**Joanna:** Hello, everybody! Welcome. PBS Wisconsin Education, bringing you *aka Teacher*. My name's Joanna Rizzotto, and I'm super excited to be joined today by my fellow co-hosts! Would you guys take a minute to introduce yourself?

**Daniel:** Sure. I'm Daniel Torres-Rangel. I'm an educator of 16 years. I've been in public charter and private schools, in roles, everything from teacher to administrator. And I now work for the local district on, in the research and innovation team.

**Joanna:** Research and innovation. I love it.

**Shelton:** Hello. My name is Shelton Evans. I'm a lead facilitator for a nonprofit. We, I do affinity groups with, uh, kids of color, and I also build cultural bridges for teachers to, uh, provide effective student teacher relationships for those students and, uh, help those teachers empower those teachers as well.

**Angie:** And I'm Angie Humphrey. I am a high school science teacher. This is my 15th year of teaching in Middleton, Wisconsin.

**Joanna:** And I should have added for myself. I'm Joanna. And I'm an alternative education teacher who works in the Milwaukee Metro area. So, Hey guys, we are together and here we are at it. You know, part of this is, um, to kind of share with everybody different facets of the world of education and wow, what a great group we have to represent. And we hope that our audience connects with us and enjoys it too. But to get started out just how are you? What are some of the hats that you've worn just very recently? How's everybody doing? Angie?

**Angie:** Well, I'm doing really well. I literally just got home from a soccer game for one of my daughters 30 minutes ago. <laugh> so I right away made sure everybody was kind of settled literally upstairs, made sure I was kind of settled. And so now education, school, that's kind of my happy place. And so now, even this right here is kind of like, "compartmentalize and go." So I'm feeling really great. Daniel, how about you?

**Daniel:** Yeah, also soccer today, but in terms of education, um, working at the district level, we've all been supporting schools these first couple of weeks of the schools being back. And I was supporting at a middle school and wore the hat of a substitute teacher, which is a role that not only substitute teachers are playing, but many staff within schools. We know teachers, staff members, wear so many hats during the day, and we know that substituting, filling in here and there, all hands on deck, is something that's happening everywhere.

**Shelton:** My role is a little, little different, non-traditional so being a lead facilitator, I usually, when I take, I like to, we, I take the kids out of class. So I like to let, 'em get acclimated the first few weeks of school. So I'm not really in the schools yet, but I am meeting principals and establishing calendars and meeting things like that. And this year I've been facilitating all the groups and now I have a co-facilitator. So that's very exciting. I'm very excited about that. Just to, uh, train that person and coach that person. Give me a little break so I can focus on admin and staff.

**Joanna:** And myself. Oh gosh. Getting started and thinking of the different hats, lately, I've been actually really tuned into my own daughter. I have a daughter who's in high school and all that's going on with, you know, trucking her to, and from her events. And she goes to school in a different district that I work in. So that's always, you know, figuring out can I be there on time? Can I do this on time? Um, and that's all starting to get settled. And then within my classroom, um, I kind of have a nontraditional, uh, setup where I'm not just in charge of a class I'm in charge of like this program in this little school. So same thing, it's a little more involved, you know, figuring out, uh, entrance, exit lunches, um, you know, some of the things that are normally taken care of by the, the larger school, uh, the logistics, uh, so right.

It's the beginning of the school year. Here we go. Right? What has it been like these first couple of days? Uh, let's chat about it. You know, we come out of that summer and we go into the school year and it's something I think that is actually hard for people to understand because they don't know that other people's schedules really work like ours does. Or they think it's like, they think of it in kind of a fantasy way where I always say, man, sometimes it is hard to get what I call "slammed back into the school year", because you kind of go from your own thing to something that's like very fast-paced and very structured. Um, but I am just curious and wanna talk to all of you guys to hear wherever we're at in all of our positions throughout the state. Like what, what is it like for that return? What are some things that like go through your mind or that you participate in? Um, what do you do?

**Angie:** Well, I'm super pumped to be that...participating in that transition back because, um, honestly, it's, by this time that I'm kind of ready to stop hanging out with my own children and get them to school with the experts that know how to rear and educate seven, eight and four-year-olds. Um, and then get back to my happy spot with the high schoolers. And so it feels like really good and energizing to be spending time thinking about what the curriculum's gonna look like, thinking about, um, how we're gonna make things work. And then we've got a bunch of new staff in our science department. And so then just thinking about how we're gonna onboard those staff, make them feel welcome, help them kind of get into like, what is the culture of our school? What's the culture of our department and kind of like how we do things curriculum-wise. And so it's kind of fun to like, just dive into that water. I feel like, and just start to get excited.

**Joanna:** Well, I'll say this. Summer was unique to me in, it was the first summer that I felt I really needed. Last school year was, it was last school year was really hard for me and I had never really been a person to count down. So even when I think about going into it, like I kind of was counting, I was counting down last year because I really had kind of run out of energy. And, um, so the summer itself, um, was very restorative and my plan was to not have a plan, you know? And so again, typically I do do a lot in the summer, uh, professionally, I do a lot for my union. Um, and I really had the calendar pretty open in terms of that, that kind of stuff. Um, so my summer in its entirety was very different for me in preparing for this school year.

It was the time that I, I just did really need a break, um, and some distance. And so coming, thinking about coming back was also though kind of okay, because I was just kind of like, I have to be in the, you know, like I was in the moment every day, this summer, and then I was like, I'm going to be going back. And I didn't want to do some of the things I had done, so then on the other hand, in the past two, I used to do countdown to when I went back to work. Right. Especially when I had young kids like you, Angie, where I'd be like, oh my God, there's only this many days left, you know? Um, and so I, I also didn't do that. I was just kind of like, I'll show up the day I have to show up and, and I'll be ready. So for me this summer in particular and me getting, uh, ready was very different than the past. And I'm hoping that's a good thing.

**Shelton:** To double back off of that last year, the last couple years, as we all know, was a little heavy. So like you Joanna this summer, well, let me start with this. I wanted to quit working in schools. Like I literally got two other, well, I had another job. Then another local agency offered me another job. So I was ready just to be done cause I was over it. But then as the summer goes on and school starts to approach, I get that itch again. And I'm like, I gotta stop making emotional decisions after school is over. So I learned a very valuable life lesson, but yeah, so it is been a, it's been a very subtle summer I would say, I would say, just staying present, not doing much. And just, and focusing on me, little lot of health and uh, yeah. Reading and spiritual stuff and yeah. Yeah. So, but very excited to get back, started.

**Joanna:** Interesting that we have that connection cuz I was in the same place where I'm like, what am I doing? Okay. You know, what am I gonna do? What am I gonna do with my life?

**Shelton:** Yes, yes.

**Daniel:** Yeah. Shelton, as you were saying, it's been a rough couple of years, as we all know. And something I'm excited about is the lessons learned that everyone's taking into this year, you know, during COVID during the pandemic, we're this weird phase where it seems like it's over, but we're still in it. Um, so I say during it as if it's over, but it's not over, you know, what did we turn to for our own wellness? You know, people got outside, people were going on, walks, connecting with the outdoors. Uh, they were doing art projects at home, uh, get really get into the arts and outdoors and projects. And I'm excited for the spaces that are really emphasizing those and doubling down on arts education, outdoor education, project-based learning and not seeing these as add-ons anymore or enrichment, but actually part of the core curriculum. And in addition to that, just reestablishing connection with each other and really doing that by listening and listening to student voices and centering them and all of those things that we do to take care of each other and ourselves.

**Shelton:** And I think that's so important what you just said about reconnecting with the students and just letting them center themselves, get their voices back. Cause I, I think a lot of them went through things through COVID, social and emotionally that they're not even aware. They didn't even have the words to say what it was, but the behavior started translating sometimes. So I, I think that was a very good point. Very good point.

**Angie:** Yeah. For me when it's the summertime, you know, I kind of find this happy balance between, um, I always say summertime Angie is like up for anything. So like weekday cookout? Let's do it. Like, concerts on the square home by 9:00 PM. I'm in. And then like school year, Angie is like, uh, it's a weeknight. Bedtime is like eight. We better be eaten by six, come on. We gotta keep things moving. But summertime Angie she's like up for anything anytime. And so I just really try to revel in that like, oh, I'm up for anything on this like calendar? What are we doing? Should we have a bonfire? I don't even care that it's Thursday.

**Joanna:** Yeah, I know I did do a lot of just meeting with friends that something that kind of really fills me up and in the same way, honestly, it was a lot of educator friends where kind of has your, uh, summer Angie vibe where I'm like go out to lunch on a Wednesday and get wine. Let's do it, cuz we can where you feel like you can, you can be in the world is what I'll say. So I do a lot of time with friends and then I do like to go up north a lot. I love going up north Wisconsin and now one of my, my best friend moved up there. So it makes it nice and easy. Um, in terms of, I don't have to book a place to stay. I really can roll up. Um, and so I like a lot of time outdoors and then I have also been reveling in just being with my own children.

I might have shared at some point I have a son who is a, he's gonna be, he's a senior in college this year. And I keep kind of counting down to, you know, how many years is he really gonna come home in the summer? Um, and so this summer too, I just really enjoyed being with my kids in like the everyday ways, like when they were younger, I did plan a lot of events and activities. And this summer it was more kind of like, right, just being at home, like let's cook breakfast, let's hang out kind of stuff. It was really important to me.

**Angie:** Is there summertime Daniel? What's summertime Daniel look like?

**Daniel:** Summertime Daniel's outside getting darker in the sun. Uh, and a lot of kids' activities. My kids are five and seven and a half. So it's a lot of, we staying energized through them and, and staying moving through them started rock climbing recently. Oh. So adding, always adding new things to the repertoire.

**Angie:** Daniel, what does your schedule look like in this summer? Because you're in a slightly different role, um, than like myself. What is, what do you do you have to work in the summer?

**Daniel:** I recently transitioned. So with this new role, that is to be determined.

**Joanna:** TBD. Good.

**Shelton:** So fellow podcasters, uh, it is, it's a new year, beginning of new year. Uh, do you have any educational stories or any fun stories or any experiences you went through or something that you didn't know when you found out that you've learned already this year that you wanna share? And I guess I can start while you're thinking. Uh, me personally, as I keep mentioning, my role is nontraditional. So I have, I have the luxury to recreate myself every year. So every year I get the opportunity to approach my job different. So I used to do a lot of group work, but now after the pandemic and I have some coaching certifications, so I like to do some one-on-ones and get down. And uh, like, like I said, get those kids back motivated and uh, establish goals that they can reach to get 'em feeling good about reaching short goals and things like that. So just the opportunity just to, I love going to work and just getting to be myself to be myself. Cause I work with a lot of kids of color. So my, my job is to teach what I live basically. So, and what I don't know, I get to learn from them or, uh, poor from other people. So do anybody else, anybody else got a educational experience they wanna share?

**Daniel:** Shelton? I'm, I'm curious as a follow up question, that's been part of your work in the past of meeting one-on-one, working really closely with youth and having them set goals. I'm wondering if you find that their goals have shifted any, you know, coming out of this summer or the past few years, uh, going into this next year. Are they focusing on different things? Are they setting different goals for themselves? Are they similar? Different?

**Shelton:** Yeah, that's a great question. I would say previously when I used to do goals, it was more, I want to do better in school. I want to get good grades. I want to, it was more academic, but now it's been a shift of feeling. I want, like, I just wanna feel better. I, I want the curriculum. I want to reflect me. Uh, why am I the only, uh, black person in my class or when we talk about Hispanic, everybody turns around and look at me. So I think it's more, it's more getting towards feelings and they, they want to feel like they belong and they don't have that sense of belonging. So I think sometimes that when they go in that environment, the school environment, it's a, it's a trigger sometimes to remind them of what they're not and what they lack. So I think that that feeling is starting to reoccur a little bit heavier than before.

**Joanna:** Well, and that trigger that you, that trigger that you mentioned for them was actually what I wanted to share is a trigger for me in terms of, when I think about coming back and my process of coming back, kind of my true story part is that too, like I show up like kind of ready full of excitement and I am not even kidding you guys within about three hours this school year I was like, oh yeah, it's oh no, it's all this. And because my work, my work on myself and in my program is focused on that external kind of stuff that you mentioned Shelton that the kids are literally asking for. And yet everything that a school and that you're going over, especially at the beginning is all the external circumstances. And if there's anything that we've learned is that like external circumstances don't necessarily change your internal condition.

And so right. There, there really is just this mismatch. And I was feeling it for myself again, when I'm, when I kept talking about like my quest this summer of like, it's my own internal needs that aren't being like greatly met by the, by kind of like the system and structure that I work for, not my specific work with students, but I felt that again, coming within a few hours of being back, because my experience is that it's like all these again, logistical meetings and it, it's not what I need, you know, it's, that's not what I showed up excited for. You know? Um, I wanna talk about how do we make people feel more welcome? And there just is, there's something kind of like really unhealthy. I mean, that is the thing. There's something pretty, really unhealthy right now. And we have to move beyond for ourselves and our students, the whole, like we're gonna self-care our way out of it or positive self-talk, uplift it. It's like, uh, so coming back kind of my true story to share is that like the weight of our condition, I kind of really felt in terms of turnover. You know, some of you were mentioning, right? The amount of, you know, the amount of people who are turning over and then just what I see as like maybe the disconnect between the practitioners and what my priorities are and then like what the system or what, what management is telling me, the priorities are as we start out.

**Shelton:** Uh, just to interject, I love how you use the system and you differentiate you and the system and how the system is a different thing than what you're really there for. So I, yeah, I love that.

**Joanna:** And I felt that that was me coming back, being like, okay, I've been in the moment. And then it lasted about, I'm not kidding. It was about three hours. I kept track.

**Angie:** Shoot. That's a bummer. That system needs to change. You need to feel good for more than three hours.

**Joanna:** Well, or that's where I just settled in after about three hours anyway. Yeah. That's my true story.

**Angie:** You reminded me. I, I feel like, well, and I feel like it's like, um, you're excited you have this energy. And then you're reminded of like, oh yeah, I gotta set up my grade book. Oh yeah, I need to, I need to start doing like the, the emails, oh, I already need to start registering parent contacts into Infinite Campus. Like you are start to reminded of like the todo list that just lives right here as you're like, just enjoying the kids and doing fun stuff with the kids. And you're like, oh crap, don't forget about that to-do list back here.

**Joanna:** Yeah.

**Daniel:** I'm just thinking about how we're, you know, we're at the beginning of the school year and we're talking about how hard the job is. And especially during the pandemic, it's, it's been really rough and what we are all doing to take care of ourselves and just thinking about new people who are new to the profession coming in, and it's hard enough being an experienced educator coming into the year and saying, how is it only the first two weeks? How is it only labor day? Uh, it feels like May, um, and being a new, new to the profession and saying, what have I gotten myself into? I, I think more and more if, if you're, I've been shifting my focus to who is there, it's so easy to focus on, uh, you know, staffing shortages or mass exodus from the teaching profession, but schools are up and running, teaching and learning is happening, right?

Light bulbs are going off. Beautiful moments are happening every day because people are still there, right from teachers to nurses, substitute teachers, cross categorical teachers, right? Bus drivers. I mean, you name it, building staff. And I think more and more people are entering the profession, knowing what they're getting into because it's out there in the media. People are hearing that teachers are overworked, they're underpaid and under-appreciated. They're reading about these staff shortages. And right now they're reading about learning loss. They're seeing schools question and address systemic racism and any one of these issues is a lot to take on, let alone being new to the profession. So I think anyone who is in a school right now, whether you're new to the profession, or you came back, they have their sleeves rolled up, they're ready to go. They know what they're in for. I mean, they, you still might have moments where you're saying, "what have I gotten myself into", but I think people are ready to go. And there's a lot of power and hope to harness behind that.

**Joanna:** Well, and when I share, you know, how, how I am feeling, or, or I think it is important to, to note that I think it's that awareness that is healthy. Like I'm under, you know, I'm understanding where I'm at and what my thoughts are. Um, so right. I hope like our audience doesn't hear it and just think like, oh, she's bummed three hours in and that just means that the whole year's gonna suck. Like, no. Um, but to be honest, um, I've actually really worked on that awareness. And I think it's a, it's a healthy part of working through all of the things that you just mentioned. Um, because with that awareness comes like, right, what is my part of it? And that I'm in control of? And what is something that I've gotta connect with others in community to chip away at? So I, I just wanted to clarify.

**Angie:** Yeah. Have you guys ever seen the, have you guys ever seen that TV show, *Abbott Elementary*?

**Joanna:** Yeah.

**Daniel:** I've, I've seen a couple episodes.

**Angie:** It's a real, uh, like it's got like a *[The] Office* vibe to it where, you know, they're interviewing the characters kind of midway. It's a good sitcom touchy, you know, like makes you feel good as you watch it. Um, and there's like in that show, there's like a first year teacher. That's like classic first year teacher, you know, like trying to do everything, like doing more than they need to maybe even fumbling cuz they just never stop. And then there's like some seasoned teachers that this first year teacher is like, "oh, why aren't you doing more?" Like, and one of the seasoned teachers says, like, "I know I can't do more because I can't afford to be burnt out because if I get burnt out, these kids have no one. And so I have to take care of myself. I have to not do everything because if I do these kids won't have a teacher."

**Angie:** And when I watched that episode, I was like, oh I agree. Write it down. Because like our kids need us. And like, I, you know, at the end of the day I have to be like, okay, I've, I'm done. I'm not gonna think about school at all this whole weekend. And I'm probably going to still, but it's like, if I just pretend like I won't, like, I know that I'm striving for balance because like my kids need my nice student kids, my kids need me on Monday to be my best version of myself. Bring the energy, bring the, like the excitement to even a boring topic because they need me.

**Shelton:** Yes. So you, you all mentioned, uh, being overworked cuz I know we have some listeners who probably they hear that a lot, but they really don't know what that entails. Can you all like explain some of the overworked things that happened throughout your day or year?

**Angie:** Well, I, I do have a funny, this would be a classic like beginning-of-school-year feeling overworked. So it's like day four of school. And we just had back to back to school night, like meet-the-teacher kind of night and it started at 9:00 PM or no, it started at 7:00 PM and got done at 9:09 PM and there's school the next day. And I feel like that's a classic one where you're like, who is asked to like work a solid eight hour day then like go home for maybe a little bit and then come back and like put on that face again for a couple more hours now to parents and then notice and then go home and be like, okay, I need to like slow down. I need to get some sleep here and then be right back at it in the morning. Ready to go.

**Joanna:** And I love that it was, I love that it was 9:09, you know? That's still too, like who else does that?

**Angie:** Yeah.

**Joanna:** Count those minutes.

**Shelton:** Gotta get, gotta get those minutes in. I was just gonna say.

**Daniel:** To Shelton, Shelton to your question. I'm not necessarily thinking of myself, but I mentioned that I was able to support a school, uh, earlier this week and in one of the classes, the class was being supported by multiple teachers, you know, reading teacher coming in and, and doing reading assessments with the students. Um, and there was also a special education teacher who came in and was supporting students. And she and I had the chance to chat a little bit after the class was over. And she was talking about how, again, first two weeks of school, it seems like it's May, she put in 15,000 steps the other day? And this, this wasn't a field trip. This was just literally running around the building, supporting every student on her caseload. And then all of the documentation after that, talking about being there till 7:00 PM, writing emails to families, working on the documentation. And I just kept thinking about those 15,000 steps during the day too. I don't think that was an anomaly. I think that's every single day.

**Joanna:** When I think about a lot of the ways that, that I feel like I'm doing a lot of work, it it's a little bit different because I do a lot for my local association. And so, um, it's voluntary and yet I'm like, okay, if, if districts themselves, weren't such a mess, our association work, wouldn't be so intensive in terms of really helping people understand what's what, what their rights are. You know what I mean? What's what their Workday really is. And isn't how we really establish kind of this, the, the collegiality amongst ourselves. So we plan outings and get-togethers, the kind of things that like can never be like fit into a school day or they think, you know, maybe like a half a Cousin's sub and a bag of chips is okay at school. That's the only thing we could do. You know?

**Joanna:** And so we plan the more like adult and real things, you know, to really, again, build a community, build a, build a community of professionals. And so a lot of my time this week was that it's like the, the workday ends at this time, but I'm on the phone with people...Well, in fact, I helped somebody resign already. Um, I'm on the phone with people, helping them figure out what to do, I'm, you know, help, you know, helping people just figure out their situation. And then we have this great leadership team. So anyway, I just think about that, whereas like the, the school day ends here, but then my work with my colleagues continues. Um, and I just think, because there's like, we just kind of like have roles in school, but there's really kind of, not at least been my experience the past 27 years, not a whole like organizational vibe. Uh, and if so, it's been like kind of just compliance-driven.

**Shelton:** What do you mean when you say roles?

**Joanna:** I mean like here's school and then you hire teachers and, and they're teachers, and then you hire, you know, your admin and they're admin and you hire your paras and there's really, there's really not time or a real effort in how are you really a team? You know, it's more like, here's your duties, here's my duties. How do you, you know, these are the duties I have to do. And, and again, it's that internal need that we're missing with people of like, but what's the organization and how are we a team? And is there even time to ever really be together? So I just see that missing in the structure and in my case, that's where my association picks it up.

**Angie:** Yeah. I agree. And I do think the past two years have taken that even further away because I feel like at my school we had, pre-COVID we had a really good, uh, staff culture and staff, um, energy that worked well with each other that did really include all the different levels and all the different departments from teachers to student support staff. And then you had COVID which separated us, and then it, it was difficult to kind of maintain that. And then, uh, with that comes a lot of staff turnover. And so when it came time to come back last year, there was almost like a guard up. Like you weren't quite ready to know who you could trust. Maybe you didn't give, I mean, I know for a fact that there was a scenario where I didn't give a staff member as much grace as I should have.

And then I kind of got called on it and I was like, why would I give them grace? I don't even know them. I've been here for a long time and it wasn't cool. Like that was, I was out of line, but like I said to my administrator, I said, we need more community. Right? So that we can have more opportunities to remind ourselves that these are our colleagues. This is our community. I trust what you're doing, even if I don't know all the pieces. Um, because I know you've got kids at the best interest here, I know that I need to presume those positive intentions. And so my dream is that we'll get back to an opportunity for a stronger community so that we can get back to that, presuming everybody's putting kids first, everybody's doing their best work to put kids first. And we have trust there, even if we don't know each other as well, is we did pre-COVID.

**Joanna:** Nicely said.

**Shelton:** Yes, yes. Lot of perspective, Daniel from the, you're not located in the school. You're downtown, right?

**Daniel:** Yes. That's correct.

**Shelton:** Like from, from a downtown's perspective, what is it pressure on you all when you're hearing teachers saying the things they want and need and you, you know, I mean, you can relate to some of it cuz like you say, you're in the school too. Is it pressure when that doesn't happen and it's due to a process or you know, all the politics or whatever?

**Daniel:** Yeah. I, I feel pretty lucky that the team I'm on is working on innovation within the district and has learned that it only works if these projects are, are working directly with schools and with teachers and in some cases with students and talking with them and listening to them, cuz I think oftentimes there's a disconnect and unfortunately it's not hard for someone at the district level to hear about the struggles and about the hardships because they're simply not hearing it. So I think how can we better communicate with each other? Uh, Joanna was talking about in schools and just teams within schools working together, how do we all fit together and communicate with each other? And sometimes you hear that people are left in silos and how can we get better doing that at the district level? I think is a, still a big question that we're figuring out.

**Angie:** And how do you help someone who feels like they're in a silo too? I think when you do begin to talk to people and you feel, you hear about that, that how do you support them when you already have so much stuff on your own shoulders to take care of? I think I wanna move on and start maybe reflecting a little bit and um, do like the compliment sandwich. What is maybe something that's going well for you right now or something you feel like you're doing really well and maybe what's something that like you already know, I need to do better at that. Or this is my goal this year on what I wanna work on. Does anything come to mind?

**Joanna:** Well, I could say, I think for myself, something that I know I do well is I'm really proud of the way that I start the school year and that I begin to start school the school year with my families. I do intake meetings, which is not very common at high school level, but that's an important part of our program and where I literally meet with the child and the family, um, before they start, to talk about just how did summer go? What are they hoping for this school year? What are they worried about this school year? And then some basic logistics, like literally like how are you getting to school? And because then we can, we can talk and share perspective because so many assumptions are made, you know, like a little thing I always think about too is like my kids who, um, ride bikes, like I'll have kids who ride bikes to school and also I'll be like, what are you gonna do to, how are you getting to school this year?

They'll be like, I'm riding my bike. I'm like, okay, well just so you know, you can bring it right in our room. Like I have like this external door nearby. So I just have, 'em bring it right in the room because right. I would, I've learned years past like, you know, I'm like, oh my God, there's a bike in the bush. And it'd be one of my kids being like, "oh yeah, I hide my bike in that bush." And I'd be like, oh, you know, so these are the kinds of things you find out when you just talk about it in advance. And that are very important to kids. Like they wanna know how to walk in the door and not look like a fool. They wanna know that. And so that's something that I'm really proud that I start my, my meeting, my school year, that way and oh, I would love a high school redesign where we all do something like that.

Um, because right. It's so important to adolescence, to like walk in like knowing. And if you listen to them, that is where all their worries are. Right. As you know, they're actually not worried about your class and you know, they're worried about how are they gonna look? What are people gonna think? Do they know where they're going? And so something I know I do well is is those intake meetings and getting my kids feeling solid and confident when they're coming in. Something I know that I think I gotta, I always have to work on is remembering that no one else in my school is really doing that. And talking with other colleagues in a way, that's not like, "Duh, you should be doing stuff like this," you know, and kind of understanding what again, that, how that system limits them too into how they're going about things. So something I, I do, I know I need to work on, is that kind of like, and I'm not mean to people, but I'm just saying like that compassionate lens of, um, yeah, it, they're, they're doing a different thing. Um, and, and I wanna build that bridge for the, for the small ways over, but I know that's, you know, I'm very focused on my work and my space, you know what, I just kind of talked about and something I've gotta work on too, is, is understanding where everybody else is coming from.

**Daniel:** I definitely hear that. Joanna. It's very similar to me too. It's it's almost listening on both ends. I think something that's going well is listening and, and in particular, um, and this comes through the, the work of Elena Aguilar from Bright Morning Team, just doing a lot of reading there. And, and whether it's reflecting on your own practice as an educator or coaching teams or leading PD, she encourages you to really lean into emotions for the purpose of uncovering unmet needs. Because if you can uncover those unmet needs, then that's really what education is all about, right? Is then figuring out how can we meet those needs. And especially in one, in one situations, if that you are able to uproot and uncover those emotions and talk about them together, you can build trust. And I think it goes a long way. Uh, but Joanna, similarly to what you are saying, I think something I have trouble with sometimes is having patience and truly listening when I feel the other person, when there's a fundamental difference between what we believe in. And I think on a macro scale, that's happening too. There are issues and people you're on one side or another, you think we should be teaching this in schools or you think we shouldn't be teaching this in schools. You think schools should be organized in this way, or it shouldn't be organized in that way. You think bathrooms should be set up one way or bathrooms should be set up another way you think, you know, certain sports should be organized this way, you know, and it's so polarized. And, and, you know, I admit at times it is hard to reach across the table and truly listen, when there does appear to be a fundamental difference. But if that's something we don't work on, it's going to be, it's gonna continue to become more polarized and we're gonna feel more distance between between us. And unless we can find common ground, we're not going to move forward together. But it's hard.

**Shelton:** Yeah. Yeah. And I'd say what I do well, I, I can, I can relate to the, to the kids or the youth that a lot of kids, don't a lot of the, a lot of the adults in the building don't think they can relate to. And those are kids what they call at-risk. But I like to think of 'em as high-promise, cuz how you think about things is how you see things and that's how you treat it. So I like to always call 'em they have high-promise and I treat 'em as such. So I like to, I think I, I build relationships with those kids very well because I see me and a lot of them and some of their experiences they've, uh, gone through and some experiences I'm going through personally and just have been through. So that, that relation that builds a, a different kind of relationship where they trust me.

And I get called brother, dad, cousin, um, uncle. So to build those kind of relationships in the school, I, I love it. And then I get to, I'm privy to different information that a lot of people I'm, I'm privy to the truth a lot, how kids are really feeling. Cause sometimes they don't trust as you all know, they don't trust people cuz the confidentiality's been broken or things like that. So just having that opportunity to build that rapport is, is a blessing. Um, I would say what I need to work on. Like you all were saying not as far as listening, but my emotions after I hear what's going on. Like, especially when it's about the kids that I work with. I, I, I go personal first if I'm being honest. So I have to pause and step back and uh, sometimes I gotta give myself a day and then I'll tell 'em I I'll come back tomorrow and I can answer because it just hits home so hard.

And I, I love hard. I hurt hard and I heal slow. So with that equation, I have to have to take my time. But the greatest thing I've learned is, um, the, the greatest way to learn something is to admit, you don't know, like I, I, every day I go in there and try to look for something, I don't know, cause that's an opportunity to learn. So especially from them and that puts that child on the pedestal in which they don't feel like they've been put on the pedestal for whatever reasons throughout the day or in life.

**Joanna:** Love it.

**Daniel:** Thanks Shelton. We wanna make sure every podcast episode, we don't just hear from the four of us, we want to open it up and we want to incorporate a variety of voices. We'll take questions from early-career or pre-service teachers, or hear unique stories from veteran teachers. So we're just gonna do a quick check of who is with us today. Uh, today we have a story from Amy from Sussex and Amy says "I work very closely, not only with my second graders, but with their families as well. So we get to know the family at a very deep level in our virtual space." Amy is a virtual teacher. "Much more than I did as a classroom teacher for 15 years. I have students who have lost parents to COVID, students who have ADHD or autism, and the traditional classroom doesn't work for them. So they choose us. One parent I was talking to this week broke down and says he knows his daughter is behind and needs my help, but cannot send her to in-person school after what happened in Uvalde, he doesn't feel safe sending her." And so that's what Amy sent us. Thank you, Amy, for sending that in and just to open it up to us, what came up for you in listening to Amy's story? How important is it for you to make connections with your students?

**Shelton:** Overall, for me, what I heard was the ways education needs to change. Some things we need to rethink how we're teaching kids, because we're not keeping in mind the, the traumas that they go through, that they're not even aware that they can't translate and, uh, and how it plays on them, socially and emotionally. So just the different ways that kids may need to start learning. And I, I don't know. It's, that's, that's heartfelt, it's heartfelt, but building relationships again. That's the key.

**Joanna:** Well, that's what made me think about too, is, is part of the, is the, is the trust we need to rebuild with parents, like they've been affected too. And that's what I heard in the story was again, because ultimately the, these educational decisions for the children were based on their parents. Um, and, and it's all fine. It's all good. And yet it's like, there, there is something there. I always talk about, like, we assume so much in education where we're just like, of course everybody wants to send their kids to a brick-and-mortar school, but it's like, no, I mean, there's, there's, I always say there's thousands of kids, there need to be more than one way. Um, and so you hear that and then you just hear too, like the parents, of course they have emotions too. And what do we have built within to do that? And I, I loved hearing that she felt that she has stronger connections virtually than in-person, because I felt that way too, during virtual. I think it depended on what you were doing. Um, and like, I don't wanna, I didn't wanna be virtual forever, but while it was happening, we made the best of it. And we did have a community and I did feel close. And so I know that it's possible for people who are choosing that, you know, for, for it to, to meet their needs. So those were some things that came up for me. Thanks for sharing.

**Angie:** Yeah. I'd say props to Amy for just being in that role. I, I would not volunteer for that. Um, and so I guess maybe when I, when I hear all of that, I really admire that she feels, and that she's observing those tight relationships with the kids virtually because I feed off that in the classroom. And I love those relationships that I build with my students. So I'm thankful that she's able to find that my hope is that she isn't living in that silo that we were talking about earlier, where I hope she's not teaching in her basement by herself, you know? I hope, I hope she's got a community of other virtual teachers or something that she can go to because I think that it's when we, most teachers I know are social beings and they like the energy that comes around working with kids. And I hope that she is getting that social connection that she needs, because she's got something good going on, it sounds like, and we need her to stay a teacher for a really long time because there's kids needs that need to be met and sounds like she's meeting them. And so I hope she's getting what she needs so that she can have a long profession doing this role.

**Daniel:** Absolutely. And we're talking about, you know, this as relates to building trust and really relationships and not just the interpersonal relationships, but the relationship to school and education and from the student's perspective and from the family's perspective as well. And another important issue here is safety. And that the safety of everyone in schools has to be a priority. And whether it's connected to a sense of belonging and feeling safe in terms of your identity, like we were talking about earlier, or simply your physical safety, whether it's due to COVID or what we're seeing in the media with school shootings, safety is a number one priority. And I'm curious, how do all of you feel about your own safety as an educator and also the safety of your students?

**Angie:** Well, we had an active shooter last year in January. Uh, it was a scare that, um, was eventually found to be that the student did not have any weapon, but we went into a full lockdown. Like there was a weapon in the building and I actually was home, uh, with COVID at the time. And what was crazy was that I literally had the police scanner app on my phone and was texting all my colleagues who were literally hiding like 50 kids in the art kiln, um, and texting them the updates that were coming over the police scanner app, because it was so intense. And I think that there's a lot of baggage that came after that. Um, and it does make you, I hate that I have to think on a daily basis, "how is my classroom set up for safety?" What, what is the way, like, I just put a desk in a place like a table and I was like, Ooh, that would be a good table to push in front of the door if I needed to. That sucks. Like that's the worst, that is the worst job thing ever. And another colleague literally has a picture next to the door of a good way to secure the door and like a plan of like, when, if we needed to, this is how we're gonna put stuff in front of the door. And like, that is too much like that's, that's where I'm lost, where I, I can't, I have no words of what to do next.

**Joanna:** There's that, you know, the real, like again, specific external episodes that of course go through, I think all of our minds, but I do think more about like in terms of safety, I do think more about psychological safety for the students and for the staff members. Um, people are not well, and that doesn't mean like in a dangerous way. I'm just like, we're not in our best thinking because we're not well, and that, that has always concerned me and, but has really increased. And then kind of our lack of understanding too, of stress responses. So like when we have done like the formal safety training and they're like, "No matter what, leave," or whatever, you know, and I'm like, well, okay, if there's fight, flight, freeze, fawn, like we're all gonna react different. And I have always have an example of like literally in our classroom between my teaching partner and I like one day the micro, the microwave kind of like started on fire. You know, it was like, we're heating up our lunches microwave was like, you know, sparks, whatever. She come, comes running out and is like, "Oh my God, the microwave's on fire," you know? And I'm like, and I go running in to be like, "Well, then unplug it!" You know? And we were just laughing being like, that's a great example of just a stress response, you know, or, and we've seen the same thing when we've had to break up a physical altercation between students. Like she ran to the phone and again, no judgment, like her response was like, run this way. Mine was run this way, you know? And so I think about too, how almost like that's never a part of it. And, and whether it's for the active shooter or not, or in general, again, as, as a community, we don't spend a lot of time talking about, what does psychological safety mean to us? How, how would we respond? What, what would we do? What are we, what are we seeing in our kids? What do they see from us? That kind of stuff.

**Shelton:** Well, me personally, that, that it gives me anxiety and I don't even have anxiety to be honest. And I, like I said, I'm not at a school every day, but one day I got caught outta school where I had to do a, that, uh, trainer shooting where we all had to hide in a room and it was just quiet. And just sitting there think like, what if this was real? Like, where would I go? What could we do? So just to, and then to think about some of the kids that bring that I work with that bring some of that life, psychological things on, and then add on top of that. Uh, I just, yeah, I, I don't know that that's a, it's a lot to think about. So me, I personally, I, I do stay alert of those things, but I don't intentionally watch the news. I don't, I don't pay attention to social media like that because I have to keep my peace. That's the only way I keep my peace.

**Angie:** Protect yourself emotionally.

**Shelton:** Yes. Yes. That psychological safety. I've never heard that, but I love it.

**Daniel:** Yeah. Amy, we wanna thank you again for sending in your story. I think it really took this to a deeper level, a very real place about what's happening this year, both in terms of the trauma that we're dealing with, as well as the ideas and energy, like we mentioned before, of everybody who is still there, who is bringing these ideas to connect people together and to build communities. So thank you.

**Joanna:** Well guess what fellow podcasters, it is time already to wrap it up. So thank you everybody for listening. Uh, we appreciated you being with us and sending in your stories. And if you are an educator we'd love to hear from you. Let us know any questions you have, and we can field them right here on the show. Um, we also welcome stories from current educators like Amy, uh, who sent hers in, because we wanna give a window to people about what is really happening in our profession. Uh, you could record a voice memo or type it up, um, just send it to education@pbswisconsin.org and make sure you put "aka Teacher" in the subject line. You could also check out the [*aka Teacher* podcast website](http://pbswisconsineducation.org/akateacher/) to find helpful resources connected to today's episode. See you next time.