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STEVE ADUBATO, host:

Welcome to another of CAUCUS: UP CLOSE, where we talk with some of New Jersey's most interesting and compelling personalities. I'm Steve Adubato. This week, you'll meet two prominent faculty members at Rutgers University in Newark whose dedication to their work has put them at the top of their respective fields. A little bit later in the program, we'll examine second-generation Asian-Americans with Dr. Jamie Lew.

But first, meet Dr. Jeffrey Kidder, who is helping kids in Newark public schools get turned on to science.

Good to see you.

Dr. JEFFREY KIDDER (PhD; Rutgers-Newark): Hi, Steve.

ADUBATO: Now first, right off the bat, how exactly do you get kids turned on to science in the Newark public schools?

Dr. KIDDER: Well, that's a good question. I think it involves getting them engaged in hands-on activities. And at a college, it's an easy thing to do. You bring kids into labs, you let them play with all the cool science toys that we have at a place like Rutgers, do dissections. It's real easy to get them turned on. We have tremendous resources.

ADUBATO: What is Project MOST?

Dr. KIDDER: Project MOST stands for--it's a Coca-Cola Foundation-funded program that--the Academic Foundations Center at Rutgers received a \$300,000 grant from Coke.

ADUBATO: \$300,000 grant.

Dr. KIDDER: \$300,000. And it's part of their Keeping Kids in School initiative. And Project MOST stands for Middle School Opportunities in Science and Technology. And the idea is to keep kids achieving at a very high level while they're in school. We have a tutoring component. We have 17 undergraduate tutors connected to kids. They work on a one-on-three relationship. So the tutors go into the schools and do tutoring; the kids come on the campus once a week and

they get tutored on campus. That's the--the focus of that is to keep their science achievement high. So we thought undergraduates that work directly on the curriculum in their classroom, on campus. But the best part of it is we bring them in the lab--I think it's the best part.

ADUBATO: What goes on in the lab?

Dr. KIDDER: And they do enrichment activities.

ADUBATO: What does that mean?

Dr. KIDDER: For example, we had a curriculum last semester on cardiopulmonary physiology. And what does that mean? That means the kids dissect...

ADUBATO: With middle--middle school kids?

Dr. KIDDER: They got to do heart dissections and look at real lungs and, you know, learn about blood pressure and--and the kind of things that we do at the college level. I mean, they essentially got a college-level curriculum and got to come in without the threat of tests or anything, got to play with, like I like to say, cool toys and stuff that we have on campus.

ADUBATO: Do they love it?

Dr. KIDDER: And they love it. Yeah, they do.

ADUBATO: You know, I'm thinking, why is it so important to get to kids so early on and get them turned on to science? Someone says, 'Well, why don't you just wait until they're older?' It doesn't work that way?

Dr. KIDDER: A lot of programs--what I've discovered in my role doing outreach with kids is that we do a lot of programs for high school kids, but to get kids from urban areas, I think, and make opportunities that are real, meaning that they could actually go to college and major in science or be premed, I think we need to reach down much earlier. And the goal of this program is to reach down. We start with sixth grade--if it were up to me, we would go even--even lower--and give them the kind of enrichment opportunities that will really foster and help build, not just skills, but--but interest in science.

ADUBATO: Jeff, is part of the problem that--with getting kids turned on to science, be they in urban areas or not, that the parents--that parents in many cases are either oblivious to, scared of, just don't know much about, science? Is that part of the issue?

Dr. KIDDER: Absolutely. Getting the parents connected--in Project MOST, we have a very large parent component. We have counselors from

Academic Foundations Center who work with our undergraduate population. They're actually connecting and reaching out to the parents in this program, already giving them information on college entrance and that kind of thing.

ADUBATO: How'd you get turned on to science?

Dr. KIDDER: How did I get turned on? I think we all can look back at a particular person or a couple people that turn us on and reach down and pull us up. For some people, it's their parents; most of us have a mentor in one way. And I certainly had several at the high school level and also at the college level. And that's the great thing about this, Steve. I think that connecting--many of our undergraduates and grad students at Rutgers-Newark come from the same urban centers as these kids and connecting them with college students really--they're--they're great role models. They're tremendous. They're young and enthusiastic; they--they're cool, hip, but they love science.

ADUBATO: Give--give--give us--share with us--I'm going to put you on the spot. Share with us a success story, one of these kids in Project MOST, who got turned on to science and you could see some real potential for in terms of--again, it's--it's not often the case that they'll actually have a career. But they actually could in this case. Tell us.

Dr. KIDDER: Well, there are several. There's so many--the program has only been going on for a year now, so I don't have, you know, a lot of details. But there have been several kids that just showed great enthusiasm. We had a science fair after the heart and lung dissections and--and--and unit that we did. And I lent some light laboratory coats to three--three young girls, middle school girls, who were in the program, and they wouldn't give them back. They wouldn't give them back. And they wanted to wear them around school. And, of course, it's a badge; it's a special thing they're getting to do at the university. And I was invited to be a judge at their science fair some time in June, several weeks after we had ended Project MOST, and I showed up at the science fair and there they were wearing my lab coats. And...

ADUBATO: Wow.

Dr. KIDDER: ...you know, they were thrilled to share with others all the neat things that they'd been doing at the school.

ADUBATO: What's that like for you when you see that? When you saw those kids, those three kids in those white labs and everything that--that white, you know, coat represents?

Dr. KIDDER: It feels great because I believe that it's about access and opportunity. And, you know, giving children, particularly children from places like Newark where they don't have a lot of

scientists or engineers or people with, you know, PhDs in their background--they don't have that exposure. Giving them that opportunity is, I think, a wonderful privilege, really.

ADUBATO: You know, several years ago we did a series on science and I'll never forget there was a science teacher in the Newark public schools. Her name was Catherine Jackson. And she made a great impact on us. She wound up doing like five or six programs with us. And I always thought, you know, Catherine Jackson must turn so many kids on to science, be--with her enthusiasm and passion and commitment and caring for these kids. And I thought, how typical, ha--how atypical is a Catherine Jackson? Let's talk about science teachers.

Dr. KIDDER: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: OK? And y--you have a smile on your face. Why? Are they a special breed?

Dr. KIDDER: They are a very special breed. The--one of the difficulties, I think, in turning any kids on in our society to science is that there isn't very much science done on the elementary level. Many of the elementary schoolteachers don't have any science background, and the science that's done when it's done isn't done in a--in a hands-on, inquiry-based kind of way. So science isn't done very well at the early years. You--you probably remember from your own background, high school sciences track--kids who are college bound get to take interesting courses when they're in high school. Everybody else goes without science. And I feel like that's too bad, because we all do science, we all love science. You know, it's...

ADUBATO: It's unfair.

Dr. KIDDER: It's unfair. And science is all around us. We all are interested in how our bodies work, you know, about stars. You know, name something in science, kids are interested in it. But I think the system we've had in the past to give access and opportunity to science has been unfair.

ADUBATO: Let's talk about the mentors at Rutgers. What do they get out of working with these kids?

Dr. KIDDER: I wish I had some here. They would be better able to answer that. But I think they have--I mean, I'm often surprised at the--the richness of the experience they claim that they have. I've had graduate students in the past in the sciences working in schools. And I do now, too, not in this program, but some of them change and--and become teachers because of their experience. And I know some of these undergraduate tutors, several of them, have expressed an interest in actually becoming classroom teachers. I think it's very satisfying. I know for me, I get a lot out of being able to reach out and touch kids, and I think they have the same kind of experience.

ADUBATO: What kind of training do these mentors get?

Dr. KIDDER: We give them--the--the Newark public schools are using special science kits that are inquiry-based. So we use...

ADUBATO: What does 'inquiry-based' mean?

Dr. KIDDER: Inquiry-based means that it's hands-on and the kids are constructing their own knowledge by questioning and we're guiding them.

ADUBATO: Give us a for-instance.

Dr. KIDDER: I had some kids and some teachers in a lab the other day and we had some cars on a special plastic racetrack. And it's a system of cars that, you know, will do these loop-the-loops. They're--they're these little toy cars. And rather than teaching a lesson, going in and putting the physics on the chalkboard and lecturing, you know, we start by letting them play with the cars, asking questions and more or less facilitate the learning based on the kind of questioning and playing. It's very much based on inquisitiveness and curiosity and fostering that in kids. And...

ADUBATO: And talk to me about the training or the re-education of existing science teachers. I--I often think about this. Say a teacher--science teacher gets tenure, 10, 20, 15, you know, years ago. So there are new inquiry-based methods, there are new approaches. How do those more experienced, older science teachers get excited about the approaches you're talking about? They don't have to do that, do they?

Dr. KIDDER: No, they don't have to do it. It depends on what level you're talking about. There hasn't been a lot of science done at the elementary level, unfortunately. Elementary teachers--and I'm generalizing, but generally speaking, they've been phobic about science and it's something that when it's done it hasn't been done well. So National Science Foundation and other national agencies have invested a lot of money into coming up with these kinds of kits and inquiry approaches that teachers can get training and they can do science in a way that will excite and turn kids on. And so...

ADUBATO: And last--excuse me for interrupting. Last question: If you could measure the success of Project MOST three years from now--OK?--I know the numbers--we're obsessed in academia, particularly when you get grants--Right?--in terms of the number game, how do you quantify the success. But in any way you choose to, from a qualitative or a quantitative point of view, give us a sense as to how you would define success with this program three years down the road.

Dr. KIDDER: To me, success--probably for anything educationally--is excitement and interest. I wouldn't measure it so much in test scores. And I'm not saying that test scores aren't important. But to

me, the true measure is turning kids on so they are interested and it enriches their lives. They want to know about the world around them. They want to investigate that world, whether it's, you know, insects or planets or, you know, how their body works. Whatever we do to turn that on. And I think it's a natural thing to do. I mean, we all have questions and we all wonder. Somehow that gets snuffed out sometimes in our educational system. So my measure of success is, you know, how many kids are turned on to science and want to take more science classes. If they start on the sixth-grade level, I'd want to know in high school how many of them are in the--the science courses. I think that would be a measure of success.

ADUBATO: Well, you're doing a great job. And everyone on--at the Rutgers-Newark campus, I'm sure, is proud of your efforts. And we appreciate your coming on. And why don't you come back a year or so from now and let us know how things are going?

Dr. KIDDER: Thank you for the opportunity.

ADUBATO: Thank you, Jeff.

Up next, Dr. Jamie Lew of Rutgers-Newark, as CAUCUS: UP CLOSE continues. Stay with us.

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ADUBATO: Dr. Jamie Lew is an assistant professor at Rutgers-Newark and is completing a book on second-generation Korean-American students.

Good to see you, Doctor.

Dr. JAMIE LEW (PhD; Rutgers-Newark): Hi.

ADUBATO: Let me ask you, is there a distinction--and, again, we're talking about Korean-American students. Someone might say, 'So you're doing research on Asian-Americans.'

Dr. LEW: Right.

ADUBATO: It's not that simple, is it?

Dr. LEW: No, no. The research that I'm doing is on second-generation Korean-Americans, but some of the experiences and issues that they experience in school and in the community, there are some relevant issues that are common among Asian-Americans as well as...

ADUBATO: Such as?

Dr. LEW: Well, one of the first issues that often concern the Asian-American community, including Korean-Americans, is this notion of model minority. And basically the idea is that all Asians are homogeneously successful because they're academically successful and they're achieving this economic success. And part of the problem--there's three main problems that I see with that. The first thing is that often the reasons to explain their success is usually based on cultural discourses. So, for example, they're hardworking, they believe in education. And, you know, they have a close family network or whatever have you. And often what ends up happening is we begin to forget about the importance of socioeconomic class issues, the racism that a lot of the Asians face in this country. And also, thirdly, what ends up happening is we have--it's the same flip side of this culture of poverty argument, that somehow if Asians can make it because they believe in education and they have values of education and they have nuclear family, then why can't other minority groups?

ADUBATO: What's wrong with that argument?

Dr. LEW: Well, because it really negates the importance of class, other structural factors. For example, like if you're actually coming from schools that are--that have problems with urban issues, if your families are actually poor, the Asian students, along with many other minority students, deal with the same issues, same barriers of--of achieving academically if you don't have those resources at home and in a community.

ADUBATO: So I--I want to be clear here, Doctor. So a Korean-American, Asian-American kid who is not performing well in school...

Dr. LEW: Right.

ADUBATO: ...is it even harder for that kid because of this model stereotype that you're talking about?

Dr. LEW: Absolutely. Because part of the--the problem is that the students usually structurally if they--socially if they have this kind of belief that they need to be successful, then what we end up finding is that a lot of the students don't really seek help because they think that it's actually their fault for not succeeding.

ADUBATO: They're weak.

Dr. LEW: Yeah. And part of--sorry?

ADUBATO: Or 'I'm weak,' they're thinking.

Dr. LEW: Exactly.

ADUBATO: And they're really--it may not be the case. But there--it's more difficult for them to reach out and get help because they're

expected to not need help.

Dr. LEW: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. So they're believed to be successful and, therefore, if they actually call for help from teachers or from administrators, it's usually often looked upon as, well, you know, 'It's one of a very few students in--in the Asian-American communities who have a problem,' for example. So their problems are not addressed, and that's usually a big problem in the schools.

ADUBATO: Let's talk a little bit about how Korean-American students and other Asian-American students are--I hate this word--assimilating on campuses.

Dr. LEW: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: I mean, you can use another word if you choose to, but you know what I'm talking about. Talk to me about that.

Dr. LEW: In terms of...

ADUBATO: Connecting with other people, getting comfortable in the environment, feeling "a part of" a community, those kinds of things.

Dr. LEW: Mm-hmm. Well, what's interesting is that a growing body of research right now shows that the children of immigrants in our communities, especially if they live in poor urban communities, the kids who are succeeding are the ones who are not assimilating; that, in fact, they have actually very, very close ties with their immigrant networks and that they gain a lot of resources from their immigrant communities; that, in fact, by doing--by having that connection, a lot of them actually hold on to their ethnic identities and--as well as their resources that they gain from their first-generation networks.

So what we're finding slowly is that the kids who are actually academically successful are the ones who are not assimilating, if you will, but, in fact, they're maintaining very strong ethnic identifications. And so one of the things that I'm finding in my research, along with many other research that's out there, is that among the Korean groups who are successful, they do have this ethnic affiliation. But they're also coming mostly from working-class and middle-class kids vs. kids who are actually poor, who are dropping out of high school.

ADUBATO: Let's talk prejudice, let's talk discrimination with these second-generation kids. What are they experiencing?

Dr. LEW: Well, the--the--the non-academic kids, the ones who are dropping out of high schools, what I'm finding is that many of them go to schools that are extremely politically and economically isolated. So they go to very poor schools. They are mostly coming from working-class backgrounds with single-parent households. Their

friends and themselves often face a lot of racism in their communities. And what they...

ADUBATO: In what form?

Dr. LEW: Being called racial names, often sort of--there's a lot of physical violence as well, a lot of them get in...

ADUBATO: A lot of physical violence?

Dr. LEW: A lot of them get into--a lot of them are involved in gangs for self-protection.

ADUBATO: Well--excuse me--how would you--because I'm going to ask you in a moment about your methodology. W--if a kid is in a gang...

Dr. LEW: Yeah.

ADUBATO: ...why would you correlate or connect that to his being a victim of violence? You know--you know what I'm trying to say? Like, it...

Dr. LEW: Yeah. Part...

ADUBATO: Could it be that the kid's in a gang?

Dr. LEW: Right. Right. Right. The groups that I actually interviewed were a group of high school dropouts and--who are attending these--a GED program in New York City. And many of them dropped out for many, many--all sorts of reasons. By no means all of them are in gangs, but a couple of them were. And many of them tried to get out of gangs as a result of, you know, obviously, dealing with a lot of violence.

ADUBATO: Excuse me. Are these gangs connected to or connected by ethnicity?

Dr. LEW: Yeah.

ADUBATO: OK.

Dr. LEW: Many of them were involved in either Korean gangs or other Asian gangs. But their reasons for being involved are, you know, many, many reasons. But several of them had to do with self-protection because many of them really faced violence in their communities often. So what I find that--that--that the--the dropout kids, the way that they deal with racism is to in many ways sort of adopt this sort of idea that they really need to--that they align their experiences with a lot of other poor minorities in their peer group.

The academic students, what I'm finding, they actually ali--they

recognize racism, they know that they're not going to be accepted as, quote, unquote, "American." But what they use, they use education to actually become more successful because they recognize that they're always going to face racism, so it's--they use it as a racial strategy to do even better in school.

ADUBATO: Let me try this. It--it--you are--your work is based in New York City, as you say.

Dr. LEW: Yeah.

ADUBATO: If you were out on the West Coast, would it be different?

Dr. LEW: It depends on where I would--which city I would choose.

ADUBATO: If you were in LA.

Dr. LEW: Yeah. It may actually--there are some similarities between the two areas, but I would imagine that it would be somewhat different. In ma--in some of the areas, the Koreans in the New York City area, they're not--they don't represent one of the largest, whereas in LA it's clearly one of the largest.

ADUBATO: Let's talk race relations. It's one thing to talk about discrimination and prejudice, but it's another thing to talk about race relations. What are you finding in your research regarding the relationship between second-generation Korean-American students and African-American students?

Dr. LEW: Well, the--the magnet school kids, the academic kids, first of all, they attend school where it's about 49 percent to 50 percent Asian-American. So they are the majority, which is interesting.

ADUBATO: That's atypical.

Dr. LEW: Of most schools, yeah.

ADUBATO: Sure.

Dr. LEW: But the--obviously the--the science magnet high schools right now in New York City consist of about 50 percent, more or less, of Asian-American students. And in a large--the next largest population are the whites, and then the Hispanics and blacks. The kids who actually go to--so therefore they don't actually have that much interaction with, for example, African-Americans or the black communities in the schools.

But many of them grow up in areas that have--that are--that are from Queens, for example, which has about 75 percent Koreans, which are heavily populated by newly arriving immigrants and some African-Americans and some Hispanics. But they kind of have this sort of way where because they go to a particular type of school that

doesn't have that high population ...(unintelligible) content...

ADUBATO: So they're not interacting much.

Dr. LEW: Not a whole lot.

ADUBATO: But--but--but--I hate to ask you anecdotally because I know for an academic doing research, that's uncomfortable sometimes. But I'm going to ask you anecdotally, your sense or any other research that you know of that examines race relations between Asian-American and African-American young people.

Dr. LEW: Young people. Well, obviously from the Los Angeles riot, there's been a lot of research on the Korean-black relations and certainly the entrepreneurial status of Koreans. What's interesting about what I'm finding with the youth population in New York is that those kids are academically successful--as I mentioned earlier, the importance of socioeconomic class--that a lot of their parents are entrepreneurs themselves. So they often come from middle-class backgrounds.

The dropout kids, however, they actually work for entrepreneurs. So they're not entrepreneurs themselves. So what we find with the second-generation kids is that there is a relationship between first-generation Koreans and their entrepreneurial "success" along with their--their children, and that, unlike sort of the model minority myth that we hear that all Korean-Americans are successful because they're middle-class entrepreneurs...

ADUBATO: Excuse me. I--you call it the model minority myth.

Dr. LEW: Right.

ADUBATO: And you say because all are not successful. However--and I'll let you finish your point in a moment. But it--is it not a fact that a disproportionate percentage...

Dr. LEW: Yes.

ADUBATO: ...of Korean-American and Asian-American kids do score better than other groups?

Dr. LEW: Mm-hmm.

ADUBATO: And is it not a fact that a disproportionate percentage of Korean-American, Asian-American...

Dr. LEW: Yes.

ADUBATO: ...adults are successful in business if compared to other ethnic groups?

Dr. LEW: Absolutely. Absolutely. But the problem then becomes that we begin to ignore those who are--who are actually not achieving the success, number one, and that the idea somehow that that success comes from--just because of cultural values when, in fact, that's not the case at all...

ADUBATO: A lot of other factors.

Dr. LEW: Absolutely.

ADUBATO: OK. I don't want to take you away from the point you were making before.

Dr. LEW: Right.

ADUBATO: Do you remember?

Dr. LEW: Mm.

ADUBATO: OK. That's all right. We'll go to another one, because you said something else early--early in the program and I should have followed up. I asked you right out of the box, Korean-American research, Asian-American research. Let's talk about some of the distinctions that the average person may not pick up on...

Dr. LEW: Yeah.

ADUBATO: ...between Koreans, Japanese, Chinese--I mean...

Dr. LEW: Yeah. It's--it's so diverse. The--the--first of all, the--the Korean-Americans hold a very particular, different experience here in this country compared to, let's say, the Chinese- or the Japanese-Americans.

ADUBATO: Because U--of US-Korean relations?

Dr. LEW: Of US-Korea relations, for sure. But also because of their touted sort of etre--entrepreneurial success. So in many ways, there is a large percentage of Koreans who are actually college educated, who ha--who bring with them particular type of skills. But because of language barrier, many of them have turned to these small family businesses as a way to--rather than working for blue collar sort of work. And one of the--the--the ways in which Koreans have become sort of successful is also in the terms of what people have been talking about for entrepreneurial success, is that it's not because they actually come with these sort of business skills or small-business skills but they actually develop them once they get here in order to make it.

The--the Chinese-Americans...

ADUBATO: A few seconds left. Go ahead.

Dr. LEW: The Chinese-Americans...

ADUBATO: We'll keep talking off the air. Go ahead. The Chinese-Americans...

Dr. LEW: ...are ethnically extremely diverse because you're talking about those who are from mainland China, from Hong Kong, from Taiwan and ex--from Southeast Asian ethnic Chinese. The Koreans, on the other hand, are much more homogeneous in the sense of ethnicity. So you're dealing with a much more homogeneous group.

The Japanese-Americans are interesting as well because Chinese- and Japanese-Americans, particularly on the West Coast, many of them have been here for many, many generations. And while Koreans, that's the case, a large bulk of the Korean-Americans have really come here since the '60s.

ADUBATO: Great job. Thank you, Doctor.

Dr. LEW: Great.

ADUBATO: You obviously love your work.

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