

## Episode 1: Our Most Precious Investment Transcript

**Becky Lewis:** This is Becky Lewis welcoming you to episode #1 of the Leaders of Literacy Podcast. This episode is all about the WV Campaign for Grade Level Reading and how that work affects our most precious investment in WV, our children. Joining me in this conversation Maggie Luma, the state coordinator lead for the Campaign and Brandie Turner, a fellow state early literacy specialist working on the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.

**Becky Lewis:** I am so excited today for the very first episode of the Leaders of Literacy Podcast. I want to give a brief introduction of myself before we dive into the episode content. I am Becky Lewis, an Early Literacy Specialist working on the WV Campaign for Grade-Level Reading. Before I became an Early Literacy Specialist, I spent 10 years in the classroom working with students in grade K-12. 8 years of that was in the elementary setting as both a Title I Reading Specialist and Classroom Teacher. I am very fortunate to have two of my amazing team members recording with me today to talk about the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading in WV. Maggie Luma, the state lead working on the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading (hi!) and Brandie Turner, one of the other Early Literacy Specialist working on the campaign. (hello!)

Ladies, we hit a big milestone this year. The start of this school year marked the start of the 5<sup>th</sup> year for the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading in WV. For those of you not familiar with the Campaign, our work is centered around improving literacy in WV by focusing in on building a solid literacy foundation in the early years in order to reduce the Reading Gap by the time children reach 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Brandie, why is focusing on this reading gap and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade scores so critical?

**Brandie Turner:** Actually, It's interesting that you ask that question. As we provide support across the state, we are often asked "What is so important about 3<sup>rd</sup> grade? Why do those scores matter so much?". What we know is that:

- By the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 74% of struggling readers won't ever catch up
- One of the most important predictors of high school graduation is reading proficiently by the end of third grade

Beginning in kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade the instructional focus is teaching children to read. Once we move from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade the focus shifts from learning to read to reading to learn. More than 85% of the curriculum is taught by reading.

As leaders of literacy, we know it is important to start providing support to children's literacy development at the earliest ages instead of waiting until we see that our children are not succeeding in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

**Becky Lewis:** You are absolutely right, Brandie! In my years as a title I teacher I came across this in my practice. Waiting to address reading issues in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade makes it nearly impossible for our struggling readers to catch up. Maggie, how are we working to bridge the reading gap here in WV?

**Maggie Luma:** Brandie is exactly right. It's hard to argue that literacy becomes the currency for all other learning by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and without a focus on high-quality early literacy practices, we would be providing a serious disservice to our children. However, this enormous task cannot be put on the shoulders of our teachers and schools alone. And luckily, in WV we have a system of support that recognizes schools can't do it alone.

We have a unique situation in WV in that we have legislation that requires support for a holistic approach to early childhood. Effective in 2014, there is WV law that serves as the blueprint for what we now call the WV Campaign for GLR. The Campaign work is about supporting communities and families in a systematic, comprehensive manner. Soon after that legislation went into effect in 2014, Every school district received a formula funded grant to address their unique needs to early childhood education by considering attendance, school readiness (so everything that happens from birth through age 5), extended learning (what happens when school is out of session) and high-quality classroom instruction.

**Brandie Turner:** Yes, each county still receives that formula funding to support their initiatives and as early literacy specialists we have divided up the counties so that we can dedicate specific support to meet each county's unique needs. We do this in a number of ways whether that's helping them research, make connections, develop a plan, provide professional learning, or simply celebrate their successes!

**Becky Lewis:** This is all really great information! Let's take our listeners a little deeper into the four components. Starting with School Readiness, like Maggie mentioned our focus is on supporting families and children from birth to age 5. We work with districts, communities, and parents to make sure that all WV children are provided with the health and educational needs that occur before entering the school system. The next component is attendance and what we are really looking at is chronic absences (when a child has missed 10% or more school per school year).

**Brandie Turner:** Yes, and we work with districts to come up with creative plans to help children get to school every day because if students are not in school, they are missing out on learning opportunities.

**Becky Lewis:** The third component, Extended Learning is just like Maggie said, it is the time students spend out of the classroom and we want to ensure every student has the opportunity to build knowledge and vocabulary through experiences.

**Maggie Luma:** A huge part of the reading gap is the discrepancy between what students from middle income households and what students from lower income households experience over

the summer. Kids from lower income families aren't getting the language and culture rich experiences like going to a museum or a vacation or even summer camps. So, our focus for extended learning isn't so much about more of what happens during the school day but rather enriching experiences that don't mirror the traditional school day.

**Becky Lewis:** High-Quality Instruction is the final component and our audience is you. We believe that investing in WV teachers is the best way to ensure that students are getting the best education possible. We support the teachers through research-based professional development opportunities in the forms of webinars, e-learning courses, plc guides, face-to-face training sessions, and now this podcast.

**Maggie Luma:** The work of the campaign is to make sure every child in WV has access to these four critical components that contribute to reading success. Our vision is to strengthen WV communities by empowering children with the gift of literacy.

I think we all here agree that our most precious investment is our children. We are not going to find a better public return than if we invest greatly in early childhood. I truly believe that the earlier we invest, the greater the outcome for our state's future.

**Becky Lewis:** Exactly, Maggie! Some of you may be wondering why a podcast? There are 3 other literacy specialists aside from Brandie and me, dedicated to working with the 55 districts in WV on the Campaign. We realized that it is impossible for the five of us to support and reach all 55 districts to the capacity we would like to. So, we developed this podcast as a way to provide all WV educators with access to professional development that is not only focused on improving Early Literacy but helping all WV children from an early age have the best start possible. We also felt it was important to give educators a different avenue to access PD that is flexible and fits seamlessly into their schedules.

**Maggie Luma:** We know first-hand how busy teachers are, and we know that it's not always feasible to log in to a scheduled webinar or to even get to a computer to listen to a pre-recording. In the past.... By using a podcast platform, we hope that we can reach teachers whenever it is convenient for you— when you are in the car, cleaning up at the end of the day, or whenever you have a free few minutes. I know I do most of my professional reading, or listening rather, in the car on my commute to work. Hoping this makes the info we have to share more accessible to everyone.

**Brandie Turner:** That's true, Maggie. I know you have a long commute and get excited about listening to your podcasts!

**Becky Lewis:** Let's talk a little about how this podcast is setup. Each month my co-host will be one of the other four early literacy specialists or our state lead, Maggie Luma. The episodes will be about 30 minutes in length and will be release on the first and third Monday of the month. The first release of the month I will be discussing with one of my colleagues, research or

resources that are related to one of the components from the Campaign: School Readiness, Attendance, Extended Learning, or High-Quality Instruction. The second episode of the month will be an interview from an expert or someone from the field that is directly connected to the previous episode.

**Maggie Luma:** I am so excited for this project. We have some really interesting topics coming up. I can't wait to hear from some of the experts we have lined up.

**Becky Lewis:** I am going to end every episode with the same question. Maggie let's start with you. What is one tip or word of advice would you give to our listeners about being a leader of literacy?

**Maggie Luma:** What one piece of advice..... I say in order to be a true leader of literacy, you need to have high expectations for all children. A belief that all children CAN learn to read.

**Becky Lewis:** How about you, Brandie? What is one tip or piece of advice can you give our listeners about being a leader of literacy?

**Brandie Turner:** One piece of advice I would give is focus on the children and what their needs are. If you do that, everything else will fall into place.

**Becky Lewis:** Be sure to check out the next episode, where I will be joined with Brandie Turner and we will be myth busting some common educator beliefs about chronic absence.