



Colin McGinnis

Colin McGinnis: [00:00:00] There is no reason that a teacher, whether it's early childhood or K-12, should have to use the same subsidies that we are putting, in my world, families into early childhood, so we can break cycles of poverty, why are we creating a poverty-driven workforce?

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:19] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, Chief Goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host. We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all, but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:54] So, welcome to today's episode of Learning Unboxed. As always, I am super excited about the conversation that we are about to have, because I have a great colleague in the Central Ohio area, Colin Page McGinnis. I always love to use the whole name for you, Colin, because it's awesome how you have that out there. So, Colin McGinnis is currently the CEO of South Side Early Learning, which is a high-quality early learning school founded back in 1922, which very few people, I suspect, understand how long it's been around.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:27] And Colin is passionate about early education and ending the disparities that prevent young learners from accessing the education they need to make sure that they have a solid foundation as they get pushed into K-12 opportunity. But he's also working to end low wages paid to teachers who are helping to create these foundations that will influence children's success in life. And for that, we applaud you as well. So, welcome to the program, Colin.

Colin McGinnis: [00:01:54] Thank you so much for having me. I'm super excited.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:57] Excellent. Excellent. So, just a little bit of context and stage for our listeners who come from all over the world, Colin and I, about, what is it? Maybe 15 months or so ago, did a piece locally as part of the inaugural class of the Future 50 here in Columbus, which was 50 innovative leaders in our community who were just out there willing to do crazy things for the betterment of our community. And I think that's the best way to put it, because it was almost anything goes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:30] And Colin and I hopped on very quickly, and said, hey, education is a really big issue in our community, both positive and negative, and there's a lot that needs to be thought about differently in this space. And so, we wrote a moonshot around the potential for education in our community. And so, I want to dig in first, Colin, with, let's talk about your background, share with our listeners and sort of the

100,000-foot view of South Side Early Learning, because that all translates into why you and I wrote a moonshot.

Colin McGinnis: [00:03:04] Yeah. So, again, my name is Colin Page McGinnis. By training, I'm a developmental psychologist and I'm actually an early childhood policy guy. So, I did not venture my way into early childhood in the traditional teacher route or through a background in the classroom. I'm actually a researcher through and through and a policy wonk. And it's been fun to connect all those worlds together.

Colin McGinnis: [00:03:28] When I actually applied for the role at South Side and took over in 2018, I was given, really, a blank slate to build something on a 100-year legacy. So, like you mentioned, South Side's been around since 1922. We have always served the South Side of Columbus, so those not familiar with the area, really, a portion of our community that is dealing with the hard of hard. It was a manufacturing community that had the manufacturing really stripped away.

Colin McGinnis: [00:03:57] A lot of inequality. The opioid epidemic hit really hard. And as a staple in the community, we've been there to ground things together. And our approach to early childhood maybe doesn't look all that different from like the website's component, but really, it is quite unique, in that there are four aspects of our work that we're doing day in and day out. The first being we're embedding professional development.

Colin McGinnis: [00:04:21] We're ensuring that our teachers are treated like professionals that they are. We're integrating data into everything that we're doing, which I think is a little more norm being K-12, but definitely not in early childhood. We have this holistic and integrated family approach, even having a social work team on staff that's been around on staff since the 1980s.

Colin McGinnis: [00:04:42] And then, we're going, we're making sure we're using evidence-based best practice, that we're taking the research that's coming out from awesome institutions across the country, and the world, and actually closing that bridge between practitioner and researcher, and bringing that work to life. And it's been an awesome experience. And coming from the research side of the house, coming from a university and from my graduate work, honestly, into this role has been a ton of fun.

Colin McGinnis: [00:05:08] And I feel like I've been able to build moonshots every day. So, when we had the opportunity to think about what if we reimagine education, and I think it was an awesome opportunity for South Side and PAST to come together, because we realized, hey, we actually could connect in a line quite a bit and take from six-weeks-old all the way through, I mean, college and beyond to really thinking about, what if we radically shake the tree and had something different emerge? And then, when we layered on the pandemic, I think both organizations realized, this might be the time that we can do that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:43] Right. Right. We're going to get this rare once in a lifetime, in many ways, opportunity to say, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, alright, blank slate, let's try again. So, if we can just get everybody on board with us, Colin, that's going to be the thing.

Colin McGinnis: [00:05:59] Exactly. And I think we can do it if we try hard enough.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:04] I think so, too. So, I think that it was a unique perspective that the board of South Side Early Learning said, hey, we're going to run with this guy, Colin, who's not a teacher, who hasn't been in the preschool world just fully immersed forever, and it takes a lot to be willing to stretch outside of the norm and the tradition to even think about how you bring in innovative leadership opportunities, because that's not always what we see happen.

Colin McGinnis: [00:06:38] No. And what's even more interesting with my board is they took two other gambles. The first was they said, hey, we're bringing someone in that's 24, because I was 24 at the time

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:50] Just a baby.

Colin McGinnis: [00:06:51] Yeah. A wee infant coming into the grown-up world for the first time. But I think either explicitly or not, they knew it was going to create almost a conflict in every table that South Side sat in. You're 100 years old, you're way too big to pivot and think different. And also, you are the youngest nonprofit executive in the city, you do not know enough to know what you don't even know.

Colin McGinnis: [00:07:17] And it was really fun to operate in that space, because we are kind of kept at arm's distance, because I honestly think there is this perception at first that it wasn't going to work. And then, on the other side of the house, just having that willingness to say, you know what, innovation isn't bad and we trust him enough to do this, I think we should take the gamble. It's paid off and it's paid off quite a bit. I don't know if we're going to chat about it later, but we just recently received a 2.2-million-dollar gift purely for growth and innovation, which is not something-

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:57] Amazing.

Colin McGinnis: [00:07:58] Yeah. It does not happen in education. That's not the norm. It's definitely not the norm in early childhood. So, we are really, really excited that we've been able to execute on some of the big thinking that my board committed to even before bringing me in.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:13] Yeah. And that's a remarkable piece, no question, whatsoever. And I think one of the other things that is also sort of a remarkable gamble on the part of your board, and I don't know that you've even thought about this one or not, but I'm going to toss it out there, because first time I met you, I was like, huh, that was really innovative of them. Because early childhood education, quite frankly, it's the world of women. Right?

Colin McGinnis: [00:08:39] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:39] It is. And we talk about it all the time, even when we talk about K-12, about how desperately we need amazing men in the classroom leading. And oftentimes, we'll see a fair number of male elementary school principals, but you don't see people rolling up their sleeves really involved. And although your role is an administrative role, I also happen to know, you're there, right?

Colin McGinnis: [00:09:01] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:01] So, kiddos are immersed with you. They see you. It's more than just leading an organization. It's leading by doing an organization, and again, we don't see men in early childhood. And I think that, again, that was another really, really important component that was an interesting sort of twist on the way your board was thinking.

Colin McGinnis: [00:09:22] And if we're going to keep celebrating my board here, which I think we should, I am also open and out really queer, which is also not the norm in early childhood. And it's actually the reason a lot of men don't go into early childhood is because this fear, particularly in community-based early childhood settings that are serving lower income communities, that you're going to have to grapple with the perception of what it means to be a man, and then what it means to have the assumption of being a gay or a queer man in a

classroom with a young child. So, it was just gambles all around that, I mean, they deserve to be celebrated for it. And I don't think even I have done that enough.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:00] Yeah. No, but I think those are really, really important distinctions. And I appreciate the opportunity to just put them all out there, and say, this is what happens, because the truth of the matter is the success of South Side Early Learning, and its impact in this community, and its impact in early childhood education in this community cannot be underscored, nor should it, right? And so, I just want to really kind of go on record, and say, it has been a game changer in the community.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:27] When you came on board, when your board said, let's take a gamble on this guy and let's see what can happen, because it's been nothing but positive impacts with ripple effect all over the community, which I think gets us back to then the conversation around the way we were thinking about that moonshot. And so, I would ask for you to sort of lay out the early childhood component, that sort of early elementary piece that you and I structured. And then, I want to talk about, do we think the same thing on the flip side of what we just have gone through?

Colin McGinnis: [00:10:57] Yeah. So, in the early childhood component of what we are thinking, now, I'll give the high level, I really want folks to go read it, because I think we laid some really cool things out.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:06] I think so, too, and we'll post it with this episode.

Colin McGinnis: [00:11:08] Perfect. But it really was this idea of, one, early childhood should start young. And by young, I mean, six weeks. We know that 90% of brain development is happening before the age of three, let's not start education at four or five, let's start at six weeks, and then let's rethink about what we're considering with early childhood education. It's not just the A,B, Cs, and one, two, threes, but to me, it really is rooting these skills around discovery and democratic life skills.

Colin McGinnis: [00:11:38] So, how do we teach the foundations in early childhood for what we're going to need for years to come? And part of my thinking of early childhood is it really is this pre-K, even though I'm talking about six weeks, I'm going to use pre-K for the sake of conversation. Through fifth grade for me, a lot of times when we think about early childhood, we'll stop at maybe third, but I think the way that we could go about teaching in the early childhood context and some of the foundations that we could lay out are consistent through fifth grade, and it's the ideas of, how do we engage children in real life experiences?

Colin McGinnis: [00:12:16] How do we create those both in and out of the classroom? And then, how do we re-conceptualize what we think a classroom is to start to include things like museums and libraries, which we talked about a little bit in moonshot? But I even go one step further in saying, the grocery store is a classroom, really intentional about how we're pushing our grocery cart around with our little in the cart itself, and how we have conversations about color, size, and shape, and sounds that a cow would make when you go by the dairy section.

Colin McGinnis: [00:12:48] And what we are laying out here really was breaking the traditional norm of how we think about learning and how we really root it in something that is discovery-based and really focused on teaching those foundational skills, and not assuming that because they're babies that they can't do that. And we're really looking at the whole brain and tapping into that potential.

Colin McGinnis: [00:13:08] And I think at least what I was hoping to convey with our moonshot is when we start that young, not only are we setting up for success, which any early childhood research will tell us, but it shifts the way that we, as adults, think about students, which allows us to do some really cool things on the

back half of education, which I know PAST is really involved in. And you really are a champion of what it takes that shifting of perspective and framework to happen in early childhood, I think, if we're going to be successful in reinventing K-12 and beyond.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:39] Yeah. No, absolutely. Now, that's part of what I just really loved about that entire endeavor as well. And I also really liked the fact that we very consciously thought about the sort of the role of discovery and curiosity, which is just so magical in our littles, as you always use that term, and I love that. When we think about the imagination, just the innate raw imagination that comes with that phase of life, and the reality of it, and many, many, many of us have seen it, the highly immobile structure, there's nothing wrong with structure, but the highly mobile structure that we have found ourselves in within a lot of K-12, not all of it, out of fairness, but a lot of K-12, certainly, in the last 20 years, the last 50 years, I would argue, and even beyond, we crush the imagination and the creativity out of our students.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:39] And what it means is that by the time we get to that flipside, the back end of that K-12 journey, it's just like, I just want to graduate, I want to be done, I want to get a job, or I want to go to school, but I'm not passionate about what that future is. And when we lose the passion to live and explore life, we will never, ever be full citizens, which is the other piece of the conversation that I love so much, is that we talked about the fact that not only do we need to really sort of harvest that native imagination and curiosity, but we also then have this great opportunity to teach citizenship.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:18] And what does that truly mean, to be a citizen of your community, your neighborhood, your church, your school, whatever it happens to be, that you have a meaningful role in the world that we occupy? That's the other piece of it, right? And so, that gets us into social justice. And I mean, ah, I love the interweaving of these elements. So, with all that said, Colin, then comes a pandemic.

Colin McGinnis: [00:15:46] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:46] Yeah. Is all this still true? I mean, do we feel the same way?

Colin McGinnis: [00:15:51] I think we do. At least I do.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:54] I do, too.

Colin McGinnis: [00:15:55] Okay.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:56] So, we can say we do.

Colin McGinnis: [00:15:58] Perfect. And what was so interesting to me in the early stages of the pandemic. So, a little bit of context on the early childhood side, unlike K-12, aside from about 50 days in Ohio, early childhood stayed open. We didn't really have much of a choice. But there is a very small window of about 50 days. And then, for some families that chose to not come back in person, where I thought this will be interesting, because early childhood does not innovate. We really haven't innovated since the initial Head Start Act of 1965. So, I was like, what are we going to do? And what we saw was a lot of what I think folks assume is innovation in K-12 come down to early childhood, which was teach remote, do preschool online, first of all.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:50] Not an easy task.

Colin McGinnis: [00:16:50] Let's talk about all the ways that wasn't going to work. And we tried. We gave it an effort. But what I was realizing is we are moving more rapidly towards a standardization of early childhood that

wasn't actually in the best interest of early childhood practice. And it made me stop, and think, and go, oh, maybe this innovation push needs to come a lot harder, a lot faster, and we need to be smarter about how we're going to do that, which is part of the reason why we launched out the Center for Early Childhood Innovation in June, which I'm going to earmark for a second, and we'll hopefully come back to that.

Colin McGinnis: [00:17:26] But I really do think now more than ever, we need to encourage and be intentional about this discovery, and teaching of these democratic life skills, and teaching of citizenship, and understanding that now is our, I still think, one time to actually radically shift things, like we called for in the moonshot. I don't think schools really have affirmatively decided how they're going to pivot outside of the pandemic, because the reality is we're still very much in it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:56] Oh, we are, absolutely, yeah.

Colin McGinnis: [00:17:59] I think when we put this piece together, we were assuming at this point, we would be dreaming up the schools of tomorrow, and putting down some infrastructure, and maybe laying some breaks, but we are not even to the point of thinking about that, because we're entering another school year where we don't quite know what's going to happen. Super unpopular opinion, and I know a lot of parents are probably not going to love hearing that, but as an administrator of a program, because we do have classroom-based work, too, obviously, I'm still going week-to-week. I am still looking-

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:33] We are, too. I mean, when I think about the background you see behind me, it's the same sort of thing, right? I'm just hoping that we're going to be able to fill the space with real life, active, engaged students, and while that's the plan, I think that it's fair, we have to reiterate, we're just in another phase of this thing, but we are not beyond it yet.

Colin McGinnis: [00:18:57] Right. The one maybe point of concern that the pandemic gave me to our radical idea here was possibly relying just on the science might not be enough anymore. And we might have to become really good storytellers to convince families that this is the shift that we should be making in education.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:20] Yeah. I think there's actually no doubt about that, right? Because I mean, I think, I can imagine that it's the same thing in the early childhood space that we see, especially as you get up into the upper grades, middle and high school in particular in K-12 and certainly beyond, is this notion, well, it was good enough for me, right? You've got that parent in that community conversation that says, yes, but it's always worked, or the schools or school districts that, quite frankly, they test really well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:46] Their performance is really great. And we've got a lot of those right here in Central Ohio as well, right? We have a fair number of struggling and failing schools, but we have a fair number of really great testing schools. But that doesn't necessarily translate into what's really in the best interest of our kids today. But that's a tough conversation to have, Colin.

Colin McGinnis: [00:20:08] It is. And I think that's why I love more than anything what we put together is the actual closing, this idea of let's not shift to the new normal, let's shift to the new. And let's acknowledge what needs to happen, because policy or mandate says that it has to happen, but let's not have that be the end all and let's not have that steer the ship.

Annalies Corbin: [00:20:31] Right. I love that. Yes.

Colin McGinnis: [00:20:33] And let's actually chart a course out, and think, how are we going to do this and why do we want to do this beyond just the test score, or beyond just the accreditation, or in my world, to step

up the quality licensure. There's something beyond the vanity metrics, because unfortunately for me, a lot of those things are just vanity metrics, it doesn't tie into the outcomes that we want to see for littles and students. There's a difference.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:04] There is a huge, huge difference, and I think that's absolutely fair. And thank you for bringing that forward, because there is no question, whatsoever. So, that's the perfect segue way into, okay, because Colin has not been idle for the last 18 months. No question, other than 50 days of closed doors, which you guys were still working really hard in that 50 days, but there's been a lot of really innovative, creative, and wonderful things that South Side has been doing.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:36] So, let's share, because you guys not only didn't stop, you said, but we're actually going to push through. And we're going to push forward, right? The pandemic's going to do what it's going to do, we can't change that, we're just going to continue to operate within it, whatever that phase happens to be, like so many of us, but yet you did not stop innovating along the way and really carried forward some of the aspirations that the organization had. So, let's talk about some of those, and why you pulled the trigger, if you will, on this one versus that one in sort of the pantheon of ideas that you had.

Colin McGinnis: [00:22:12] Yeah. So, even thinking back to March 12th, I remember the conversation with our social impact manager at the time who is now a social worker, and I'm very happy that she was able to move on, but was really a loss for me, because she was fantastic. But we saw rumblings of the pandemic happening in the weeks before. And I remember turning to her, and saying, I don't know what we need to do, I'm not sure what we should be doing or even if we have to plan this far ahead, but I want you to put a plan together and let me know how we're going to take care of the families, because they won't be here.

Colin McGinnis: [00:22:49] And at that time, the thought of closing early childhood I don't even think was in anyone's deck of cards. I didn't think we saw that as a play that was going to actually happen. So, we put together what we called care kits, and they were weekly ways to connect with our families. They came through the almost assembly line of cars and we'd hand the kits to the families. And it did two things.

Colin McGinnis: [00:23:12] In the kits themselves were either education, materials, food, personal hygiene products, cleaning supplies, the things that we knew our family center was normally providing. Instead of targeting families, we said, we don't know what's going to happen to employment or household stability, so everyone is getting one of these and we're going to do them weekly. And it also gave us an opportunity to check in, and say, is everything okay at home both with the verbal ask, but then also just checking on the family. What's happening? What's the stability going on? We gave out over a thousand of those.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:48] Wow, that's awesome.

Colin McGinnis: [00:23:49] Which was awesome. Both South Side, and then kind of to the next success that we had was we acquired Hilltop Preschool. We took another program that needed an injection and maybe innovation, and just the nature of the pandemic and the uncertainty, the reality for early childhood is you're stronger in numbers. If you can centralize your administrative team, you can serve more littles and you can be more effective. So, we started actually with a center management agreement. We took a very different approach. It wasn't the traditional acquisition process. We actually tried on the acquisition for three months before we did that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:30] Oh, really? Wow. Okay.

Colin McGinnis: [00:24:30] Yeah. And we took all of the administrative responsibilities of the program. We were doing programmatic. My director of program stepped in for that. Our senior director of finance and business operations was helping run the books on the back end. We actually hired, as a South Side employee, a center director to manage the day-to-day operation. And we tried on for a bit before fully acquiring the program on the last day of 2020, which most programs at that point were laying off and shuttering the doors.

Colin McGinnis: [00:25:01] And we decided to be bold, and not let the program fall, and then try to fill in later, let's just bring them into the family, which there was more to that than I think I knew I was getting into, but it's working well and we're really excited to have been able to expand into the West Side. What I also had my team do, though, was think about, what are we doing? What's our model? And what's our approach?

Colin McGinnis: [00:25:27] And I talked a little bit about the model before, but we started to think about approach, and said, okay, would we ever start a standalone child care center, a building where we operated all of the walls? There were no partners in there, just us. The way that I think a lot of us think about child care. And the answer quickly became no. And then, the question became, okay, then what? Is it always going to be like the Reeb Avenue Center, which is our flagship school, where we add on with nonprofits and we came up with these four different approaches that we then started maybe aggressively. It could be the word to use, but-

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:05] Yeah, I think so.

Colin McGinnis: [00:26:06] ... aggressively started moving towards. So, we thought serve, learn is what we're doing right now. We're partnering with nonprofits. We're providing this community approach. We're grounding early childhood as a community hub and a place for community development. And we are very good at that. We've been doing that for 100 years. Then, we also said, let's look at the barriers of families that we serve, and how do we address some of those barriers through early childhood as well, going one step beyond our current thinking of community development? And we ventured into what we're calling live, learn.

Colin McGinnis: [00:26:37] We're actually building microschoools in affordable housing complexes, which we are very excited about, too, opening by the end of year. One more in discussion for 2022. And then, our opening conversations about what could that look like, having these really intentional and well-built programs, where, again, it's not next door to affordable housing, it shares walls. It is not the end of the housing complex. We know housing and transportation are barriers for families and littles, let's remove it. Let's build it right there and let's do it in a compact way. It's only 3,000 square feet, which is very different than Reeb Avenue, which is 15 or 20,000 square feet. So, we're excited about that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:23] How many students will that serve, that size of space? Just to give people a little bit of context, because I know that's going to be like, oh, how many kids would that be?

Colin McGinnis: [00:27:30] Yeah. So, it will serve about 25, which probably doesn't sound like a lot.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:35] No, but that's the microconcept, right?

Colin McGinnis: [00:27:37] Exactly.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:37] It's very intimate. It's going to be incredibly intimate with those families.

Colin McGinnis: [00:27:41] Exactly. And all of our programs are intentionally small because of the approach that we're using. So, in the infant toddler classrooms, mixed age, it's going to be three teachers with a max of nine littles. So, one to three ratio. You know that's what they need at that point. And then, when we transition to

pre-K, it's going to be a max of eighteen with, again, three teachers, so one to six, really thoughtful and intentional small classrooms that are far below what the state says I have to from a licensing perspective. And again, with each of that, we have a bachelor degree teacher in every classroom. Even our infant classrooms have a bachelor's degree.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:20] Right. Which is not typical in pre-K at all, so I'd like to be really, really clear about, that is one of the innovations that the South Side has really pushed.

Colin McGinnis: [00:28:30] Yeah. So, we have these microschools, which we're really excited about. And then, we started getting bold, which I didn't think my team could get more bold than we already were, and we said, we have this microschool, we have these really large programs, because even Reeb Avenue has nine classrooms. That's a big school. We started thinking, how can we go to employers and build out work, learn, where we're intentionally in areas of employment on the campus of the employer themselves.

Colin McGinnis: [00:28:58] Again, removing that transportation and work barrier that we see, and we have been thinking a lot about, and I think we're going to start moving on, learn, learn with both higher ed, and then maybe even in the K-12 space, how do we integrate and co-locate together to where we could have early childhood programs that also provide opportunities for students, whether it's high school or higher ed, to get very intentional hands-on training in an early childhood classroom and build out that pipeline, so you can make a career and a profession out of early childhood?

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:34] Love that so much and it's so desperately needed. Bravo.

Colin McGinnis: [00:29:38] Yes. Right now, we're seeing, I believe, the statistic and it could be even worse than I'm remembering, it is one in five programs across the country do not have enough staff to operate. So, it's not that they're understaffed, it's that they can't even open the doors, because staffing is a barrier. And it needs drastic and dramatic change. We need to build out the early childhood workforce and we have to actually treat them like they're valuable assets to the education community like they are.

Annalies Corbin: [00:30:07] Correct, rather than just an afterthought or a pre-thought, but that we're not compensating in the same way that we are, that we're not really thinking of them as a licensed teacher in the same way, right? And we've created this artificial sort of hierarchy, but quite frankly, A, it's ridiculous, and B, if you were going to swap it, turn it on its head, because without the foundation, the rest of it is just a complete slog, quite frankly, right?

Colin McGinnis: [00:30:39] Yeah. And as someone who studies the early childhood workforce, because that is my background for research perspective, a lot of it has to do with the history of who has been an early childhood teacher. And I do want to acknowledge it, I won't dive into it too far, but it's predominantly women of color that are in the early childhood workforce, those that have been denied access to the bachelor's degree to be a K-12 teacher that end up in early childhood, which I'm so glad that they are, because the early childhood workforce is dynamic, and bold, and resilient.

Colin McGinnis: [00:31:10] But now, what we're doing is from a policy perspective, we're saying, hey, this early childhood thing is important. We're going to create systems that improve access. We're going to create universal systems in some municipalities, in some states. But because of how we like to policy-make in the United States, we are creating these, in my mind, artificial barriers that don't need to be there, where we're requiring bachelor's degrees.

Colin McGinnis: [00:31:38] And what we're doing is further disrupting the workforce or we're telling professionals that have been in their jobs for a decade that, actually, you can't move up to leading your own classroom, because you don't have a bachelor's degree, we're going to ignore the fact that you've been denied access to that up until this point. And that's something that we work really hard at South Side, is to ensure we can meet the requirements from the policy perspective, but that we are also going to treat our workforce well.

Colin McGinnis: [00:32:07] And it's an upcoming initiative that's launching out in September, but equity is something that we are really passionate about. We're adjusting our minimum wage to be \$32,000 a year at South Side with minimal credentialing and no experience, because when you track that out to when you actually have the bachelor's degree or the master's degree on staff, their wages are aligned with the K-12 system and I no longer have to worry about like awesome teachers that have the experience leaving me for a kindergarten classroom.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:40] Yeah, it's a problem, right? We understand that's our real problem, right? And so, trying to find ways to make it worth everybody's while to stay in the place that you love, that's meaningful.

Colin McGinnis: [00:32:52] We know early childhood is about 35% of teachers turning over every year in an average wage, at least here in Franklin County, of \$10.68 some odd cents. I think nationally, it's like \$9.30 some odd cents, to be able to say, here's my staff, who have an average tenure of 13 years, where we have at least one bachelor's degree in every classroom, a quarter of which have been with me more than 20 years, we are going to put them on track with K-12, not because I was losing—honestly, it's not because I was losing folks, it's because I was tired of talking about how bad it was and my board made that commitment to our workforce to say, they deserve it. Why are we-

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:31] Absolutely. It's only fair, right?

Colin McGinnis: [00:33:34] Yeah.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:34] That's effable. Well, I mean, I step back and think about that, I mean, even all the high school kiddos that we hire in the summertime to help facilitate with camps, we pay them \$15 an hour, right? And so, it's like, come on, we have to honor our workforce.

Colin McGinnis: [00:33:49] Exactly.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:50] With living wages.

Colin McGinnis: [00:33:52] Living wages. There is no reason that a teacher, whether it's early childhood or K-12, should have to use the same subsidies that we are putting, in my world, families into early childhood, so we can break cycles of poverty, why are we creating a poverty-driven workforce? It doesn't make sense. It's counter to what we're trying to do. So, I'm excited that we're stepping up and we're doing that this school year, which we're doing a bunch of research around and we're going to evaluate the impact of that. But honestly, even if that research comes back with no results, it doesn't matter. We've made real impacts in someone's actual life. It's that difference between, what is a data point for a statistic and a study, and then who is behind that data point?

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:40] Yeah, absolutely. Well, and you made a commitment to these people. That's the other thing, right? And so, the research side is the right thing to do for so many different reasons. And back to something I said earlier, it will have a ripple effect. It will have a ripple effect of the most positive way in this community, and hopefully, in other parts of the state as well. So, bravo on that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:02] I want to make sure before we close, we're going to run out of time, I want to make sure we talk a little bit about the ECE workforce piece just a little bit more, right? Because I do think that is one of those really remarkable components that I don't see others in early childhood necessarily thinking about so deliberately. So, flesh that out just a little bit more for us, please. You've made reference to it throughout.

Colin McGinnis: [00:35:31] Yeah. So, I'm fortunate that I'm at a nonprofit early childhood program, where it allows me to tell the story in even more impactful way. So, I think I'm going to put on my development hat for a second. The reality is for early childhood programs, if someone's looking to invest, if someone is looking to donate into a program like South Side, you're not donating into the books, or the supplies, or the building. I mean, you are if it's a capital campaign, but the program itself is actually the teachers. It's not the littles, they're the cute ones, they're the thing that we're working towards.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:10] There's a photo op. Yeah.

Colin McGinnis: [00:36:12] At the end of the day, if you don't have exceptional teachers, like I truly believe I have, and I know everyone probably says that about their staff, but I've worked in a lot of programs from a research perspective, I've seen the early childhood workforce, it's what I study. I have exceptional teachers at South Side, and my question always is, why did you stay? I have teachers that have been in a South Side classroom, not just in a classroom, in a South Side classroom, longer than I have been alive.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:42] Wow, that's remarkable.

Colin McGinnis: [00:36:43] It is. And my question to them is always, thank you, but why? Why are you here? And there's a couple of things that happen. South Side has always given them the autonomy to be a professional, and implement what they think is going to be best practice, and try it out. And there's something about when you can say to a teacher, not only are you a teacher, but I trust that you are the expert in this, let us know how it works, and we're going to scale that, if we can, into other rooms and try it out.

Colin McGinnis: [00:37:14] And if it doesn't, that's okay, we're not going to fault you for that. So, there's that professionalism that we give them. There's this sense of community. I have teachers that also went to South Side, because we've been around for 100 years. They know that early childhood and their work directly makes a difference in the neighborhood that they're working in and that they're serving. And then, the other thing that we do is we're really intentional about building out this pipeline.

Colin McGinnis: [00:37:40] So, whether you are a recent high school graduate and you want to work on your child development accreditation, the CDA, which is a minimum requirement for licensure and hiring at South Side, you can come in at that point. You could come in as a student that just got their associate's degree. You can come in as a student teacher in the bachelor's degree pipeline. You could go and work towards that master's degree.

Colin McGinnis: [00:38:02] We will support you every step along the way, because whatever your educational aspirations are, I want to ensure that we are able to foster that. Those three things don't sound that dramatic or radical, but you would be surprised how often that is not the case in the early childhood world. Usually, early childhood is severely overworked, a ton of stresses in the field. There's a lot of strain on the body itself.

Colin McGinnis: [00:38:30] It's a very physically demanding job and we don't often, until recently when the research started that pointed out, think about the wellbeing of an early childhood professional, of these mostly

women, who are taking care of, honestly, our most prized possession and treasure as a nation, and making sure that we are caring for them. It's really amazing how the smallest changes from the administrative side of things, and even honestly, refer to early childhood teachers as teachers. Don't call them child care workers.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:04] Right.

Colin McGinnis: [00:39:05] They have, a lot of times, the same credentialing that your kindergarten teacher would have. And the difference is six months of time for the age of the student that they're working with.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:14] Right. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Colin, I want to thank you so much for making time in your day to have this conversation with us. And it is a true pleasure to chat, but it is a true pleasure to have you and the work of South Side in our community. And I, for one, feel incredibly privileged to get the chance just to work with you. And I hope that we get to continue to sort of develop some of the ideas that we've been hearing today. So, thank you so much.

Colin McGinnis: [00:39:44] Thank you so much for having me. I love the work of PAST and all the work that you are doing, and I look forward to collaborating again in the future.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:52] Excellent. Thank you.

Colin McGinnis: [00:39:53] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:55] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media @AnnaliesCorbin and join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.