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In Case You Missed It

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Governor Chris Christie – “...hope is the greatest gift we can give to each other...today is not the best that we can think of but tomorrow can be better and that’s what we want for our kids...”

Trenton, NJ - On Thursday, September 30, 2010, Governor Chris Christie and Geoffrey Canada, president and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone in Harlem, New York, participated in a discussion on education reform. The discussion took place during a town hall meeting at Elysian Charter School in Hoboken, New Jersey. Below is video footage and transcript of highlights from the conversation, followed by the conversation in its entirety, split in three-parts.

Governor Christie and Geoffrey Canada on Education Reform <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvxKIS6Db3c>>

TRANSCRIPT OF HIGHLIGHTS VIDEO

Chris Christie: For those of you who aren't familiar with Geoff, Geoff and I are going to have a conversation now. This is great for me, I am going to get to ask somebody else the questions and they get to answer. You should know a little bit about the Harlem Children's Zone, if you don't know already. It's an area in Manhattan; obviously, that covers less than one square mile and it is home to about 10,000 children. The neighborhood is coming back to life, newly renovated townhouses are side by side with buildings that have fallen victim to violence, drug use, and despair. Local businesses next to national chain stores, but despite all of the renewal nearly all of the children live in poverty. We know that two thirds of them score below grade level on standardized tests and that's why Geoff who had a good education himself, both at Bowdoin and the Harvard School of Education came back and claimed this territory as his own and tried to see...

Chris Christie: You talked a little bit about innovation. What's the freedom that you have and what you're doing now in the Harlem Children's Zone that you didn't have when you were teaching in the traditional public school. That is really interesting.

Geoffrey Canada: I think that the big difference for us, is we can meet as a team of administrators and teachers, figure out what we need to do and do it, and we don't have to talk to another person. Right, it is just those of us in the room, we sit down and say you know what that didn't work. Then you guys would say, yeah, that didn't work. I say so we need to come up with a new plan and if the plan is we need to work Saturdays, believe me that is the plan, then we work Saturdays. If the plan is we need to work July, because it's not happening for our kids, then we work July. Because if you come in and we find out, having made the mistake of bringing you in, that you can't teach, right, we work with you and we try and we support you and we do all of those things, and then the kids don't learn. Well then you have to do something else, you cannot be inside our schools. And I think that kind of freedom to make the decisions, if you run a business I don't think there is anything controversial about these kinds of decisions. If you run a business, everybody I know who runs a business in America, meets with their team figures out what they need to do then does it. When people don't work out then let them go and replace them with better people. That's the way most businesses run, if businesses are not successful they go out of business. That happens everywhere except education. Education is the only place you have the option to fail...

Chris Christie: It is the truth, you know that, in no other place can you get away with that measure of consistent failure and continue to operate the way you do. One of the things that you also here, and we have heard this, Geoff and I have been on a few different panels together, we were hanging with Opera last Friday, and one of the things we did hear all the time is about parents, well the school can't do this because the parents are the problem. And so the excuse or the blame is pointed towards the parents. So I wondered if you'd respond to that Geoff and also how you include parents in the process and what you do...

Geoffrey Canada: And our message to our parents are that you're part of the education of your child, but we also recognize that some of our parents, maybe they have substance abuse problems or maybe they have mental health problems, they are not ready to be full partners in this or sometimes partners at all. And we still have to educate those children. So while we say we need parent engagement, we cannot use the lack of parents engagement as an excuse

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for not educating children. That's the challenge.

Chris Christie: You have spoken about accountability and results that you demand from your teachers. And the response that I've gotten from some corners, and you know what corners those are, well this isn't the right way to compensate teachers. You shouldn't be trying to look at testing or other things to gage accountability and success. You've had success up there, let's show everybody how you deal with the issues of accountability and success and tracking that and why it's worked up there and why it might work here.

Geoffrey Canada: Well I think in the end this is one of those issues that again people get upset about. This issue of can we measure teacher effectiveness, can we hold teachers and principals accountable for the results of young people. There are a group of folk who want to argue that you can't do that. Now that to me is one of those things that if you start down that road that you really can't measure teacher, then let anybody teach. You can bring in people off the street and say "teach," because it doesn't matter. We can't measure it anyhow. We don't know what a good teacher really looks like. I think we actually can measure whether or not a person is a good teacher... And I think that this issue of measuring teacher effectiveness is critical because only then can you figure out how to hold people accountable. In the current system if you don't measure anything then you can't say, you know what it was you Geoff who failed those kids. When you got them they were fine, when they left you they were not fine. So guess whose fault that is. I don't want to hear about the mamas, I don't want to hear about anything else. See that is so simple and direct that it makes, it pulls the covers off of what the issue is. And the accountability is... Here's the big problem I find in education, the kids don't do well, right, they end up getting left back, they end up not graduating school, they end up getting in problems, but the system just goes on fine and all of the adults get to stay and do well. They all go on vacations, they do well. This to me is such a crisis and I really mean it, this is such a crisis. If we do this for the next ten fifteen years we will watch this nation decline...

Chris Christie: We're saying in New Jersey from now forward what we should do is say, "teachers are going to be held accountable, like everybody else, for the progress of their students." Not for the absolute number of how they achieve, but for the progress of their students. And we need to test kids that way and we need to hold teachers accountable for that. And for those teachers who do great, they should make much more than they are making now because we want them to stay. We want to keep that stamina, we want them to feel rewarded and valued and we should pay them more. As for those teachers who don't succeed we invite them to pursue another career. Because it doesn't mean, like Geoff says, it doesn't mean they are a bad person, it doesn't mean they're not trying hard, some of them aren't, but some of them are they just aren't good at it, that's okay. We have to though not accept that as being what we need to do for our kids... I though after spending a lot of time with Geoff over the last week or so that having him here with me today to give you an example of what is possible, gives hope. And hope is the greatest gift we can give to each other. Is that today is not the best that we can think of but tomorrow can be better and that's what we want for our kids, is for them to feel that way too.

1. Governor Christie: Conversation with **Geoffrey Canada**: Part 1 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20wO7nJ3Nd8>>
2. Governor Christie: Conversation with **Geoffrey Canada**: Part 2 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLOmZqes8Fw>>
3. Governor Christie: Conversation with **Geoffrey Canada**: Part 3 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eg0Bt-7ELXo>>

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