUCD, but at his time with Senator Tom Harkin, and while he headed the American Association of People with Disabilities where he was also a valuable member of the leadership conference Board of Directors.

Andy has been a dynamic partner on so many issues. From the ADA amendments, to our fight for the U.S. ratification of CRPD, and to all the other issues that we're working on, most especially the Every Student Succeeds Act. Disability rights are civil and human rights. And Andy's commitment to the disability community and to the broader civil rights community has been unwavering. Andy, I really appreciate your friendship. And I really appreciate your leadership of this great organization. ...APPLAUSE...

I'm also really honored to share the podium today with Understood.org, a magnificent collaboration of organizations working to ensure that millions of children with learning and attention issues and their families have the support they need to succeed. Now these are important endeavors, and I'm so pleased to share the stage with a project that is doing this amazing work around the country. Give Understood.org another round of applause. ...APPLAUSE...

This is the first gala of AUCD. Won't be their last. They raised \$150,000 this year. But we want their event to generate annually a million dollars for their advocacy. So this is a first step, guys, there's no question. Andy, I know you'll bring us back year after year and make this is the financial success I know it will become. So I'm going to forget my prepared remarks and say only this: elementary and secondary education lays the foundation, laid the foundation for opportunity in America. It's over 50 years old. We're also celebrating the over 60th Anniversary of Brown v. The Board of Education. ...APPLAUSE...

These two, the Brown Decision and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act laid the foundation for the inclusion of students with disabilities into the body politic. You know, and it is so important that this community stands up for it's right to be recognized as full citizens to be included in our society in every way. And if we are not included in the classroom, if we are not given the opportunity to succeed at our level of capability, then this is not the America that we dream of, that we aspire to have it achieve for all of us.

So let me say, look, the Leadership Conference is committed to building an America that is as good as its ideals. AUCD shares that commitment. We would not have had the Every Student Succeeds Act without the tremendous work of AUCD. Give yourselves a round of applause, and recognize that the fight that we share in common is only beginning. So I will leave you with these two observations. Guys, we have two challenges ahead of us. First is to ensure that President Obama carries out his obligation to appoint the next Justice of the United States Supreme Court. ...APPLAUSE...

It's his obligation! It's his obligation! Under Article II, Section II, Clause II of the United States Constitution, the Senate has an obligation to do its job. To provide advice and consent, and to vote, up or down, of the President's nominee. And secondly, guys, this is the first election, the first federal election without the full protection of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Persons with disabilities need the protection of the Voting Rights Act to ensure that we have access to the ballot. ...APPLAUSE...

If you don't vote, you don't count! So remember your job is to lift your voice, to make sure you're included and that you can go to the ballot box, either assisted or unfettered, but you have the right to vote. We expect you to do that. Okay! So you've got to do that.

So I conclude, I conclude by thanking AUCD for this incredible honor. For thanking Senator Murphy for really coming out tonight to join us for this incredible celebration. Senator Murphy is the future, he's the future of the Civil Rights Movement and Disability Movement in the United States Senate. We are fortunate that he carries our water on the important issues of social justice and inclusion.

And so, I am especially honored to have received this award based on his introduction. Please thank him again. ...APPLAUSE...

And thank you all for your support of AUCD. Thank you so much! APPLAUSE...

Zipporah Levi-Shakleford, AUCD Member

Good evening. I'm actually going in a very tough spot following him and in between him and entertainment. So I'm going to keep this very short and sweet. (Laughter)

My name is Zipporah Levi-Shackelford. I'm the AUCD board trainee representative, and I'm also a Virginia LEND second year trainee. I have been very excited and looking forward to this night for several months, because I'm a special education consultant, a special needs sibling, and a special needs parent.

From those different experiences, I know the importance of education for all. For AUCD to host an event like this, and to be here and to see all these people who support this mission excites me very much. And I thank you all for being here. The AUCD's mission to promote education for all means a little bit something different for me. For a lot of us I think we're thinking of education of special needs students. But the AUCD also promotes education for young professionals like myself throughout the network.

Since becoming a trainee for the AUCD network, I have been able to better establish my brand, and they have provided me with a lot of valuable resources as I try to promote education for all.

Again, I thank you all for coming. It is great to see all of us here together on this mission, which is a very big one. And I ask for all of you to continue to support education for all, so that we can have a new population who are able to be independent and strive for all their dreams and goals. ...APPLAUSE...

Thank you. ...APPLAUSE...

And now we will hear some more from Blessing Offor! ...APPLAUSE...

Recording Artist Blessing Offor

(Playing Piano) I'm excited to play a couple more songs for you. So, guys, there's been a lot about Connecticut, people have been saying Connecticut. I grew up in New Haven, Connecticut. Speaking as someone who is blind, I thought it was normal to grow up with a school district that was perfectly willing to get me pretty much anything I needed, to go to a magnet school in New Haven that taught me all the skills that I needed to be doing what I'm doing in front of you right now. It's only after having left Connecticut and talking to other people I realized how amazing it was. The more I am here the more grateful I am. It is that we keep doing this kind of work. ...APPLAUSE...

That being said, I write songs sometimes. This is a song called "This is Life".

(Singing)

In the still of night, in the quiet yet of the storm, in the moments you're dreaming, bigger than you should, at the top of the Ferris wheel, take a look around, tell yourself that nothing will ever bring you down, but something big is happening, can you feel it? Feel things will never be the same. Things will never be the same again.

This is life, this is love, this is the moment. This is life, this is love, and here we are. This is life, this is love, keeps you going in the dark from the very first time you feel the touch, the sound, the spark. It's in the body of a man, who's had all he can take. It's in the eyes of a girl, who never let her heartbreak. It's in the spirit of the protest, crying out for justice; it's in the soul of a nation that finally heeds the call. Oooo, yes. Something big is happening, can you feel it? Things will never be the same again. This is life, this is love, this is the moment! This is life, this is love, and here we are. This is life, this is love, keeps you going in the dark from the very first time we feel the touch, the sound, a spark. This is life...

This is life...

This is life...

This is life...

This is life, this is love, keeps you going in the dark, from the very first time you feel the touch, the sound, the spark. This is life... this is life... this is life....

...APPLAUSE...

This is an old Louie Armstrong here.

(Playing Piano)

(Singing)

I see trees of green, red roses too, I watch them bloom for me and for you, and I think to myself, what a wonderful world...

I see skies of blue and clouds of white, the bright blessed day, and the sacred nights, and I think so myself, what a wonderful world. The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky, are also on the faces of people going by.

I see friends shaking hands, they say how do you do? They're really saying "I love you".

Ooooooooo. I hear babies cry, I watch them grow. They'll learn so much more than I've ever, ever know, and I think to myself, what a wonderful world...

The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky, are also on the faces of people going by, I see friends shaking hands, they say how do you do? They're really saying, "I love". I hear babies cry, I watch them grow, they'll learn much more than I'll ever, ever, know...

And I think to myself, what a wonderful world. What a wonderful world...

...APPLAUSE...

You guys have a great night!

...APPLAUSE...