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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** And since. I would assume that that's the benefit of your regard.

[00:00:05] **Speaker 2** Yeah, exactly.

[00:00:07] **Speaker 1** So do you want your name when you're done? Oh, yeah, I'm different. But I think the problem. And is it okay if we close the store? Absolutely. Just going to cut out. Yeah, go ahead.

[00:00:23] **Speaker 2** Those loud.

[00:00:24] **Speaker 1** Kids. That's about to say to me. No problem with, uh.

[00:00:29] **Speaker 2** If you will use getting set up. There is one little kid who must have done something wrong with. He got it but sent back to the table. Yeah, He had exhausted the patience of the group. And use does.

[00:00:41] **Speaker 1** Have some things really cheap.

[00:00:47] **Speaker 2** So he's like, uh, remember just, you know, just the whole week when you had your chance, and now you get to go sit at the table like, hey, yeah, probably won't be the last. I'm sure it was well earned. Yeah.

[00:01:04] **Speaker 1** Yeah. You try to keep him in the classrooms. Yeah. Sometimes things happen.

[00:01:13] **Speaker 2** So did you start out in the classroom before moving to this position?

[00:01:18] **Speaker 1** Yes. In another district I was a special education teacher in Sheboygan Falls. Part of that I was the autism specialist, the special education teacher of Manitowoc. Prior to that, I was a behavioral therapist. Prior to that, I worked in a group home network for Children of Autism as an outside service provider.

[00:01:36] **Speaker 2** Okay. How'd you end up on this side of the state, then?

[00:01:39] **Speaker 1** A couple reasons. One, that camping out here. Governor's Dodge. Coming out here for it and just kind of took a chance by seeking an area that was further away from where I was before. And I knew about the area just from growing up and camping around here. And this wound up becoming home. And the district itself is a very good district to work in. Um, great colleagues, uh, good discussions with folks when it comes down to how do we best support our kids. And I think that's a district that I want to be a part of.

[00:02:11] **Speaker 2** How long have you been here?

[00:02:13] **Speaker 1** This is my six year.

[00:02:15] **Speaker 2** Six year. Okay.

[00:02:16] **Speaker 1** All right. So. Well, now.

[00:02:17] **Speaker 2** You know, when you go camping, do you go back across the Cole or Andre or. No.

[00:02:23] **Speaker 1** No. You know that area. It's not very interesting comparatively. This area, we get all the rolling hills and it just doesn't. Doesn't it? Doesn't hold a candle. Your point. Beach is nice, but not as nice as Governor's Dodge. Not as nice as Devils Lake. It just seems like if you lean forward too far, we will kind of.

[00:02:43] **Speaker 2** Okay, I will have you switch back on. All right. So for this, just talk to me. Don't worry about all the. Sure. The razzmatazz around here. Let's start kind of broadly speaking, you have seen an increase in the number of kids coming in with speech delays. That or speech disorders. Right. Over the last few years?

[00:03:03] **Speaker 1** Yes, I've definitely seen an increase in the number of referrals. I would say it's not abnormal for me to get at least one speech referral per day, which historically that's not been the trend at all. We look at our overall spec ed statistic in terms of like our five year trend, um, taking in consideration all disability labels, you see an increase from about 12.6% to 13.7, which isn't that bad. This speech. What the speech increase though is more substantial than that. I believe last time I was looking at it, it was up beyond 14% in comparison to where it was before. So I would say we've noticed definitely a measured increase in speech referrals probably over the past three years. And I would say that it's definitely accelerated because when I'm getting referrals on almost a daily basis for speech and not all of those panned out as being all right, we ran through our assessments and we determine eligibility. But the fact that we get that many is something of note.

[00:04:11] **Speaker 2** Mm. And ah is the severity of some of those delays also increasing.

[00:04:17] **Speaker 1** That's hard to speak to. Um because you know, when I look at it from that lens, you also deal with student movement between districts which, you know, I could think of various reasons why that stat may either locally or on a state level be increasing. When I see student movement, I have I could speak to this year. We have seen an increase in more what would be historically what would be considered to be low incidence disabilities like students with autism. But autism is severe, profound, which will have a speech component to it that is a deficit area. Or I might see kids coming in who have intellectual disabilities, which, you know, that is a fairly profound disability that we might service, which also may have may have some speech and language features that are more severe. So an increase in severity just locally within like the population who has always been here. I can't say yes or no to that, but I can say that just overall through student movement, I think we're having a lot more students move in with severe disabilities in general, but very often is either a related service or they're part of the team or just, you know, generally speaking, they are the predominant service provider. Speech is often accompanying that on some level, as is O.T., occupational therapy, physical therapy, all of that stuff for sure.

[00:05:58] **Speaker 2** And yeah, some of that can also be the number of parents know where their kids will get the best service. They talk to each other. They hear one district provides a little bit better or more. And then. They will try and send the kids here.

[00:06:11] **Speaker 1** I can't necessarily like say for sure. I would love to say yes. That is the exact reason why. Right. That that's great. We want parents to feel that when their kids come here, that they're going to get the best service possible. Now, along those lines, I will speak to this. We are the largest district in this city, in this region by virtue of being the largest city. It's going to have a ripple effect. You know, I would say when you look outside of the Platteville school district, too, you're going to see a lot more service providers in the form of counseling, things like that, just regionally within this vicinity, which is advantageous to families simultaneously due to the student population being larger. We are going to get more funding just categorically per the number of students we have, because we receive funding in part on the basis of how many students we have within our program, which does allow us to be a little bit more nimble when it comes down to, okay, we've had an increase. We're at a point of where looking at case loads, we need to go ahead and hire another speech therapist versus, you know, if we were in a smaller district, we would be in a position to perhaps contract out through like seesaw or a local service sort of hub versus being able to hire our own.

[00:07:42] **Speaker 2** As far as the the general speech delays and the increase there that's been seen, I mean, from what I've heard is pretty much nationwide, it's everyone's been seeing that particularly coming out of COVID. Yeah. Do you have any theories as to whether it was masking or, you know, mental health issues with parents or the virus itself or phones and screens or what may have contributed to this?

[00:08:06] **Speaker 1** All of the above. I think when you look at the masking thing, the fascinating piece about that is when you're, for example, let's say you have a student who is already qualified for speech and language services, right? And let's say that we were at the beginning of the you know, we see for at home things were either shut down or very controlled in let's say you're in a speech in language session. It's hard when you're working on articulation to be able to adhere to a model when they have a mask covering their mouth that would be like a sub factor. I don't think that that's the end all, be all. I think that there's probably factors that you mentioned in your question that are more substantial. I think for the most part, our families did the best that they could, just as we did during that time. So I don't necessarily think it's something like, you know, I can uniformly say that all families were struggling with X, Y and Z, which perpetuated this. But I think in some instances that's true. I think that there were some kids who, because they weren't at school, where to them this could be the most stable environment where they have the most exposure to positive language models. And since they're not here, they're at home or something of that nature, they're not getting at the same level of access that they once had, or the younger kids didn't get access to what they had in daycare. Just generally speaking in society, that likely, theoretically, would have an impact. Mm hmm.

[00:09:39] **Speaker 2** And we heard one of the experts we spoke to on this was saying that, you know, the phrase she used was it was the same storm, but different ships. Yeah. Resources available to different families were and I'm sure in this part of the state were dramatically different as far as who could stay home with their kids, who had the availability, who could still interact with their kids in that time, and especially little kids that are you're now seeing as three, four and five year olds that were born in that time period.

[00:10:05] **Speaker 1** Yeah. And I mean, I have four kids of my own, but at the same time, you know, I come from a household of where you have both working parents. However, you know, the financial situation is at a point of where we're okay. That's not every household, though. There's households in which you might have a single parent working two jobs. And how they pull that off is just beyond me. And they may have one, two, three, four kids. I mean, that that would be a very difficult task at hand to be able to provide that modeling and that emotional support during that time when you're also trying to put food on the table by working all those jobs. I just how people got through that in those conditions is astonishing to me sometimes.

[00:10:56] **Speaker 2** As far as the kids that are experiencing some of these delays, are they able to come out of it faster? Like if if the theory is that some of the delays were created or because they weren't getting some of it. Interaction. They didn't weren't exposed to a school environment or parents weren't around or screeds or whatever. Now that that has changed in theory, can they catch up faster than historically someone that had a speech delay and was receiving services?

[00:11:25] **Speaker 1** Are you talking about comparing the environment, given that they went through COVID compared to if they hadn't?

[00:11:31] **Speaker 2** Yes. If a kid coming in ten years ago with a speech delay, would they be around the same ability to catch up and maybe graduate out of speech services compared to a kid today? Or is there any difference?

[00:11:45] **Speaker 1** I think that there would be a difference, just given the nature of COVID in general, because if you look at opportunity for instruction, I think we we did we made a decision as a district where if we had kids who were severe, we utilize the IEP process to bring them in when we could. And I like to think that that help mitigate some of the challenges that we ran into locally. Generally speaking, I do feel that inevitably time lost during a period in which they could have been receiving services that looked a little bit different than via Zoom or virtual or things like that, or what all of us were trying to figure out, particularly that march when it was just, boom, everything shut down. I think that, you know, that is going to create a delay. You know, I'm not going to I'm not going to say that it's going to prevent that because we always have to try. We always have to keep applying strategies and techniques and try to ensure that our kids are meeting their goals, are receiving access to free and appropriate public education and are making gains. But given that there was a period of time which instruction didn't look like it always did. I would say that yes, there is going to be a difference between those groups in many conditions. Now, there could always be a kid who once they get that modeling, they're going to click along and just catch on. That could happen. But generally speaking, I think that that's a fair assumption to make.

[00:13:16] **Speaker 2** As far as the budget situation, we know that the state doesn't fund their full share. We know that the federal government doesn't fund their full promised share of special education.

[00:13:26] **Speaker 1** Appreciate you saying that.

[00:13:28] **Speaker 2** That will relieve you of the burden. I've done the stories on and I. I know that that's a fact. I mean, that's the state the state budget ever so slightly.

[00:13:37] **Speaker 1** Ever so slightly is most correct. But I would I would challenge the opted perspective, given that they did not adjust for inflation, which when you look at those numbers, it's not necessarily that we're getting slightly more we may be getting slightly less because all of the tools that we purchase to help support some of those gaps and help kids get back to where they were before those went up in cost. So inevitably, you know, it might be well, they increased your funding by about X amount, but then you're losing it by more. And then you have your staff members, too, who their salaries and wages. It's not a priority. It is a priority of the district. And we have made good on that priority because it got pushed down to districts to make good on that priority or not. We've made good on adjusting salaries and wages along with cost of inflation, but it used to be that those two things were married for everybody and they're not now. So that's another factor when you look at, okay, you can have an increase, but if there's all this stuff suddenly getting paid out that historically was, it can't really be viewed as increase. It's not you are spending more money that you have.

[00:15:00] **Speaker 2** Given given those circumstances. How because every new kid comes in, they may bring some funding with them as a new person, but not enough funding. Not full funding, Correct. So what does that mean when you are seeing this uptick, when you're trying to figure out, can we afford another full time speech? Because it.

[00:15:21] **Speaker 1** Is difficult. We wind up being in situations where we have to make difficult calls very often with our people. And we're fortunate to have very good people working for us in our district who are committed to servicing our kids, and they are very good. I would say the speech team is particularly very good at coming together and looking at their caseload and trying to figure out, okay, we have these minutes because with IEPs, you have minutes that you need to cover that are defined in their it's like a legal contract. You have to fulfill it. It's not an individual's choice to be like, you know, let's skip that and save a dollar. Can't do it. So we we often go back to the drawing board quite a bit with our schedules when we get new students in our caseload. To try to move things around and make it work. And we're able to and we did increase we did increase by a new speech pathologist, I think is back in 2122. And then we had someone who is it like a 60%? We increase them up to 100%. They'd been with us at 100% formerly, and we're willing to come back to a 400%, which has been advantageous to us because otherwise it would be very challenging to meet our obligations per all. The student IEPs, particularly like you have, you have the students in their IEPs. We're here in their programs that are here now. But you know, it's not and we don't want to stop kids from coming to our district. We want kids to come to our district and get the best services they can get. But that being said, it's not necessarily something that's within one's control, nor something that you always get tons of notice about when you have kids come in and, you know, their program could be something that's very easy to meet. Their program and I have had this before, could be something of where it might have, okay, you get what is it like, you know, anywhere between nine and 12 grand, of course, depending upon categorical funding and general aid per student. But then what if they come in with about 12 grand worth of t cost? What if they come in with nursing services like an individual nurse, which is a position that's one FTE of a professional level position of where when you factor in benefits, now you're talking about 80 grand. What if, what if that happens and you're obligated to do it? And we pride ourselves on being honest and, you know, living up to our service obligation. So I'm not going to lie. It can be quite challenging for us, but I have the good fortune of having good staff members, and I mean that sincerely, not just because I'm being interviewed.

[00:18:02] **Speaker 2** Have you seen a shift to maybe trying to do more group models like the kids that can work together or.

[00:18:07] **Speaker 1** Oh, yes, Yes.

[00:18:09] **Speaker 2** That's the creativity you're trying to do.

[00:18:10] **Speaker 1** Yeah. When we're talking about the schedules and coming together and talking about how do we provide or specially designed instruction minutes in an effective matter, you will look at students of like abilities and try to it times ability group. I would say as a district we place a priority on inclusion. That's good because federal law does too. But with that a lot of our services will be push in the speech person going into the ED classrooms and providing some support to because it's good since they have access to positive behavior models in there who it might provide good examples for kids to work with in which they might further develop their skills. That's a good opportunity for us as well. In a blended fashion. It may also be advantageous for us to take kids and ability group who may have like needs and like abilities for the purpose of servicing, not just for servicing efficiency but from an instructional stance. There's just a lot more that you could do if you have more than one kid in the room. Even with an educator effectiveness and you look at how you evaluate instruction, collaborative learning, all that stuff. So there's kind of hidden opportunities in that, not just silver linings, but it is a factor that causes us to, you know, consider such methods and they're not bad methods to do and they can improve instruction from time to time. But yeah, it does present challenges. When you get lots of new students.

[00:19:43] **Speaker 2** How do you handle the threat of burnout? Because we've seen that everywhere from teachers, everywhere, but especially those that have seen an individual caseload rise perhaps exponentially. How do you handle their mental health and their needs? If I was from every speech pathologist I've ever talked to, they love working with the kids. It's always the paperwork and the, you know, all all the other factors that that add the stress to them. But sometimes adding all that on top of it can make it So it's like a burnout level.

[00:20:13] **Speaker 1** Yeah, for sure. We still to a couple about two years ago we did a trauma and we adopted a trauma informed care model. It was called Seven Essential Ingredients of Trauma Informed Care. Now it's through WellPoint. But part of that model is self care and reason to be Why did we get into this profession and also not forgetting ourselves? What do we need to do to help us self-regulate? What do we need to do to ensure that we're in a good headspace when we come into work? That's important to prioritize and top of that, and many districts do it. Nonviolent crisis intervention training or CPI training. I'm one of the trainers for that. Over the years, they've adopted a lot more content into their curriculum and one of the areas that they talk about in the past, I feel like they go heavy on. How do you support students well-being and with the precipitating factors they may bring to school that we have no control over? Well, they're starting to talk a lot more About what? About your own precipitating factors. What are you bringing and how do you have awareness of that? What are things that you can do to help them self-manage? And beyond that, what do you need to tap out? We directly encourage because all of us have been there, including me, of where, you know, you might be in a situation of where you might need a colleague to step in to provide some support to. And that's just part of being on a team and supporting one another. We encourage that. That being said, I think that that is something that we will constantly be working on different ways in which we might help avoid that. I know for special ed teachers this year, Season three got a grant and our new teachers that we hired are part of it, of where it is like a coaching grant of where they can go to see the three, have different coaching sessions, have different private coaching sessions through someone there. We've done local support between myself and last year we hired a new program, Support, who's focused on new teachers and supporting them and being there. I as a director, I'm not a believer in sitting in my office before you folks showed up, and it wasn't just to make sure we had space. I was here working directly with kids and also staff and, you know, just being a part of the culture to try to get our kids to where they're successful and help maintain that.

[00:22:50] **Speaker 2** Have you heard of Lena?

[00:22:52] **Speaker 1** Nope.

[00:22:54] **Speaker 2** Okay. It's a it's a system where kids can wear a little vest with a little recording device that actually doesn't capture it, doesn't record conversations, but it records interactions between teachers and students. We were just at a Head Start program in Milwaukee. Oh, where they're they're one of the sites using that. And I wasn't sure if that kind of technology how widespread the knowledge of that was. But they've said that they've they use it for a lot of little kids as well. But they found in court more issues where some kids just weren't as verbal. And so it's like, okay, make a focus on interacting more with that kid to try and get some more words out of him and that kind of thing.

[00:23:36] **Speaker 1** Yeah. Well, the interesting thing about technology and language instruction that I will say I've never heard of that sounds fascinating for kids. So thank you for sharing, Lena. Something that I have noticed, too, is particularly as you're learning kids. Back when I first started in the profession, a lot of the time we would use choice books and a lot of printed materials, or we'd use sign language issue or sign language is not everybody knows sign language, so it's hard to kind of generalize that communication. And I'm talking more about severe and profound cases in these circumstances. We also had different choice books and models for teaching those where we had these universal symbols that people could construct certain strips and stuff packs. The pictorial exchange communication system was one variation of doing that that was more systematic in teaching it. Nowadays, fortunately, a lot of the handheld technology like Go Talk Pro Lakota, Go, which are different programs in which in the past you'd have a choice book in which you can construct certain strips and use pictures to communicate your needs. Nowadays, a lot of these devices that back when I was teaching and using them, they were around towards the tail end of my career. I can't say that we loved using them the book because they were very difficult to navigate, not very user friendly or huge. I mean, it's like carrying around a giant lunchbox, often just not very user friendly, not very ergonomic. Now I do feel like that technology's gotten a lot better and our speech people do utilize those programs a lot to help kids develop speech. And that is good to see. That being said, we still will use the old school stuff as well. I think it's always good to employ a blended approach, particularly with new kids, because they may be setting up their device, they may be learning what words they know, what words they don't know, learning at what level. They have receptive language to where they can understand what's being communicated with them. So sometimes we'll do simple things like you get out a whiteboard and start drawing and illustrating things you might want kids to attend to perceptively. That doesn't really always help as much with the expressive thing, but sometimes you could draw choices too. So I would say between, you know, when we look at technology, we use a myriad of methods as a district to get in there. But yeah, and each kid is different. So what works for one may not work for another. It's fascinating that. Mhm. Yeah. Keeps us busy.

[00:26:11] **Speaker 2** Anything else you want to add?

[00:26:13] **Speaker 1** No, I think that I appreciate your question regarding the funding scenario. I think that is a district right now we have lots of good people working with kids. We have lots of great kids. That being said, I do think my perspective would be many districts beyond just what we're talking about today are going to struggle in meeting the needs of their children if that is not eventually addressed, particularly with inflation. Because of that, when we talk about increases, I mean, I'm definitely not into economics by trade, but it seems to be that that's something that has increased substantially. When I look at the costs of our programs now and comparatively to what we're reimbursed on through categorical fund, I, I grow concerned about what the future brings in terms of districts ability to districts, not just us ability to meet some of the growing challenges. We will always be there. We will always try and we are always going to work hard with our kids in mind. And every kid, every day, every kid belongs here. We believe that. That being said, it would be incredibly helpful to be able to ensure that everybody has the exact resources they need in the future and to be able to put our heads down at night and rest, knowing that that will be the case. Um.

[00:27:40] **Speaker 2** Can I get you to say and spell your name? Sure. Just yet.

[00:27:44] **Speaker 1** My name is Dr. Max Long. You may X, l0 and G, and I am the director of Student Services. All right.

[00:27:52] **Speaker 2** That's what we need from you. Thank you so.

[00:27:54] **Speaker 1** Much. Thank you.

[00:27:55] **Speaker 2** It wasn't too bad, right?

[00:27:56] **Speaker 1** No, it's fine. I'm good. It's fine. I tried to memorize all these statistics, but the API changed like some of their statistics from Waze Dash this morning. I couldn't see it by label. Now it's like I'm thankful you didn't ask me.

[00:28:12] **Speaker 2** No, I. I tried to call people directly. Had statistics that if.

[00:28:19] **Speaker 1** I could have got in there, I could get them for you, though.

[00:28:21] **Speaker 2** That's okay. All right. So you're still tethered right here if you want to take that off. Um, so is our.