

## Bluum Together: Episode 6- Rallying the Troops with Sage International School of Middleton

**Mike Caldwell:** Alright, greetings and good day podcast listeners. I am Mike Caldwell and you are listening to *Bluum Together*. We are out in Middleton adding another perspective to our series on the science of reading and Idaho schools. Today we're at Sage Middleton and joining me is Andy Johnson, Executive Director for Sage International Schools and Darci Stelzner, Principle at Sage Middleton. So, Andy, Darci, thanks for joining us today.

**Darci Stelzner:** Thank you.

**Andy Johnson:** Thanks, Mike.

**Mike Caldwell:** Excited to hear your perspective on this conversation. We've had some great conversations as mentioned before we started the recording and I'm looking forward to, kind of, your angle on this. So as always, we like to start with a story to kind of set the stage for our conversation today. Andy, do you want to start us off with a story?

**Andy Johnson:** Yeah. I love that you're doing this Mike, and what a slick intro. I sure hope we live up to the visionary leader portion. I know we worked all for it out here together. I guess when I first came out to Sage Middleton back in the fall of 2020, deep in the throes of COVID. I just remember getting my arms around the scale of the importance of reading, especially at the elementary level. Darci's going to talk a little bit about the middle school level. But I was just sitting with a young man, I think he must have been in 4th grade at the time, and he was attempting to do the MAP. The Measures of Academic Progress, it was mathematics. As I sat with him, I could see that he understood kind of what he was supposed to do, but he couldn't read the prompt. He couldn't read the prompt with a level of fluency and accuracy that allowed him to really get after the mathematics. I'm like, "Houston, we've got a problem". He wasn't the only one, and Darci I think is going to talk a little bit about kind of what she saw.

**Darci Stelzner:** Yeah. Opening up a middle school, first year, grade 6-8 coming in, I remember the teachers feeling so hopeful and so open-ended. We can create this middle school however we want to create it. We have this wonderful IB focus that we're going to be looking at and when our students came, we had 8th graders reading at a second-grade level. Our behaviors weren't quite what we were thinking we were going to come in with. So, it was a complete back to the drawing board. Square one.

**Andy Johnson:** Yeah, it was intense.

**Mike Caldwell:** I think that really sets the stage for where we're going today. I talked to Andy early, needing a kind of, a call to action. This kind of like, "Oh we need to make some big shifts, some big moves here," right? So, we're going to come to that. Before we do that, give a little bit

of your background each of you. And also tell us about Sage International with a couple of different schools now. Talk to us a little bit about your program.

**Andy Johnson:** Yeah so my background is, you know, I didn't come to education first. I spent a long career as an army officer. I started as an enlisted soldier and then got commissioned and spent a long career doing that. I'd always weirdly become and was sort of interested in schools. I will tell you it was that year in Iraq where I did a lot of different things with rebuilding police forces, but I was lucky enough to do things with Iraqi schools. I had one moment in Iraq where, and I kind of knew I was going to be teacher after the army. Anyway, I met with a group of parents, mothers, who I was essentially evicting them from this property we were developing into police station. These ladies were just simply asking me if I could delay their move, they knew they had to go until May so their kids could finish school. Like Yikes, schools important. Fast forward several years, I end up at Riverstone International School. I'm running the middle and high school boarding program, you know, that group of kids didn't have issues with reading, but I knew that reading was important. Like, our kids could read before they went to kindergarten and I knew that having a sort of philosophy and approach to reading, especially around the science reading, was important. We didn't necessarily need that here but as soon as I arrived at Sage and discovered, at Middleton we really did need that. Not at our Boise campus, much longer history, stronger program getting great results, and we wanted that for our kids out here at Middleton too. You know, as Darci and I looked at that, we saw gosh we got a real issue with reading out here. Not the kids fault, not the teachers fault, not the schools fault, but now we got to do something about it.

**Mike Caldwell:** Sure, yeah. Darci what was your background before joining the Sage team?

**Darci Stelzner:** I started in education in 2002, so this is my 21st year in education. I started out at a larger a traditional district in the in the treasure valley and this is my eighth year at sage international, so in my fifth year here at this school. I've been here since before we opened actually. I first got into education because well my mom was a teacher and school's really hard for me. I I'm lucky I graduated high school without an extra band class and home ed at class, but it was difficult because I didn't have the learning and the education that we do now. I feel like if I had this type of environment be so much different.

**Andy Johnson:** I got to echo Darci on that. You know I grew up in Harrisonville Missouri. Not good teachers, not a great program, not a lot of expectation or demand. And one of the things that you know, with reading and talk about the programs. We offer these International Baccalaureate programs that we offer at both campuses 6-12, K-12 campuses, which I think are not unique but rare in schools in general. Rare in public schools and rare in Idaho. It's a really unique opportunity to sort of meet a child when they're five and then see them go through and watch them graduate. Last year at this campus we had our first ever group of kindergarteners who joined us as kindergarteners, graduating. And it was super exciting, about thirteen of them had stayed with us the whole time. I know that we have kids that have joined us here in kindergarten and 1st grade that will graduate with us. It's pretty cool I mean, it's years.

**Mike Caldwell:** That's awesome.

**Andy Johnson:** So, you know, touching on that. The International Baccalaureate is college preparatory in nature, it really is. It's also a lot of other things and so we know that we have to do a really great job with reading, writing, and mathematics. The foundational skills that kids need. To be able to be strong, to be engaged fully with the programs as you get older, right?

**Mike Caldwell:** Absolutely. So going back to this story, you've made some significant shifts in the last couple of years to really rally the troops, right? and getting very serious about reading instructions. So, what was the impetus or the catalyst that sparked that shift? What kind of was that awakening moment said we need to really get serious about this?

**Andy Johnson:** Certainly for me, it was some of the things, you know in the opening anecdote about the boy I sat with who was in 4th grade. But there were multiple things like that. And then I do have to say that a group of pretty phenomenal teachers out here, several of whom are still with the school and the network, you know I would tell you that our current second grade team was here in the 2021 school year and they are both phenomenal teachers and in the in the depths of all of that sort of chaos of COVID and you know recently adopted and the program the school adopted was the Fountas & Pinnell curriculum which frankly we knew then but we really know now wasn't ever going to be the right tool to help our kids get better faster and learn to read. Our second-grade team knew that and frankly so did our third-grade team. And those two sets of grade level teachers or sort of the people I gravitated to, number one they're just phenomenal people and great teachers. But they were also ready to do something different. They sort of formed this core of like what else can we do? So we started digging into the tools we had. They were willing to try almost anything and both groups of teachers did see quite a bit of growth that year. Despite how far back we had started, despite not having all the right sorts of tools in place. We used the tools we had as well as we dug up ones that were available, and mostly it was building a coalition of teachers and leaders who recognize the scope of the problem and want to do something about it. It was pretty easy then to make a call to action to the rest of the staff about that. You know, there are places where we ran into some friction or, "why are we doing this," right? Don't quite believe that. But pretty quickly we developed a critical mass of people who said, "Yeah these kids got to learn to read". I mean the middle school team felt that way, a big chunky elementary team felt that way, but Darci and I really spent a lot of time around using the right sorts of tools to progress monitor. Because that's the way we illuminated the scale of our challenge. And I'm going to say we started doing progress monitoring every month which we know is a sort of foundational piece of any good reading program. Yeah, and so we got that going. Darci?

**Darci Stelzner:** I think kind of backing up a little bit before that I think what we needed to do is we just had a lot of teacher worry.

**Mike Caldwell:** Worried about like what they were seeing in terms of progress from the students? Is that kind of where their worries were coming from?

**Darci Stelzner:** Absolutely.

**Mike Caldwell:** COVID set aside, I mean this was kind of in that time as well, but it was like, “Oh we have some issues”.

**Darci Stelzner:** Yes. And having the proper tools to deal with the challenges that we're seeing. Before this, we came together as a staff and created essential agreements centered around IB language. I think that kind of really gave teachers that jumping off point of, yes this is hard, yes this is big, but yes, we're going to come together and we're going to get through this.

**Andy Johnson:** I like that you reminded me of that. That was really important. We did a couple of Fridays on that, didn't we?

**Mike Caldwell:** Expand on the essential agreements, what is that? Is that between faculty? What do you mean by that?

**Andy Johnson:** Can I start real quick, Darci? Because I want to give you a ton of credit for this. There was a strong sense among the staff that we didn't really have a core set of guiding beliefs and we didn't have common language that we could then use with children's. Children's? Children. Listen to me! I need to go to school! With children and parents about what we believed about education and what we wanted them to believe about education. So, it was really this first sort of step and like being certain in our own minds. I hate to use words like the value propositions, what is it that's different? What do we believe in? At the center that was International Baccalaureate. We had a couple of Friday days and we spent most of two Fridays as a staff developing these essential agreements and you know I wanted to just give Darci credit. The team that she led because you broke into little teams, those agreements are essentially the ones that Darci and her small team developed and the rest of the staff said, “We love these!” I'll let Darci talk more about them in the way that she's implemented them over the years since we developed them.

**Darci Stelzner:** Yeah, so these are agreements within our school culture. So, students to students, teachers to students, teachers to teachers. Example, I will take responsibility for my actions. Looking at it, we easily can see what that would feel like, look like, sound like, from a student perspective. But what does that look like from a teacher perspective?

**Mike Caldwell:** I love it. So these are kind of just declarations that you're making as a school saying these are the things that we're going to commit to in our efforts overall as a school. Not specific just to reading, but overall this is what we're going to do from a school standpoint, together.

**Andy Johnson:** Yes. We also recognize that one of the things we really needed, and I guess we just didn't think about this when we set the school up is when we pull from multiple districts. Some rural, some suburban, some urban, right? So, the biggest group of kids we got we mostly draw right now from Middleton, Star, Caldwell, and Emmett, right? Very different communities

that all have their own character and ideas, different traditions. Their public schools brought them together and we recognized pretty quickly that we needed to be clear about who we were and what we believed. So what Darci and her team did, is they wove in the language and the International Baccalaureate into those essential agreements. They're called the learner profile values. They're things like open minded, balanced, caring, reflective, knowledgeable, inquiring, risk taker. And you can see in her essential agreements, and maybe we ought to just read them so the audience can hear them, but they've been pretty good and pretty enduring and people embrace them.

**Mike Caldwell:** Yeah. Do you want to read a couple more? Or it even looks like you have four or five of them there?

**Darci Stelzner:** I will be caring by showing kindness and my thoughts words and actions. I will be principled by always engaging and learning even when it is hard. I will be a risk taker by always seeking help when I do not understand. I will be knowledgeable when handling difficult situations in a healthy way. I will be reflective by always producing work of which I am proud. So you can see how easily this can be on a teacher as well. We can do the exact same things in our professional development our learning.

**Mike Caldwell:** Absolutely.

**Andy Johnson:** And Mike, they do. When Darci was reading, I'm not even thinking about the kids, I'm just thinking about the way Darci has been leading the school with her staff and the way that they do this with each other. It's pretty awesome.

**Mike Caldwell:** It really defines the culture and how you're going to go about the work that you're called to do. And it kind of sets that mindset and that call to action of like the how. This is how we're going to go about doing it and I love it. That's great. You articulated that so well and it's your guide as you're doing this hard work that you're doing. Good for you. You needed to make this big shift in addition to these essential agreements and you know in this quote, "cadre of core teachers" that you kind of started with, what were some of the significant action steps that you took to move forward on this effort?

**Andy Johnson:** I think you know I outlined a couple already, right? So we identified the cultural piece, right? That was multiple individual and collective conversations about the need to define who we are and get a handle on behavior in classroom management, right? That was a pretty tough fall and spring during COVID in a brand-new school. The second one was a recognition of, we don't know enough about what they know. And so we really dug into Moby Max I think at the middle school level. We tried to leverage our MAP data that we were collecting as best we could. Then we started using the I-station IRI as a monthly progress monitoring to get a handle on like where are they at in the skill level. Like in phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, that sort of thing. Then just to start thinking about, ok. What's the scale of problem? What do we need? What tools out there could we pick? And then, I will just throw a shout out to Max Koltuv at Bluum. Max has been an invaluable partner to me personally, but also to the schools that I'm

leading and to the folks out here at Middleton. Max at the same time was talking to our friends over at Mosaics, Anthony Haskett and his team because they had a similar problem. They recognized what they had picked out of gates just was utterly inadequate, I think he picked Lucy Calkins for lots of stuff. And you know that's not going to make it either, we know that for sure. So was Max and I and Anthony then start talking about Foundations, because we all were looking for something was lower lift that didn't require a ton of PD. Frankly, you know, we all made the determination like, look. The science of reading is pretty settled. We don't need to use a ton of our creativity to make this up. We didn't want to be all over teachers' pay teachers. We didn't want to do all that. We wanted something that we could hand to teachers, yes there's a little bit of a lift learning how to use it and we discovered that. But it was really about what is the lowest lift, highest affect, high effectiveness program, that we can get into without dropping \$100,000 this fall. We just didn't have that kind of cash. I don't think probably Anthony did or probably many schools do.

**Mike Caldwell:** Who does right? Once you get into the budgeted year.

**Andy Johnson:** Right, absolutely. So, we picked Foundations and I would say once we got going with it, we started seeing a lot of success. I'll let Darci talk more about that because her team as they used it more recognized ok, there's more gaps here. Let's add this tool, let's do this, and I think you know, as we get into it, one of the things I'm most pleased/proud of at the network now is that a shout out to the state for maintaining this and supporting this program. The program is the Smart Reading Program the state department education sort of launched and committed to. I think we have almost every K-3 teacher at both schools either in year one or year two of that program, including me. In fact, I got invited to teach a lesson, a reading lesson, in second grade and kindergarten at the Boise campus now that they know I'm doing it. But I love that they invited me. I would say it'll be a good exercise for me.

**Mike Caldwell:** How confident are you on and going in there and teaching?

**Andy Johnson:** I'll be a lot more confident once I see what they want me to teach and I make sure they coach me before I go in. It'll be a great opportunity. They'll get to coach me, I'll get to learn, and then I fully expect they'll give me a good critique on that and I'll learn more about reading. Hopefully it will make me a better leader for them, and a better coach, and better partner. So, we'll see. I'm excited about it, I honestly don't think there's anything more important than teaching reading in kinder through 3rd grade in any school in America. You know, frankly it opens up everything.

**Darci Stelzner:** Yeah. So to help leverage that, we had our secondary teachers who happened to have just one extra block of time during the day. We opened that up for them to come down in K-5 to sit with their reading group. So they had their reading group, they had their kids, so it was a really great way for everybody and the reading teacher, right? It doesn't matter what subject you teach; everybody is responsible for the growth that our school has. When the middle school teachers were able to come down and help the literacy in the K-5, it just helps to bring our school together.

**Andy Johnson:** I'll throw a shout out to our partners at Teach for America. We have had a great partnership with them and it's not all that common that teachers with lots of experience want to come to a brand-new school. We've been really lucky to get really good people from Teach for America who've been a big part of the school success as well. A couple of cases have gone on to leadership positions within network. One of our first Teach for America candidates is now the networks, sort of, outdoor education leader. Another TFA alum is Darci's elementary director. Then you know, we've had several rotate in and out, but I just think about that early effort that you put together to flex the middle school teachers down for reading groups. And two or three of them were from Teach for America and just dove right in. It was a cool team effort to make this a whole school effort.

**Mike Caldwell:** Elaborate a little bit on the TFA program. How long have you been involved in it and what does that partnership look like at Sage?

**Andy Johnson:** It's been five years, right? Megan joined us in year one. I guess we've had Teach for America people in the school for five straight years now.

**Mike Caldwell:** Is it a two-year commitment that they make? And then you have the option to offer them a contract after that?

**Andy Johnson:** Totally, yeah. Darci, if you want to talk more about that, but we've had some just phenomenal people. I've just stopped down and saw Zach Maga and his individuals and societies history social studies course for the middle school. Watching his growth and the teacher's excitement about what he's teaching this year is phenomenal. Kate Riberty also over in the middle school. Watching her growth from last year to this year, I mean just. Darci, as you know, we touch back on those essential agreements. She's created a community where people are not afraid to try and try again. And just to be relentlessly positive and know that they'll get better. They've just gotten incredible support from Darci out here.

**Mike Caldwell:** What's your experience been with the Teach for America program, Darci?

**Darci Stelzner:** It's been wonderful. They are such a great partner. One thing that I really appreciate about Teach for America is that they also have mentorship outside of the school and it's pretty phenomenal mentorship. Their philosophy and ours really go hand in hand. They're using *Teach Like a Champion*, that's one of our pillar books that we use for PD and they come in here monthly. I am able to meet with them after they meet with their core members, so it's been a great partnership.

**Mike Caldwell:** Very cool. Um, I completely forgot the question I was going to ask...

**Andy Johnson:** My fault, Mike. I took off on a TFA tangent.

**Mike Caldwell:** I really was going somewhere! I absolutely lost it but that's ok. I'm curious Andy on your background with the army. How much of that is translating over as we talk about kind of the catalyst moment and making a move and rallying the troops? You know, this is very militaristic kind of language but maybe how much of this translates from your days of leading the school? Versus your experience in the army?

**Andy Johnson:** I mean, they are obviously different, right? The thing that I always tell people is working in schools, particularly ones that I've worked in, Riverstone, previously. Great people, great school, great mission, but it's not a public school. After a long time there and I had a lot of fun, some of my best friends still worked there, I felt this call to come to public schools. I got lucky enough to get picked up for this particular job. I'll tell you now, it's mission driven work with purpose driven people. You know you're in a great place when people actually share that belief. Right when the mission sits at the center of what we do, and I would say the Sage Network of Schools has a phenomenal mission. I had nothing to do with developing it, but I love that mission. It talks about an inclusive IB learning community, incredible. Touching back on your question, I go right back to that year in Iraq. I mean, that came late in my career you know I'm not going to lie, we're not talk about today super violent things. It was a really tough year but also did some amazing things, right? When I think about work Darci and I have done and Darci had done with her team and like sort of making sense of how we run a really effective school to be clear about our mission and clear about the people we care about, the people that come to our schools these families. I think about the work because I was responsible for rebuilding the whole branch Iraqi police. We did lots of different things but eventually it dawned on me that we were never really going to move that organization forward unless we had our own training Academy, right? So I'd made this decision with the support of my Brigade Commander, that we're going to set up our own police Academy. I was going to make it Iraqi lead from the get-go, and it was a huge lift. I think I learned more, and I'm not saying I'm good at this, I just say I learned a lot about what would go well and poorly in terms of that call to action. Getting partners on board. I had to convince my Iraqi partners it was a good idea, I had to convince the general Petraeus of staff it was a good idea, I had to convince these American civilian police advisers, who oftentimes were either retired police officers or people that had taken a leave of absence from local police forces (who all good people weren't entirely convinced the Iraqis could do this themselves). The whole point of it was that we had to believe in the Iraqis because it was their country. Most of them really didn't want us there and they wanted to do it themselves and of course they were capable of doing it themselves. I think I learned a ton and that was obviously a very difficult environment to pull that off and you know, we built a little police Academy. I won't lie to you the most of what we could do is teach them to shoot a pistol, make sure they could jump out of a truck, and hide behind a wall, and shoot back. But that's what we needed in Iraq at that time and a lot of brave men and a couple of women, that still wasn't super common, joined up and said yes. And we did our best with them. I learned a lot about pulling people together, being really clear about what the vision was, and why it was important. I don't know if I did that super perfectly at Sage Middleton. But, I felt like we did a pretty good job and we did it together, right? It took us all kind of standing up front saying that we know these kids need it and making that clear to everyone that we know the kids need it.



**Mike Caldwell:** Right. I think Darci, when you talked about getting your all your K-5 teachers there, you're all reading teachers, right? I mean getting everybody rallied around this, it's not just these teachers that are responsible for it during these times. It's like, no. This is a big enough endeavor and it's important enough. The most important thing that we need is everybody moving in this direction and everybody contributing to it.

**Darci Stelzner:** I think, Andy, you've shared with me and what has helped from your past with you. You always say "mission first, people always".

**Mike Caldwell:** Man, there's some good sound bites here! I love that. So, keep going sorry, I love that.

**Darci Stelzner:** No, that's it. I mean, just like whatever decision we make, teachers are important. Students are important, parents are important. That is the first, like we always have to consider that.

**Mike Caldwell:** Absolutely. Mission first, people always. Love it.

**Darci Stelzner:** Andy Johnson!

**Mike Caldwell:** So, where are you now in the current war? The battle with your reading and your work that you're doing. Where are you now? Where are you now and what's coming up?

**Andy Johnson:** I will just throw a plug in, I'm not going to say we won. I don't think you ever win. There's no winning in this fight, right? Or whatever we're going to call it, struggle, you know? I think we are winning. We are seeing some small and important successes and some big successes, right? This is a thing I shared with both you and Darci because I started to nerd out on data. Just take the current kids who are now in 4th grade at Sage Middleton. They joined the school's kindergartners, this is a group that's going to walk across graduation stage one day, right? Their kindergarten year was short. We opened school almost a month late and because of construction, we shut it down a couple months early. So, they got really not much of a kindergarten year. We really don't know what they learned about reading that year. There were some of them it seemed like they're on a pretty good track, but we just we just don't know. I can tell you though, by the end of their first grade year, only about 50% of them as measured by the IRI were at grade level. A full 30% of them were not even approaching grade level and then there's a sliver in the middle that was approaching it. So, big chunk of kids not ready for second grade in terms of reading. They arrive in Dalia Mohameds classroom with huge growth in their second-grade year. Huge growth! Partly for the things that Darci's done, right? Reorganize reading groups, reorganize when we teach in reading, onboarded foundations, really looked hard at progress monitoring, hired two phenomenal reading specialists and Heather Love came to us from West Ada. She is an amazing collaborator and thinker about this and great partner for us. By the end of their third-grade year, 73% of them were at grade level. Almost 25% of them came up. The numbers of kids, and I didn't parse this out to see who had joined later or whatever,

let's say 10 or 11% of them now finished third grade in tier three. We're not happy about that. We're still working on it. We know that about 90% of kids can learn to read at grade level, that's our aspirational goal and to write that on a piece of paper. That's a huge growth and that's testament to like everything we've tried, right? Building a culture of reading, being clear about what we believe about reading, getting the right people into the building. I hate saying building, I just said it! Into the school, and making sure that when new people come to us we tell them, "This is what we believe, this is what we're driving on to our IB school. We believe in the science of reading". We kind of make people raise their hand and say, "I'm in for that". We don't want it to be a surprise. It's sort of that point of sale like, this is who we are this is what we offer. This is what we believe and if that's for you come on board. I think Darci can talk about how we now have people reaching out to us at hiring season saying, "do you have positions open?" Like people are getting word that Sage International School Middleton is a darn good school. I know that I'm the Executive Director but I truly mean that. It's because of the leadership of Darci and her team and everything they have done the last 2-3 years has been phenomenal. Like building a world class college preparatory International Baccalaureate school in Middleton Idaho for kids from rural Idaho, big deal.

**Mike Caldwell:** Darci, what do you see as you look ahead in the coming years or even months for that matter? What are some of the big battles ahead? Or maybe even they're not big maybe its the small ones, things that you're shoring up? Or working on? Or wanting to improve?

**Darci Stelzner:** So, writing is one of our big goals this year for our network. What we're doing at the secondary level is we are going to vertically align. What does it look like to be able to write X kind of essay in 6th grade? What should that look like in 10th grade? That's one of the big things we're working on. The second thing is, we are creating a really purposeful RTI program for our middle school. Making sure that those kiddos who are approaching grade level keep going. That they don't fall off and we don't miss them.

**Mike Caldwell:** Thank you. I mean your progression is amazing and I have zero doubt that you guys are going to crush it on that as well. If you could boil down some of the things that you feel like you've learned in your progress over the last few years since you had that call-to-action moment? Boil it down to maybe, the three to five most important things that you felt were really the keys to get from where you were to where you are today?

**Andy Johnson:** Maybe we should break this down from kind of like the Superintendent or district level leadership and then I'll go down to school level leadership. I'll talk about it at the Superintendent level and the charter administrator level. I just think if there's anybody out there listening to me right now they're going to think to themselves yeah no kidding that's what you should do. I just think it's really important for superintendents and charter administrators to be very clear about what's most important, right? There are a lot of important things in schools every day, but I think you got to be really clear. And again, I'm not saying I've done this perfectly and I've got room to improve, but I feel like I've been super clear that my number one priority is K-3 reading. We're not going to do anything else really well unless we can do that. If we don't have strong readers leaving 3rd grade, then we're not going to have a strong diploma or career

related program in 11th 12th grade. We'll have kids that get frustrated through middle school and use that as an excuse to look for something else. We want every kid that comes here in kindergarten to feel like they have a home until 12th grade. So I think being really clear about your priorities and saying that's this is our most important thing, this is our next most, and this is our third most. If it doesn't meet one of those priorities, it's important but I can't and you shouldn't spend a ton of brain power on it unless you think you've got the first three lockdown. That would be one thing I'd say. The second is the Superintendent level, you got to really work hard. This is also no brainer, but you've got to have a great CFO or finance person, right? I'm really lucky and we're really lucky to have Emily Downey who is not only a CPA, but she really gets schools and she loves schools. She's a great partner, great teammate, but she works relentlessly to help Darci and I and the team at Boise make sure that we can meet our goals that we set aside. The right sort of budget pockets make sure we husband our resources in the right places so that we can do the most important things. I'd say that's critical for superintendents if they don't have a CFO that is actively helping them, they should probably find a different CFO. We're super lucky to have one that is an incredible partner and a true believer in education and just works relentlessly hard to make sure we have what we need to do we do. Probably the third one is, as hard as it is, and I've got two schools or 35 miles apart so it's easy for me to say and if I were in a much bigger district it would be harder, but you really have to just be at the point of friction. Where am I needed most today? You can't know that if you're sitting on e-mail. You have to be in schools, stopping by classrooms, and trying to take a knee and listen to a teacher in the middle of the day. I truly believe that at the Superintendent level, if you're not doing that regularly you're going to you're probably going to miss the pulse. Because the pulse is not on e-mail and it's typically not in meetings. Anyway, I I don't want to sound critical it's just like we all get dragged into that we all have to do it, but I think those three things for me are probably most important.

**Mike Caldwell:** What about you, Darci?

**Darci Stelzner:** I think at the school level, we know how hard our teachers work. They're amazing people so it's my job to remove those barriers so that they can teach. They can go in there and they can deliver the best prepared and planned lessons, that they can remove barriers so they have time to adequately grade, provide feedback those sorts of key deals. Something that I love about our network is we do have Fridays for professional development. It's also my job to plan professional development based on what I'm seeing in the classrooms. Just providing that support for teachers so they can do what they do best.

**Mike Caldwell:** Awesome. Well thank you guys so much for sharing your journey and your experience and just openly sharing that to whoever's listening out there. I think there's a lot that you guys can provide others that are out there listening and maybe going through the same thing that you were going through a few years ago, saying where do we go and how do we move and you certainly gave a nice overview of the path that you took to get where you are today. Well, thank you again Andy and Darci for being our guests today. Thanks to all of our listeners for joining our conversation on the science of reading in Idaho schools. As we continue this effort, be sure to tune in and listen to our future episodes as we ask more schools what

they are doing to be successful. So again, thanks Andy and thanks Darci for being a part of our series.

**Darci Stelzner:** Thank you!

**Andy Johnson:** Thanks, Man.