

## Bluum Together: Episode 4- Bonneville School District

**Mike Caldwell:** Alright, greetings and good day to all of our podcast listeners. I hope some of you are out there, at least one person's out there listening. I am joined today by special guests from Bonneville school district, Jason Lords and Nicky Pack. So, Jason, Nicky, welcome.

**Nicky Pack:** Thank you.

**Jason Lords:** Thanks, Mike.

**Mike Caldwell:** Thanks for being here. Nicky was tricked into being here. You said she was coming in for a bonus conversation or something, and all of a sudden, she has earphones on and here she is.

**Jason Lords:** She falls for it every time.

**Mike Caldwell:** Good trick. Jason, why don't you kick us off with a story that is going to set the stage for our conversation today?

**Jason Lords:** Yeah. As a school district we've been just working really hard on trying to improve, trying to help students not only become successful, but stay successful. And you know, over last 12 years we just had a really big focus on professional learning communities. And you know, as you're doing things, you're thinking, "okay, this is going to make a difference. I know this is working". And it was interesting, I just remember this very vividly meeting in one of our school board meetings. We do different reports throughout the month, and what I was reporting on was just our IRI data. We typically will do like an, "Okay, we just did our September. What does that look like?" You know, willing to count the summer slide that happens. But also then, looking back at last year and okay, "how did things go last year?" And Scott and I were meeting one day in his office just getting that report ready. And we're just both going, "what in the world? It doesn't feel like according to the IRI data, it didn't look like our students had done as well." And so, I'm presenting to the board basically saying, "here's all the things we're doing, were working really hard. I swear we are, and our teachers are". I know our teachers are. And our teachers are passionate about students, especially you know, in those K-3 grade levels. Those teachers are so passionate about students reading. And so, I'm just trying to figure that out. And then after that meeting, Scott and I both looked at each other like, "no, we got to be able to look at something different to be able to really judge how we're doing". And I think there are a couple of things that happened, you know, in an IRI assessment, it's a normed assessment. So, this year they re-normed that assessment. And we were getting to the point where we're almost having 80% of our students were proficient on an assessment that really, it's that bell curve type of assessment that really ought to be in the middle, and you should have a few students over the middle and some under. But really, most students in the middle, almost 80% of our students were being proficient on that assessment. And so, we started having conversations about what can we use that is really focusing on where those students are, not

where every student is on a normed assessment. And as we looked at those assessments, it was like, “Oh, my heck! Our students actually, really, really grew”. And we're performing really well. And so, for me it was, “Wow, okay, we are starting to see those”. And I would say, we've also had a couple of things happen, in a report that just came out last week, you know, saying the growth in our school district on those reading scores has just been great. And then last year, one of the reports came out was on our special populations and how well they were doing on assessments. And so, it's like, okay. We're starting to see those fruits from our labor, I guess.

**Mike Caldwell:** Kudos to you and your district. You know, I was meeting with Ryan Cantrell at the State Department, and a couple of their goals this year is to really try to get more schools embracing the PLC concept. The other goals that they talked about is really trying to help school boards spend more time looking at data talking about academics, right? And it sounds like you guys are nailing those two just in that brief story that you shared. Nicky- data, data, data. Can you personalize the data for us a little bit? And I mean, do you have a student story that kind of just sets the stage for this conversation and how important what we do in the classroom in terms of reading instruction goes?

**Nicky Pack:** You bet, I can think of a few actually. During our collaboration time just today as a whole staff, we were doing some celebrations, and one of my teachers checked their IRI data as we were talking. And she said, “Oh, my gosh! You guys, guess what? This student who came to us as an English language learner this year cannot speak fluent English and doesn't know how to read English or Spanish. He came in, wasn't doing well. We pulled some systematic interventions and pulled him in for those, and he now made 60 points growth within one month, which is really huge for him”. He started out in a negative Lexile score. And he's a third grader, and he's now above 0. Which sounds like, well, he's still at kindergarten level. Yes, he is, but he's actually starting to read because of those systematic interventions that are happening.

**Mike Caldwell:** You were able to identify him right away, and then you had a process in place to support what he needed.

**Nicky Pack:** Yes.

**Mike Caldwell:** Well, that absolutely sets the stage for our conversation today on reading and really spotlighting the Bonneville School district and the good things that you guys are doing in hopes that other schools can learn from the good work that you are doing. Just like we all learn from each other, right? We've kind of jumped ahead but let's come back to introductions. Nicky, you're a principal at one of the elementary schools here in the Bonneville school district?

**Nicky Pack:** Yes, I'm a principal at Cloverdale elementary.

**Mike Caldwell:** It sounds like you've been in the district for a while.

**Nicky Pack:** I've been in the district for over 20 years, I've lost track.

**Mike Caldwell:** And this is your first podcast experience?

**Nicky Pack:** First podcast experience, a bit scared.

**Mike Caldwell:** Yeah, yeah. Well, never too old to learn a new trick, I guess!

**Jason Lords:** That's what I keep telling her!

**Mike Caldwell:** And Jason, you've been in the district for a while as well? Do you want to introduce yourself, and kind of what you do here?

**Jason Lords:** Yup, yup, this is my eighteenth year in the school district. I am an Executive Director over instruction and learning. And I've really just been lucky enough to be a part of the district for that long, that I've just learned so many things. I started as an Assistant Principal at Rocky Mountain, and then moved to Fairview Elementary, where Nicky was also a Principal there for a few years, and then back to Rocky Mountain as the Principal, and then back to this position. Gosh! I think it's my seventh year in this position.

**Mike Caldwell:** Yup, and for those of you out there that are coming from a school district that maybe doesn't have a Director of Curriculum Instruction, hang on! Stay with us, because I think there's still some stuff in here that is worth listening to and learning from. And I think, you know, whether you're a large district or a small district, I think there's some things that are universal in what we can apply. So let's talk first about, you know, when we talk about success, you've already kind of mentioned data and things like that. But when Bonneville goes out and looks at how you're doing in terms of reading and measuring your success, what kind of things are you looking for? And then also, what is your process to look at that data?

**Jason Lords:** What I would say is for those school districts that you know, if you're a smaller rural school district, or you're even bigger school district than we are. And even just that middle school district. Really for us, our focus has been a professional learning community structure. And it's all about making decisions as a team. I mean, we have different structures of teams throughout our district, all the way down to the principals. And then in the building levels, they all have those structures. But if you're a small school district, being able to use that structure of teams. I mean, we're all we're all better as a team.

**Mike Caldwell:** Absolutely. Yeah.

**Jason Lords:** But there's three on our team and that's what we've got, although it's better than the one person making the decisions. And so really, that's what I'd say. Anything that we're going to talk about today is conversations that we've had as a team, as a district, as principal leadership, as district leadership, and then all the way down to the teacher level teams. And I mean, we're getting feedback from principals that are getting feedback from their teachers, I mean, just all the way back. And so, things that we're having conversations about is typically

when we make a decision. A lot of times, it feels like it's slow, just because of the conversations that have to happen.

**Mike Caldwell:** And that's a core part of your structure here at Bonneville is what I'm picking up when I walked in here this afternoon and saw a group of you meeting. And so, it starts at the top with leadership and trickles down how important that is, in terms of the collaboration in the PLC's. And I would imagine at some point you've had some professional development, because PLC's is more than just getting together and talking, right? There's more to it. Do you want to elaborate a little bit on that?

**Jason Lords:** Yeah, we've actually been lucky enough with the state professional development funds that come to us. We've actually had Solution Trees, the company that really is big focus on professional learning communities, started with Rick DuFour and his wife way back in the day. But we have actually had two PLC institutes come to our district. For our August in-service days back in 2019/2020, before Covid hit, we had an institute that came to us. And I mean, you're talking, it's the big brains, the big minds, of professional learning communities that are coming. And our whole district is hearing that conversation. We had done professional development before where we were going out, and we were sending teams to like Salt Lake. We'd send, you know, a hundred teachers and staff members there. And what we continued to hear is, "I wish everybody was here to hear this". And so, yeah, in 2019, we brought the conference in. And what we heard is, "This is awesome!" And really, what was those opening meetings that many school districts have, right? They're saying, "Hey, we're going to do an in-service". And now, for those first few days of August, that's what everyone's hearing. They're hearing the same conversation. But even more importantly, they're with their teams, not only hearing the conversation, but having conversations with each other throughout those two and a half days of training.

**Mike Caldwell:** Practicing it when they have someone to model and support that.

**Jason Lords:** Then this year we brought it back again. So, our goal is to try and do it every three to four years. And so, we brought it back this year. With staff turnover, you know? You can never have enough, right? Professional learning communities are never ending, it's just getting better at what you do. And what was interesting from this fall in-service was that a number of those teachers were here in 2019. And then it was like, it's like reading a book, right? You read it the first time, and then you go back five years later and things have happened in your life, and whatever else, that you read that same book and it has a different feel.

**Mike Caldwell:** Absolutely.

**Jason Lords:** And you are like, "Oh, man, I didn't get that last time. What the heck!" And so, I think that's what happened many times. With this one, the feedback I started getting from teachers was, "Oh, I get it! I understand what the conversation was". Where in that first one many times it was, "Well, you know. Yeah, you don't have to sell us on professional communities. We don't need that. We just need more things". I think the other part of it was as

we work with Solution Tree, having those other sessions built in as well. But I do think it's just the more you hear it and start to understand, you really get it.

**Mike Caldwell:** Yeah. So, Nicky, why don't you take us through, take me through, okay, so you've had this PLC training, and you have that built into your school, and I'm sure it's an ongoing effort, as I would imagine in a school, to keep teachers focused on the process and the elements of a true PLC. But how is that connected to reading instruction, and a difference in your school? Can you kind of put those two together for me?

**Nicky Pack:** Sure. Having those conversations, and having those conversations often, leads us to asking the first question, what is it that we want all kids to be able to learn and do? And of course one of those things is reading, and there's a lot of different facets that are involved in reading. If you look at Scarborough's reading rope, there's a lot of different things there. Then we can bring writing into it because writing is married to reading, it really is. But we start having those conversations and as we have those conversations, we line out exactly what is essential for our kids to learn how to read. We match that with classroom formative data and some summative data. But we also look at our IRI scores, which also map out for us all of those different elements that compose an IRI score. We start having those discussions on, with the student I talked to you about prior, where is this student low? Well, they don't even have letter identification skills as a third grader. Of course they have some sounds which is interesting but not completely surprising. But they don't have all sounds. They don't have phonemic awareness. That gives us a place to start, right? So that's exactly where we know we need to start with that student. And those teachers are having those conversations all the time and it's not just during their PLC time. If they're working as a true PLC group or community, they are touching base and having those conversations daily. So, they're not waiting to talk about it and then when they're having those conversations, they're calling me down. And they're calling our instructional coach down and our interventionist, and we're putting all of our heads together trying to come up with a solution or something to try that may help.

**Mike Caldwell:** Yeah, I think it gives a good visual of kind of what is happening in those PLC meetings and those conversations between teachers.

**Nicky Pack:** Not one of us, and not one teacher in one grade level can come up with all of those ideas and solutions for all of our kids to learn at high levels. So, I rely on doing my research, right? And then I rely on my instructional coach. I rely on my interventionist, and I really rely on all those teachers that have got boots on the ground, and that conversation when we all get together is so much richer than just me doing the research.

**Jason Lords:** And to me it's that skill by skill, right? I mean, I think with most students struggling, okay, what does that mean? What are they struggling specifically with? And then it's that intervention skill by skill and the conversations those teachers are having. Plus, one of the other things that I think comes out of that is professional development that happens if I'm a teacher and I'm learning as we're having conversations. And it's just very, very helpful.

**Nicky Pack:** Things have changed in the last five to ten years, the conversations. It used to be, we take, say, our star assessment. And we group all of the kids for intervention according to whether they're on grade level, above grade level, below grade level. We send them to this intervention group. We decide that there's going to be some curriculum assigned or some online learning assigned, and they stay in that group all year. That's not the way we do it anymore. It's kid by kid, skill by skill, and we intervene, right? Exactly pinpoint it, almost can pinpoint it exactly where we need to intervene with that kid. Sometimes it's that very day, and that's the best-case scenario. We can intervene right now, that very day, with this grade level skill. That's how specific we are getting.

**Mike Caldwell:** That's impressive. I mean, to do that at that level is, is truly impressive. Kudos to you guys. And I'm curious on when you guys look at data, maybe at the district level, or even the school level like, there's certain metrics that you guys really zero in on and also like set goals around like, if I looked at all of Bonneville's IRI data, it is thousands and thousands of rows of data. Where do you start? What's the most important thing that you really zero in on?

**Jason Lords:** It's funny that you ask that. Our meeting we were having this morning, a little bit before you even came in, as we met with all of our K-3 teachers over Zoom and so principals had their K-3 teachers together in whether it was the media center or office wherever they could fit. And then we were talking through our SLO's, our student learning outcomes, and where they were going to build goals for their students in K-3. And really, that's where we've been struggling. Okay, what are we putting a goal on? And a lot of it before was on the scaled score from the IRI. But like we talked about before. Well, that skill score is based on that normed assessment. And it's saying, you know, again, if 80% of our kids are passing that, we've really done an amazing job of getting them past that bell curve, right? On a normed reference assessment. And so really, our conversation has been since even August, when we first came back as a district. Well, really, our Admin team... principals, district leadership. And everybody's saying, "Okay, what can we look at?" And really, Scott just does an amazing job of thinking outside the box. I mean, he always does. He's like, "What can we look at differently?" And so one of the things he said is, "Let's look at doing some research on Lexile scores, and all of our assessments that will spit out a Lexile score". So, start looking at IRI data and saying, "Okay, we do have a Lexile report that comes from that. So if we can get that, how can we then look at how a student's doing?" Because the Lexile scores are not going to change. A Lexile basically says, okay, here's a here's a Lexile rating of a book, and it's going to be that.

**Mike Caldwell:** I'm going to pause you for just a second, and I want you to explain or dumb down if you will, when we talk about Lexile scores. Because you know, I don't know who's out there listening. And let's just make sure, what are we talking about? Specifically, when we talk about a Lexile score?

**Jason Lords:** So, a Lexile score. Basically, if you looked at like a reading passage, it would give a rating on that reading passage of what Lexile is this? And then they can correlate that back to, in first grade, here's what a Lexile score should equal for those books. And really, that's I think the big shift...

**Mike Caldwell:** Kind of a difficulty rating of a particular reading passage?

**Jason Lords:** Yes. It's not really based on the student or where was the student scoring. No, it's that this Lexile rate or score that's on that passage, it's not going to change from a 2012 study. They said, "Okay, here's what Lexile should be", and so that will always stay the same. So what we started to do from the IRI score is say, "Okay. A student took the IRI assessment, and here's their Lexile rating. So in theory, they should be able to read books that are within that quartile". And then, really, that's what we looked at is, there's basically four different quartiles of that Lexile rating. And it is based on the number of books that a student could read in a first-grade classroom. So, what I'm saying is if a student can read 0% to 25% of those books, then they'd be in that first quartile, if they can read.

**Mike Caldwell:** So going back to goals. Is that starting to be kind of your goals? How many books a particular student reads?

**Jason Lords:** Yup, the percentage of books that a student would read within that quartile. So, first grade's going to have, you know, a rating of books, second grades, third grade is going to have the same. And so what we've done is basically broken those apart and said, if you're in that first quartile, then you'd be more in the old school color rating, right? You'd be a red. A student would be a red because they're reading a quarter. So 0% to 25% of those books, and then it's going to be 26% to 50%, and then 51% to 75%, and then 75% or higher. It would basically be where those would go if you looked at like a 1, 2, 3, and a 4. Because those are going to stay that way. And so throughout the year, what we should see, is a student's going to be able to read more books within that first grade Lexile. So that's really what we're looking at because that's not going to change. So, we should be able to see a student come in and his reading, say, gets a score of Lexile that's in the lower part of first grade. Well, by the time they leave first grade, now we'll be able to see. Okay, student, from 5% of those books that you'd be able to read to now, 75% to 80% of the books in first grade Lexile, right? Yeah, that was the conversation that we were having this morning with our K-3 teachers.

**Mike Caldwell:** Is that a normal practice that you guys would meet? I mean that seems different, that you're meeting with all K-3 teachers in the district. That's probably that's got to be a couple of 100 teachers. I don't know how many teachers, that is, but that's a lot. I mean, is that kind of a beginning of the year thing since you've done the IRI, that you have some pre-assessment data or the fall data, if you will. And now you're setting goals around that? Is that kind of a timing thing? Is that why your meeting?

**Nicky Pack:** Yeah, that is. And I think that one of the beauties of the pandemic was that we were able to see how we could all meet together where it didn't take so much time to do it. And so, if Dr. Wilson Hume has something that he needs to share with us or walk us through or get input on, or if Jason does, we're going to all sit down together. He's going to put on a zoom, and we're all going to be there together.

**Mike Caldwell:** Yeah.

**Jason Lords:** I'd say, two weeks ago we had our elementary admin meeting. And in the admin meeting that was the conversation we were having was, "Hey, we're going to roll out the new SLO template". We talked through that with principals. Hey, here's what the template looks like, it's a shift. We're going to look at Lexile scores. And so, as we showed it with principals we said, "What do you guys think?" And they say, "Yeah, this is, this is good". They had questions. We went through the questions, talked through a lot of that. And then we said, "Okay, do we want to do a K-3 Zoom? Or you guys want to go back to your schools? How do you want to do it?" And they said, "Let's do a Zoom, so we all get the same information". So yeah.

**Mike Caldwell:** There's a lot of really nice pockets of great practices here. Right? I mean, you talked about the PLC's. You know and put them in action. You talked about looking at data at all levels. You know, the teacher level with the PLC's in the district, but I think that what you just described is also, I don't know how unique it is. I haven't talked to every school district in Idaho, but I think it's pretty cool to take that time to bring all those teachers together that are directly impacted. They're the ones that have to carry out the goals, right? But to make them part of that discussion and hear it all at once and leverage the technology. I mean, I think that's awesome. You've already shared some great nuggets here. When you think about where you are, the practices that you have, the strategies that you have as a district that are making a difference, is there something else that maybe we haven't talked about that you'd like to elaborate on or share?

**Jason Lords:** Yeah, I think I think one of the things and Nicky will be able to jump in on this one. I think we talked a little bit about our structure, right? We have our district leadership team. And then our district leadership team has district directors that has our executive directors, then it has principals from each of our levels, right? We have our secondary, our high school, our middle school, and elementary and have principal reps from each of those areas on our district leadership team. And really, what we're doing is throwing things out there, right from the district level. We're saying, here's what we're thinking and throwing it out to that team saying, "Okay, what do you guys think?" And three years ago, four years ago, we were having a conversation really about reading. And where are we? And what do we need next?

**Mike Caldwell:** Before you go there, slow down on the district leadership team. You have administrators and you have teachers from that?

**Jason Lords:** We don't have teachers. Yeah, it's really an administrative district leadership team. And then, as we get to like to say, our principal meetings, is where we're saying, go back to teachers, bring that feedback to us, and then we can help make those decisions.

**Mike Caldwell:** Sorry to interrupt.

**Jason Lords:** No, that's great. And really, yeah, three or four years ago we really started saying, "Where are we reading wise? And what do we need to do to be able to help really make that



difference of our goal of all students reading?" And in that conversation, we're like, "Okay, gosh, phonics wise. We don't have anything phonics. We don't have a specific, what are we doing with phonics district wide?" Some of our title schools have this and really for me, I've always been the type of administrator that if some students are getting something, and it's working well, I want my kids I to have that too. I mean, probably you know from when you were a principal. You see a school doing something that's great and you're like, wait a minute. I want our kids to have that too. And so, a lot of times, that's what we hear from that of, you know. Maybe title one has some funding that they're purchasing something, or they're doing something with. And it's like, well, wait a minute. If it's good for our title students, why not everybody? And let's see if we can make an impact. And so we looked at like phonics first as example, okay, well, let's really start on that phonics. And we did it backwards. But it was really just that conversation of what do we want to do phonics wise? Then we really start focusing on phonics. And then over the year and a half of okay, we focus on phonics. We're still missing. What do we need? And then really start to have that conversation to our district leadership team about Scarborough's rope and really, all parts of reading. And now what do we need to do to be able to focus on those things.

**Nicky Pack:** Right. Our curriculum was old, and it didn't have any foundational reading pieces in there. No word recognition pieces, if you will, from that rope. So we started with the word recognition, thinking, well, if we can't recognize words and we can't read words, we're not going to be able to comprehend, and we couldn't focus on all of the strands of the rope. We picked that one and started there, and we did bring in as systematic Orton Gillingham approved, methodology in the phonics first. We also have teachers that are that are using other things in addition to that or are using things like UFLI. That's University of Florida Literacy Institute. That's something new that's come out through research and being systematic and teaching explicitly those pieces of the rope to students really helped with the fluency, right? And now they're starting to read. But now we're having some issues with background knowledge. So now we're looking at the rest of the rope, the language part of the rope and seeing, oh, we have some needs here and here and here. That'll be the next piece we work on.

**Jason Lords:** And I'd say, too, I think the great thing about being in a bigger size district, we just have more teachers. Right? And so we're looking at, Okay, here's a classroom, or here's some teachers, you're really seeing some results in their classroom. And what are they doing? And so with that, basically, we can take that action research and say, okay, we've identified, say, 30 teachers. But you know, let's talk to five of them and say, "What are you doing specifically in your classroom?" And then being able to use that as a guide of here's what we're seeing and really goes back to that instruction within the classroom. What are kids getting? And a lot of it goes through that professional learning type conversation, but also instructionally, what are you doing? And the success you're seeing from that and like said, I'm sure, in the rural school district you have, teachers are just doing amazing job. And you know, how do you look those bright spots and try to replicate that wherever else you can?

**Mike Caldwell:** Absolutely, yeah. So if you could boil down, maybe your strategy approach and say, okay, here are the five, I'm just making up a number here. But here are the five things that

we're doing that are part of our system or part of our strategy to ensure that every student can read, right? Every student is at this level, so they can read, what would be those key elements? And you've already talked about it so it's kind of a summary of some of the things you talked about, and maybe anything that we missed.

**Jason Lords:** First would be professional learning communities, and really that focus on essential standards and that skill by skill, kid by kid. And really, those structures that teachers are working together, and really just trying to help students and figure that out, I'd say, that's one of them. I would say, our focus on those essential reading skills. Also with funding from the literacy funding from the State, we were able to move to a full day kindergarten, which our kindergarten teachers were very passionate about. And I mean, even when that conversation was happening, Scott and I, as we were looking at it, we're like, "Well, is full day kindergarten right?" And I think our teachers looked at us like, "You guys are crazy. Yes, we need our kids longer and can be able to do more with". And so I think that's been helpful. I think, being able to use the literacy funding, we also were able to hire instructional coaches within our buildings that have been able to focus on what's called the Student-Centered Coaching Model where they're being able to work with teachers. And that newer in our district. And of course, like professional learning communities, we're trying to get better at all those pieces.

**Nicky Pack:** I also think that our district may or may not be unique in this, but the thing that I really appreciate about our district and what we're doing in those professional learning communities, that it goes all the way to like Scott and Jason and Heath, is the directors having their professional learning communities but also being open to listen to what we have to say. So we feel safe that we can share these things, even though some of the conversations are hard. I can go and I can tell Jason, "Hey our curriculum, we we're not supporting teachers, and we don't have a piece for this foundational reading. So what can we do about it?" It's not that, "Oh, hey! You're not doing your job, and you're not doing your job". It's that conversation and that openness to be able to have that conversation.

**Mike Caldwell:** Yeah, that's so important. I mean, especially if you're asking for feedback on a big change. Hopefully, when you get the feedback, you really want to hear that feedback because you might want to implement something. But if there's people at the ground level, whether it's a principal or teacher that knows, no. This is going to be a train wreck, or this is not going to work unless we do X, Y, or Z, then you're setting yourself up for failure. So kudos to the district and having that collaborative approach to especially big changes.

**Nicky Pack:** They reach out and ask teachers as well. And I really appreciate that they will listen to that teacher feedback. Does it always result in the change teachers want? No, not always. But we're able to have that conversation, and that's the most important piece.

**Mike Caldwell:** What has been the biggest challenge over the last you know, five years or ten years? I know you've been at it a long time.

**Jason Lords:** Yeah, I would say turnover. I think turnover has made an impact. And really turnover comes for a lot of reasons, right? We have a good partnership with BYU Idaho. And we have student teachers that come but many times, it's a young family, you know, and so they're moving, doing different things. And so we have turnover that way. But I think it's just that turnover piece of getting a teacher that is brand new to the district, to the same spot. That a teacher that's been here for ten years, which I think is a huge part of that professional learning community, is that teacher that's been here for ten years being able to work with that new teacher. And you know that historical knowledge of okay, here's what we do. But also, knowing that new teacher will have some good ideas as well. And so, them working together. But I would say, turnovers, I know that's a conversation that comes from principles of, "Man. We were really rolling and felt like we're doing good. But now, in a first-grade team of three teachers, two of them left. I have one now. And so now I'm hiring two new and that teacher that's been there, really trying to train and work with the two new teachers".

**Mike Caldwell:** Yeah, I would think going back to your PLC's having that in place as part of your system has to be help in that in that area. I would think, because you have it built in the fact that they're going to be collaborating and meeting often, and so that can help with that turnover I would think.

**Jason Lords:** I would think, yeah. I would think so, too. I don't know if you have anything else, Nicky.

**Nicky Pack:** I think that is one issue. Another issue is enough time to meet, and enough time carved out where teachers can meet often enough. That has been hard, especially if you're going to start the professional learning community journey. That'll be something that people really need to consider like when are we going to meet.

**Mike Caldwell:** When do your teachers meet?

**Nicky Pack:** The set aside time that the district has for us to meet where we don't have students is every other Monday, we meet for a full day. Of course, that would be great to be weekly. But then you have to balance that need with, "Okay. Is it that big of a need that we want students to be out of school that often?" And then once they get rolling and get functioning as a professional learning community like I said, they are touching base with each other all the time. I know myself and other principals included have carved out, like we have PE and music specialists, so we will put those together at a time where they have their PE and music time back-to-back. So those teachers now have an hour or an hour and a half once a week to also meet together.

**Mike Caldwell:** Time is always the challenge.

**Nicky Pack:** Time is a challenge. Of course, money is always a challenge. Can we support this reading curriculum or the foundational piece of literacy without money? Nope, we can't, because we have to buy resources. Then I think the other part is keeping up with that

professional learning community and what that really is about. My first year being a principal, I attended a Solution Tree conference, and it was like drinking from a fire hose and to realize the work is never done. Sometimes that's hard to know, the work is never done. The laundry's never done. We keep coming back to it, and we just have to keep getting better at getting better. So, you really don't have an endpoint, right? You have your measurable goals along the way.

**Jason Lords:** And one of the things coming back from Covid just thinking outside the box of you know, we had to get creative. We used to have Wednesday early releases, and then what we moved to is, our elementaries are Monday, every other Monday. So our first and third Mondays and a fifth Monday would be collaboration time, so that full day, and then for our secondary schools it ends up being they have every Monday is a half day, half day intervention in the morning, and then they have their collaboration time in the afternoon.

**Mike Caldwell:** I'm so happy to hear you're building it in. I know you're teachers appreciate that, and like you said would love more. But it's always a tradeoff and getting that time. So, to kind of summarize or to capture the end of the conversation. What do you see moving forward as kind of big focus areas of what you're going to zero in on, as you build on your successes that you've had and move forward? You talked about the Lexile score and the refocus on that. Is that the big thing? Or is there something else on the horizon?

**Jason Lords:** I would say that's the, I guess, the new data or picture of what we're trying to do in K-3. I think what we're also doing is really trying to get better at what we do in teaching reading. And so, we're having some professional development as a part of our at elementary admin meetings. The first 90 minutes of one of our meetings for the next three or four months will be about teaching reading, and really, that science of reading focus to get our principals so that they're all on because administrators come from different areas, right? Some taught elementary, some did not, some were secondary teachers. And so we're trying to get them all on the same page of what is the science of reading. And what should our focus be? So that then, as they're going back and having conversations with their teams in their buildings, they know how to have the conversation and know what to look for. Because you have a first-grade teacher and that first grade teacher knows typically how to get a kid to read and knows what they want to focus on. And so, a Principal will be able to have those conversations with them. That's going to be our focus.

**Mike Caldwell:** Is that internal professional development? Or do you bring somebody from the outside?

**Jason Lords:** Yeah, it's called Teaching Reading, is the book. It's a Corwin novel novelty, right? Yeah, it's called Teaching Reading. And with that basically what we're going to do is have four 90 minute webinars with them, and then they'll come in for a one day training. And really, just for that focus is that science of reading and really teaching kids how to read. So we will start with principles. And of course, those principles will go back and have conversations and NPD with their teams of teachers. That'll be their structure of what they do.

**Mike Caldwell:** So maybe the last comment and this could be either one of you. But if a school district was kind of, or is kind of still trying to figure out, you know, they're looking at their data. And they're like, wow, we need to do better. We need to improve. Any core nuggets of advice that you would offer to whoever's listening out there? That's also really wanting to focus on improving reading instruction in their school? Maybe start with you, Nicky.

**Nicky Pack:** I would say you really need to break down your data and not just look at an overall score like on the IRI or on the I-SAT. You really need to break it down and see, where is it exactly that you need to focus? It might be that your K-3 students are doing well with fluency. Everything's going great there. But you've got four, five, and six that maybe the fourth or fifth grade teacher says, "Hey, these kids are reading fluently". This actually happened at my building this year. A teacher came and said, "These students are reading really fluently. I've never had better readers. They don't know what they're reading, so how can I help build comprehension?" And we're going back to that language part of the rope. So, it just depends on what you need. And you really have to break your data down to see what you need.

**Mike Caldwell:** Great advice.

**Jason Lords:** I'd say from our district level, a lot of times what we don't want teachers to think is, "Oh, we're going to look at this data that's way out here. And we're going to judge all of you on that". I mean, that's not what we want. What we want teachers to know is when you're given an assessment, and really, what I want to know is I want to be able to walk into your classroom. I said this all the time as an administrator, I want to be able to walk into your classroom and when I ask how a student's doing, I don't want to hear, "Well on the I-SAT". What I want to hear is you telling me what does the student know or not know? And what are you doing with that student? Yeah. And to me, that's the key. I think too many times, I don't want to say, too often, I think many times teachers get that stressed out about data like, "Oh, man, I'm being judged on this". No, no, really. What we want to know is, what does the student know? And then what are you doing? Specifically skill by skill with that student.

**Mike Caldwell:** Yeah, good stuff. Thank you for that. I really appreciate you guys sharing your knowledge, your expertise, and some real great nuggets that hopefully our listeners can take away and apply to wherever they're working. So, thanks again.

**Nicky Pack:** Thank you.

**Jason Lords:** Thank you.