

## Episode 31: Interview with Darlene Dingess-Adkins Transcript

**Becky Lewis:** Hello fellow educators and welcome to episode 35 of the leaders of Literacy Podcast. I'm your host, Becky Lewis. Today I am wrapping up my conversation with my co-host, Brittany Fike on extended learning opportunities to support student recovery. Today we are joined by fellow West Virginia educator, Darlene Dingus Adkins from Logan County. Darlene is going to share some information about the summer programming that will take place in Logan County this year, so she may mention some instructional materials or resources.

I just want our audience to note that the leaders of literacy team, including the staff of the June Harless Center at Marshall University, along with the West Virginia Department of Education do not review or recommend instructional materials. Those decisions about curriculum, assessment, and other instructional resources are made at a local County level.

Hello listeners and Hello, Britney, Britney thank you for joining me again as we continue our conversation on summer learning while focusing on student recovery.

**Brittany Fike:** Thank you so much, Becky, and excited to be here with you and for our conversation today.

**Becky Lewis:** And I am really excited for the conversation and to not only continue this conversation with you, but with our guest Darlene Dingus Atkins. Darlene is a fellow West Virginia educator from Logan County.

Welcome to the podcast Darlene and thank you for joining us today.

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** And thank you for inviting me.

**Becky Lewis:** Can you tell us about your role in Logan County. What's your job, title and the role that you do there?

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** I am currently the Assistant Superintendent of Logan County Schools. And my primary duties are curriculum instruction, professional development, but I also oversee child nutrition, transportation, maintenance, building and facilities just as many other educators throughout West Virginia. We wear a multitude of hats.

**Becky Lewis:** Right, we hear that a lot when we speak to our educators across this state. We do have many hats in this state. So, for some of our listeners who may be unfamiliar with Logan County, can you tell us a little bit about the area?

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** We are located in the Southern coalfields coal mining has been our primary industry for many years, but that's slowly becoming a thing of the past. Tourism is growing quite a bit. We have the Hatfield McCoy trails and we have riders from all over the country every weekend.

We have 18 schools. Eleven of those are elementary schools and of those 11 elementary schools, they are all title one schools. There are three middle schools, 3 high schools and a standalone Career Center, not on the same campus, but we also have Southern West Virginia Community College and several of our other students go to the Early College Academy at Southern and of course, right now it's virtual. We are a very high poverty district this year in FY21, 56.16% of our students live in poverty, but when you look at just pre KK123 students, we have the highest poverty rate in the state, at 66.7%.

**Brittany Fike:** Thank you Darlene, for sharing that with our listeners. I think that that provides us some good context for what we're going to begin talking about now, and that is an extended learning programming.

So, love to hear a little bit before we get started discussing what your upcoming plans are for extended learning this summer. I would like to take a second and just discuss what your extended learning programming looked like prior to the pandemic.

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** In prior years, or probably over 10 years, we've had energy Express sites throughout the district. We had a site at each of our local areas, Chapmanville area, Logan area, and Mann Area. We increased that to five sites, backed off due to it. But the next summer we had four sites, but this summer we're back up to the five sites.

So, we had energy express. We had credit recovery and we had a few opportunities for some weekly stem camps that kids would go to that would last usually a week, and a multitude of opportunities, but no focus on literacy per say, except for Energy Express.

**Brittany Fike:**

Thank you so much for sharing that again. I think that's an important context for the conversation that we are going to now have. So, with all that being said about what your programming looked like in previous years, we know that this year you have big plans to revamp your typical summer for this year. So, we've been having a lot of discussions amongst our own team about what the research is pointing to come as far as strategies go to make summer learning as effective as possible this year, and one report that we keep going back to is getting to work on summer learning from the RAND Corporation, and in that report, they say that 34 hours of reading and setting is necessary to show improvement over the summer. So how do you plan to fit in more of that time? Specific to leading in your summer programming this year?

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** Well, we're going to build on what we already have. Which are our five energy expressed sites, but we're going to support students' literacy as well as social and emotional development. We'll begin each day with a morning meeting, and it's like a family meeting and. We're hiring teachers and. It's and they will have breakfast with the children, just like a family would do during that energy express part of the day, which is the morning part.

Students will have a 40-minute intervention period. We will be utilizing what used to be called bursts, but it's now called amplify reading. And that's very strategic and focused on the five components of reading. And there are five lesson cycles in this 40-minute period. They are two cycles, but will be one skill, and three cycles will be another skill. So, all the students will have 40 minutes of very intensive, high dosage of reading every day.

And during the Energy Express piece, of course I know most people throughout the state know that there's daily read alouds. It's a print rich environment. There's time for independent reading, so all the pieces are put together of the morning and then they're built upon in the afternoon.

In the afternoon, the students will be transported to the Chief Logan State Park, which is not far from any location in Logan County, and they will. The teachers will be using EL units and EL units build on content knowledge such as kindergarten will do "Trees are Alive". That's one of their units and 1st grade will do "Birds with Amazing Bodies" and 2nd 3rd grade will do "Secret World of Pollination". So, these units lend themselves to outdoor learning along with project while and project Learning Tree.

So as these afternoon units support that building content background knowledge vocabulary, but they will be in a different environment. They will move from the classroom environment to the outdoor environment at the park and we've worked with the Chief Logan State Park personnel, and we've reserved every shelter in the park from the first day of our program till the last day of our program and we were very fortunate to be able to get those scheduled.

**Becky Lewis:** I think that's so smart that you're building off of something that you already had established in the County, and you're really taking that deep dive for your students and you're going in and doing that remedial work that they need, and that foundational work in the morning, and then building that content knowledge like you said in the afternoon. And I love that idea of just going to that new environment like you said, because I think that gives kids time to settle down and they're in a new environment and they're not in the same four walls all day. So, they get to be out there in nature. And you know, that's always good for us when we can go outside and work, so I know it's going to be beneficial for our students too.

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** It gets a little tricky with transportation and with personnel, but we think we have that worked out and I think the kids will be excited and that they'll want to be in both environments because with Energy Express they're moving around. And they're integrating art with reading, and so I think it will be a beautiful program.

**Becky Lewis:** I think so too, and I think it's going to be great for your teachers too because they get to get out and get in the sunshine and enjoy the enjoy the weather during their summertime instead of being stuck inside.

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** There's plenty of shade, plenty of shade in the park if they need that.

**Brittany Fike:** That's always necessary to have. I completely agree Becky, and I found myself getting so excited Darlene listening to you talk about all these wonderful, really best practices that you're going to be incorporating and these wonderful opportunities that you're providing your students.

Especially going back to what that research says and the amount of reading instruction that we were talking about is necessary to show improvement over this. I'm so excited that you're including that time and I can't wait to see how your students improve as a result of that.

So, another thing that report we were discussing talks about is ensuring more focused content, could you share with us a little bit about how you plan to provide programming that is focused on those really important skills that the students need and who we talked about you working to, you know, build off what they're doing in the morning with Energy Express and then diving into some of that content in the afternoon? Is there anything else you could tell us about what that's going to look like?

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** Well, let me go back to the morning with the amplify reading intervention and they are intervention peer kits and that amplify reading does work on the entire 5 components, but for these young children many of them will need phonological awareness, and some they'll need phonics, and they will need vocabulary. Groups will be very small, and we will use the teacher and the teacher and the ECAT will each have a maximum of 10 students. Then the amplify reading groups will be between one to five students in the group. Our goal is to have 5. And so, the ECAT, which is the assistant teacher, will also be trained to facilitate a group of children with the amplify reading.

Now every 10 days there will be progress monitoring, so there will be 3 progress monitoring cycles through this 30 days of instruction. And those kids possibly will be regrouped, not likely over the course of 30 days, but possible, and the programs they print out the lesson plans that address the specific needs of that group of students.

Then in the afternoon as well as of the morning with read alouds and enrichment activities with Energy Express, they will build content knowledge and there's a study that W puts together and their text sets for each week there's set sets of texts during Energy Express, and so there is a study each week, and the study may be on their community or it may be about their family and they take those home at the end of the week and then in the afternoon the L units are very. They are rich, rigorous integrated units. They integrate social studies and science with the skills of English language arts, and they're designed around the developmental level of those children, whether it's kindergarten or whether it's second grade.

So, we specifically chose units that would allow us to build that content knowledge and vocabulary in an outdoor space. There are a couple units we're doing, like poets and poetry. On that week, those group of students, which will be the rising 4th graders. They will spend also in the park, and I know we think poets and poetry maybe that's not outdoor science, but I know a lot of people get their inspiration for art and for writing outside. And there's a writing

component with each of those IL studies and that will be a part of their afternoon, so they will get the total English language arts package.

And then on Saturdays there will be 2 Saturdays for Expeditions. One Saturday they will go to Books-a-million Bookstore and to the farmers Market in Charleston with their families. These will be family Expeditions and they will be provided gift cards to purchase books or purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at the market and that will be integrated into what they're doing during that afternoon and morning sessions with their teachers. But the teachers and their families will join them on the Expeditions.

**Brittany Fike:** How exciting do you think you can open up a spot for me to be a student in program?

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** Always, Always!

**Brittany Fike:** How wonderful.

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** Oh, I get excited just talking about it. Uh, and you know it is complicated. Bringing all those pieces together, but reading is a complicated subject.

**Becky Lewis:** And I love the that you built in that family aspect because we know that right now, especially that parents have had a heavy hand with helping support our students through the last year, and it's great to continue those partnerships that you've already built.

Can you tell us a little bit more about how the Expeditions are planned out for the families? Is there going to be an alternative if students cannot or do not have transportation with their families to go out to those locations?

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** Yes, the families will not have to provide transportation. We will transport the families and the students from Logan County to the location of the expedition. And parents will ride the bus with the children, but there will be a session for families during that week prior to that Saturday there will be family learning opportunities where the parents have a separate class from the students.

The parents need to know what their role is, and they need to have a preview of what the day's going to look like so that everyone can get the most learning out of that day. These are families who probably never been to a bookstore, and they've never been to farmers' market. So, it will be a joyful day for everyone.

But we have to have some preview experience prior to that. Those parents will be approved just all the legalities will be covered when we have that preview day. They will also get trained on how to be a volunteer on an expedition.

**Becky Lewis:** I think that's so wonderful because I think that's a step that's often overlooked when we try to involve our parents and let them be a part of something and not giving that

additional training to them to support them and supporting their child. And like you said, getting the most out of the whole day.

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** Yeah. And you know I mentioned earlier about talking about families, that there would be 10-day lesson cycles when we look at that progress monitoring every 10 days there will be a meeting with the parent to let the parent know. This is what's happened in the last 10 days.

And this is the progress we've made in 10 days, and I know sometimes we don't realize how much progress can be made in 10 days.

**Brittany Fike:** I love that too, because you know that's kind of up working on building those important relationships with your families before you get to the point where you're inviting them to go on this expedition with you.

So, I love that you're going to be able to make connections with them before that, so hopefully when that Saturday comes out. Also comfortable and ready to participate in those experiences with their students.

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** Right, and you know, the relationships that we build this summer will also carry us into the fall.

**Brittany Fike:** I think that's wonderful, and I would just like to take a second to commend you on all the hard work you're putting into this summer programming for your students in Logan County and, you know, I know how big of a lift this has been for you following the research and incorporating again all these best practices, so kudos to you. And again, thank you for all you're doing for our students.

**Becky Lewis:** And I think it's a nice, unique approach to summer learning, because you have all of those moving parts and you've figured out how to get the transportation, which is always the biggest hurdle worked out because I think every time we talk to our counties, that's like the biggest issue is transportation. And like Brittany said, I commend you too for being able to get this set up and ready to roll for your students.

I'm going to ask you one final question before we end this episode. So for any counties that are out there still planning for summer learning opportunities for their students, what is one tip or piece of advice that you have for them?

**Darlene Dingess-Adkins:** I think in the past we just kind of let summer programming happen. We were not as strategic as we are now, and I think we cannot just send teachers in a classroom and say go forth for six weeks and do good work.

We have to give them with the right tools and the right professional development and the time to plan. And we are giving our teachers a week prior to the children coming for professional development and for planning and then they will have an hour at the end of each day for planning or paying their daily rate to attract them and for a full day. You know our teachers are

going to be working 8 to 4. It's no early out, it's a regular day and we have to have that much time to get in all the components that we need, so we're not shortening the day. And since we're not, we have to give teachers ample time to plan.