



Glean Education's Ed Leaders in Literacy Podcast Episode #14 - Angie Hanlin and Dr. Sam Duncan (Administrators, New Madrid, MO)

Nita Cherise: Hi, everyone. Nita Cherise here, editor and producer of the podcast. I just have a quick editing note; this interview was conducted during the Plain Talk about literacy conference, which was held in New Orleans at a location near the Mississippi River. At a certain point, you will hear a beeping sound in the background, don't be alarmed, it's just the sound of the Creole Queen docking on the river. Thank you, and please enjoy the show.

Angie Hanlin: One of the big shifts is we took the focus off of teaching and put it on learning so that we could develop a learning culture.

Jessica Hamman: That's interesting.

Angie Hanlin: And what I mean by that is some of the things that we would hear back from a resistant teacher, it's always one of two statements, "But I taught that," or the other thing that teachers might say is, "Well, I know I covered that." So we took the focus off of that, had it been taught or had the material, quote unquote, been covered,

but what was the impact? Did the students learn it? And if they did not learn it, what are we going to do about it?

Speaker 4: The results, they've been immediate and we had one of the biggest shifts in the state.

Speaker 5: It's almost magical when it all comes together. And I think to myself, "This is what education is about."

Speaker 6: There were inequities everywhere. My students in south Texas ultimately taught me more than I taught them.

Speaker 7: Over 40% of our students were leaving third grade with less than proficient reading skills, and that was just something we had to stop.

Speaker 8: The bottom line is that we can prevent reading failure. We can change the trajectory of these students' lives, and I just want to shout from the rooftops, "It can be done."

Jessica Hamman: From Glean Education, this is Ed Leaders In Literacy, a podcast series that features educators and administrators who have made hard decisions about instruction, curriculum, intervention, and



school systems to close the achievement gap and build equity by improving literacy.

Jessica Hamman: First, a word from our sponsors.

Speaker 10: Go ahead and state your name and title and what you enjoy about working here.

Marc Lonergan: My name is Marc Lonergan, I am the director of operations at Heggerty. And what I love most about working at Heggerty is feeling that what I do is truly making a difference in our children and growing them to become stronger readers.

Speaker 12: Heggerty's daily phonemic awareness curriculum is used by over 450 school districts nationwide. Learn how you can get started at heggerty.org. That's H-E-G-G-E-R-T-Y dot O-R-G.

Jessica Hamman: I'm Jessica Hamman, founder of Glean Education. And on the show today is Dr. Sam Duncan, superintendent of schools at New Madrid county, R-1, and Angie Hanlin, principal at Matthews Elementary School. In 2015, Matthews was identified as a focus school, one of the lowest performing schools in the state. Only 13.7% of their third graders were reading at grade level on the state test. According to the 2019 results for that same assessment, 95% of their third graders were reading at or above grade level, ranking Matthews



in the top 200 out of 1045 in the state. Today, we'll be chatting with Sam and Angie about the things they put together to make this happen. So welcome Sam and Angie, thank you so much for joining us today.

Angie Hanlin: Well, thank you, Jessica. Thanks for having us. This is a great opportunity.

Dr. Sam Duncan: Yes, thank you, Jessica.

Jessica Hamman: Take us to the beginning and kind of how you got involved in the school turnaround that occurred at Matthews and then how you work together to kind of bring this turnaround to a district level?

Angie Hanlin: Okay, well, I'm going to take about a minute and a half and go backwards. I'm in my fifth year as principal, prior to that, I was the district instructional coach for both reading and math for three and a half years. And during that time, I was also doing curriculum and professional development. We had given teachers research-based professional development. We had given them the research practices of John Hattie, explicit instruction by Nita Archer, professional development on the science of reading, but there was a disconnect. And the problem that we had and the mistakes we were seeing was the fact that we were experiencing pockets of success, a few teachers doing great things and really making some gains in their data, but we had two problems. We did not have building-wide success in any of our five buildings, and we did not have an entire district-wide



success. And at the time, we've really believed we could achieve those things through the role of the instructional coach working with administrators.

Angie Hanlin: So at that time then, Matthews Elementary, that's the school where I had been a teacher, came open. My former principal was retiring, so I looked at that as an opportunity to go and see if we could just build it in one place and then maybe use that and collect the data, put the practices into place, and then maybe if we could get building-wide success there, we could use it to change and transform the rest of district. So that year our state achievement scores came out very late. We had just had a new test the spring prior to me starting as principal. So I knew that the school scores had been on a decline, but I did not realize how low they had gotten.

Angie Hanlin: I immediately put us on a self-imposed building improvement plan, nothing formal. It was just something that we talked about as staff members. Now, as you can imagine, as happens in a lot of schools, there was some resistance to that, because the teachers really thought everything they were doing was totally just fine. So we began to go a little deeper with research-based practices, but we still weren't getting huge gains. So then the scores actually come to us and it was what I would call a new meaning of low. It's like you mentioned earlier, around 13% of our third, fourth and fifth graders scored proficient or advanced on the state ELA assessment, and their end-of-year benchmark score, less than 20% of the students, K-5, were reading at grade level. So we had a huge deficit and a huge gap to close.



Angie Hanlin: A few months in, like I said this, I call it a huge blessing, really came my way and dropped in our laps when the state department identified us as a school that had entered turnaround status. Now in the state of Missouri at the time that was called a focus school, that put us in the lowest 15% of schools. I've been asked so many times if we were upset or disheartened by that, but actually I saw that as a blessing because it allowed us the possibility to do three things. One, it really helped establish a true sense of urgency for the people that were holding out and thinking, "I don't think we have that big of a problem." When the state comes in and identifies that it's a problem, it really helps us establish that true sense of urgency.

Angie Hanlin: The other thing it provided our school was leverage where we could go ahead and try some things and pilot some things that weren't approved district-wide. We could do it under the umbrella of, "But we are a focus school. So this is why we're doing those things." And then the third thing, and this was pivotal in the plan, actually, I found out there was this small underlying condition, kind of some fine print in the focus school status, the budget of how we were able to spend the funds was allotted to the building principal, not at district level, it was the building principal. And then I could establish whatever professional development that I felt was needed for the building.

Angie Hanlin: So I found that out at a meeting on a Monday and the very next morning, I had a literacy consultant and a leadership consultant by the name of Pati Montgomery of Schools Cubed on the phone by



the very next morning. I had met her through some previous literacy consulting work. And what we were missing, and the reason why we weren't having building-wide success and district-wide success, even though teachers had been given research-based professional development, is we did not have the correct systems and structures in place.

Angie Hanlin: For an example, database decision-making is crucial to the work that we've done. We were collecting data, we were looking at it, but we were not going deep enough to truly use it for decision making. So what I mean by that is we were not using it to actually plan instruction and plan intervention. We, I feel like, probably a lot of schools, we had a one-size-fits-all intervention approach. If you were a tier two, you received this intervention. If you were a tier three student, you received a different type of intervention. So with our work, once we started and adopted the system structures and strategies of the Schools Cubed model, that made us take a laser-light focus on data, first of all, and then use the data to guide every single thing we did, everything we did in intervention, everything we did in instruction and even our budget purchases.

Dr. Sam Duncan: And if I might-

Jessica Hamman: Please.

Dr. Sam Duncan: That would be, what, February-



Angie Hanlin: Yes.

Dr. Sam Duncan: ... when Ms. Pati Montgomery came into the district. I had been here as a building principal 20 years earlier, and my first day official day was March the 1st, 2016. So I was coming in as superintendent elect, the prior superintendent was still acting, and I found my way to Matthews quickly. What I learned there was that they had already started down a path that was quite extraordinary, and it was under the guidance of Pati Montgomery in Schools Cubed, but it was also that Angie had her act together. And I'm going to tell you, when I showed up in March, they were a school on a mission. And so immediately, it was pretty easy to see that what was going on there needed to happen everywhere.

Dr. Sam Duncan: So that was when the beginning started, I think, of us focusing on how do we take this, protect the process, protect it, protect it. We called it an archeological dig. How do we draw? How do we put a boundary around it so that nobody can come in and take anybody away? But if we need to move some people on to other places, we did it immediately. And we just tried to clean the house up and protect the process. That was job number one in March, April of 2016, I would say.

Jessica Hamman: It seems like part of the success of this start was the fact that you, as an administrator, Angie, had your ducks in a row and knew where to turn and what you wanted to do from day one. So you knew to



contact Pati Montgomery, you knew to bring on consultants from Schools Cubed who could support your administrator team in knowing what you needed to know to get this school turnaround. So can you just give us some more insight behind how you got there, how you got to that mindset, that should you get lucky with those three elements of urgency, leverage and budget, you would know where to take it?

Angie Hanlin: Absolutely. Prior to becoming the instructional coach for our district, I had been a literacy consultant for Gibson Hasbrouck. It's one of the leading literacy consulting groups in our country. It's owned by Dr. Vicki Gibson, Dr. Jan Hasbrouck. They've been the author of several of the reading programs by McGraw-Hill and what they teach the schools that they go in and work with, and what they trained me deeply in was effective literacy instruction. So I knew what that instruction needed to look like, what it needed to sound like, what should be in whole group, what should be in small group, all of those pieces. So I met, through Jan and Vicki, I met Pati Montgomery and I actually met her, and this is so ironic, and I love the fact that I'm talking to you from Plain Talk, I met Pati Montgomery years ago at the Plain Talk convention.

Angie Hanlin: We went to dinner, I was explaining the problems that we were having in the relevant instructional coach. And I tell them, "I know the teachers are getting the right information." And so Pati immediately said, even then, prior to me being principal or anything, she said, "What schools are missing is the systematic and the systemic reform. It takes systems and structures." So that little nugget had kinda been delivered to me. And so at Plain Talk one year, I was in a room speaking with Jan Hasbrouck about being an



instructional coach and in the room right next door was Pati Montgomery working with leaders and principals, because she teaches building leaders how to be true instructional leaders of the school. So I actually knew from Jan, Vicki and Pati what was missing from the school. So I knew the power that she could bring if I could get her, if I would be fortunate enough to get her on site.

Angie Hanlin: The other reason why I knew it had to be her is I knew that there were other places doing some of this work, but she had a 100% track record. And as I shared with you in an earlier conversation, one time Jessica, when I first met you, at the focus school meeting, it was shared with us as leaders that this work would probably take five to seven years, and they had the principals in the room go around and say how long they'd been in focus-school status. There were building leaders in there that were on their ninth year. And I am the principal of an elementary school, pre-K through fifth grade, and I thought, in five years, most of those students will have already left that building, I don't have five years, I don't have seven, I don't have nine.

Angie Hanlin: So I gave myself three. And on the ride back after that meeting, I thought, "What do I need to get this done in three years or less?" And that was the thing that propelled me to send an email to Pati and say, "Can I please have time to talk to you tomorrow?" So that's how I had the knowledge base of Pati, of what she could bring and also the knowledge base of what exactly we were missing.



Dr. Sam Duncan: Just to piggyback on that, as I came in, when I was hired, a survey had been conducted of the community and the board brought me in thinking that I could help them build their administrative team. And that's something that I studied in my doctoral work and really enjoyed was the team building and becoming a knowledge creating organization where we actually can come up with new ways to do things. But also a big part of what I had seen that was successful was having third-party consultant or third-party evaluations conducted. I had not seen a third-party literacy consultant, but I had served eight years as a title one director in a neighboring district, and I was certainly amazed when I saw what Pati was capable of doing. And what I had to do was sort of take what the board had told me, which was they don't think our building leaders at that point are really instructional leaders. And perhaps even that the climate morale issues and the trust issues we had, the board was really concerned that the principals... maybe they had not really been trained, they didn't blame anybody, they just said, "I don't think they've ever been trained in any of this."

Dr. Sam Duncan: So when Angie and I put our heads together, it's like, "This needs to be everywhere," and we started asking ourselves that question constantly. And I do think this is key, from that point forward, we started asking ourselves constantly when we saw something that started working, "Can this be replicated in the other buildings? And what would it take?" And Pati just jumped right in, it almost became something where the three of us were... I would say, pretty much immediately said, "Yes, this needs to happen. And we need to start with the principals, with the board principals." And that's the moment where we said, "This needs to be district-wide," that sort of occurred to all of us.



Angie Hanlin: And for me, it was the opportunity of being able to become the best type of instructional leader from the very beginning. It was such a blessing that it happened in my first year, because I thought, "Why not just learn to be the most effective leader I can be and have the biggest impact on the teachers here and the students here, and let's just get a resource in here to help me become that." And then as Dr. Duncan and I started talking, we really came up with this, after seeing the effect that this immediately had on student data and even the confidence and the efficacy of the teachers, we had a discussion where it really boiled down into this, we felt it was our moral obligation that after we saw the power of the work, it was our moral obligation that we could not allow the other schools in our district not to have the opportunity to do this work as well.

Dr. Sam Duncan: And as we sort of maybe wrap that part of it up, although we were thinking that, I don't believe that any one of us was naive enough to think that the district with what it had been through... We'd had a financial crisis, as soon as I started, we lost one sixth of our operating budget overnight, there was already a lot of distrust and there were problems that were seemingly unsolvable in terms of the climate and the trust among the staff. So what we had to do immediately was we had to consider how we would save the district financially, that all of a sudden was destined to be broke in two years, completely out of money. And we lost a lot of teachers, we cut 24 jobs that year. So as this was happening, we weren't naive to think that everybody would just say, "Wow, look at that. Isn't Angie wonderful? Isn't the new superintendent doing a great job? Let's go see what's happening up there and let's do it in our buildings."



Dr. Sam Duncan: And I'm going to say that, not to judge anybody, it's a very human trait to not just jump onto something. And then the last thing I'll say on that is they had heard a lot of voices over the years prior, they had had a lot of people come through, they had been sent to workshops, they had a lot of different approaches, I think districts [inaudible 00:20:39] thrown at them and none of them seem to work. And every time they turned around, there was something new. And Angie, Pati, and I tried to boil it all down. My objective coming in, as Angie was mentioning hers, was just to get things in their natural order. And it was almost a calling in my mind to get things in order.

Dr. Sam Duncan: So we had to shut out all the other voices, and we really kind of sucked out any voice that the teachers were hearing except for the principal. And we didn't even let Pati Montgomery at the moment, we did not... We asked her not to talk to teachers for a solid year outside of that one building. So there were processes there that had to take place. And once, I guess, the next chapter of this was how did the actual replication go and the painfulness of making a system understand that there's a new way and that there are non-negotiables and this is where it's going?

Jessica Hamman: And it's really-

Angie Hanlin: I think one really important key factor is that we also immediately included our school board and I started just sharing data with them



monthly so that they could actually see truly where we were. I don't even know that they had really realized how low the scores had gotten. And so it was to bring them onboard immediately and just give them a steady diet of this is where we are, this is what's happening, and this is the traction that we're getting.

Jessica Hamman: And it seems like it was a mindset shift that was needed-

Angie Hanlin: Absolutely.

Jessica Hamman: ... on all levels, for the school board, for the administrative team and for the teachers. So really it's a district-wide mind shift that was needed.

Angie Hanlin: Yes. And one of the big shifts is we took the focus off of teaching and put it on learning so that we could develop a learning culture.

Jessica Hamman: That's interesting.

Angie Hanlin: And what I mean by that is some of the things that we would hear back from a resistant teacher, it's always one of two statements, "But I taught that," or the other thing that teachers might say is, "Well, I know I covered that." And so we took the focus off of that,



had it been taught or had the material, quote unquote, been covered, but what was the impact? Did the students learn it? And if they did not learn it, what are we going to do about it?

Jessica Hamman: Oh, I love that. It's so interesting. Let's just take a step back and I would love to see you paint a picture about new New Madrid. Tell me what your community is like and why this is so important for your community in particular?

Angie Hanlin: Okay.

Dr. Sam Duncan: I would like to start with the demographics and then Angie can kind of let me have some more. And I do want to share, I started teaching there, it was my first teaching job in 1989, and I taught there at the high school, and then I was a principal. So I was there from '89 to '96. At the time, the district was highly consolidated it is, it had more students. Of course, Noranda Aluminum was its big taxpayer, and it seemed like there was more money than anybody knew [inaudible 00:24:01] to with. And we had a lot of students, we had about 2,600 students at the time, now we're down to 1,400. That was 20 years ago. Fast forward, New Madrid county, it's very rural, it's a 500 square mile district. It is one of the top four land-wise, in terms of mass, school districts, in the state of Missouri.

Dr. Sam Duncan: We run 2,900 miles a day on our 41 buses, and 78% 80% of our students have to ride a bus to school from our communities. We have seven city councils. I believe four of our seven townships do



not have any structured law enforcement outside of the Sheriff's department. We have nine commissioned officers on staff now, we have expanded our school resource officers and put them in other roles as well. And anybody that retires from the police department, we pretty much hire them and bring them in if they're good with kids, so that our internal police department is the largest police department in the county. And they often will tend to the needs in the communities.

Dr. Sam Duncan: The other thing that's important is we are boarded by the Mississippi river to the east and very proud community, national fishing tournaments. It is a proud of community. It's a strong community. I believe our demographics were roughly 70% to 80% in every building free, reduced lunch, as far as poverty. And then we also have about a 30% to 40% minority population district-wide, and it varies from the three elementary schools. So we have three elementary schools that are spread out. It takes me 20 minutes to get to Angie's building from my office, which is located in the high school. And so the high school and middle school, 6 through 12 are on the same campus. Otherwise, we have three elementary schools that are pre-K through five in three of the communities that are still strong communities in the district. So those are the overarching demographics.

Angie Hanlin: Before we get to probably the end of this conversation where we're going, we're going to share where the data is right now. It's very important, I think, to point out the makeup of the students that are in my building, in Matthews Elementary. Very poor students, at this point, actually, our elementary schools, 100% of our students receive free breakfast, free lunch every day. Lots of drugs in the



communities, heavy drug culture in the neighboring communities around us. I also frequently have to work with the children's division, students move in and out of foster care, those type of issues. So we have so many issues going on that so many schools face as challenges when we think, "Well, can these students perform or can they not?" So I just really want to get a good picture of the makeup of the students before we start talking about how the data has turned out.

Jessica Hamman: And I'm excited to bring us to this conversation based upon that, because your data is incredibly impressive. And I think it shows a really important thing that we may have, as educators, preconceived notions about what students can and can't do, what they're capable of achieving, and your data shows all students are capable of achieving if we go about it in the right way. So please do tell me what the data showed at Matthews after this three to four year process of hard work, and then how you scaled it to the district and what that [crosstalk 00:28:06]

Angie Hanlin: Okay.

Dr. Sam Duncan: And I want to say one quick thing for the listeners, because I think it's important maybe for them to hear this, the data is outstanding, but what I saw from the beginning when you see the work and you know what happens and you know why the numbers are what they are, it is so much more meaningful. And I can testify at this moment, I've been there since March of 2016, not just... But special ed as well has transformed, and so the numbers you hear are a part



of a process that's identifiable. It is something that can be replicated because, as you know, we've asked that question at every turn. It can be done again, we're trying, as we'll talk about, to do it in every building in the district, but I wanted to verify for everyone out there, these numbers are real and Ms. Hanlin and her team can tell you exactly how they got [inaudible 00:28:56].

Jessica Hamman: I'm so glad too, that you pointed out the numbers for special ed, because a lot of times when we talk about student data, we're talking about general ed data, and sometimes the special ed student data is omitted or including EL data, too. So I think it's really important to know that their data grows as well, and that you're including that in these results. So thanks for mentioning.

Dr. Sam Duncan: We did have a special ed revolution in our district that started in Angie's building. We went from 26% of our students district wide being identified down to 12 to 13, now, percent, identified as special needs students. And that started in this building.

Jessica Hamman: That is such an interesting and important point. I think what that shows is that when instruction, maybe when the shifted focus is on to learning and not teaching, as Angie was talking about, and when best practices for instruction improve, that special ed rates actually can be reduced, saving districts potentially millions of dollars and supporting students better in the general ed classroom. That is a fascinating and really critical point to make.



Dr. Sam Duncan: Correct.

Angie Hanlin: Absolutely. We actually started changing special education, then those students with IEP, through high-quality, research-based, effective, tier-one instruction, and that's where we started getting traction. We had students that were, because they had an IEP, they were missing the whole group and the regular ed classroom. That was one of the first changes that we made, that everybody was going to receive that whole-group instruction. And then we got the whole group with such a detailed plan, those whole-group lessons were so systematic about what was going to be included in that whole group lesson. And then those students, when they would go to small group, they would see their teacher first at the small group table, and then they would leave the room for either intervention or to go to the resource room, the students with an IEP. But we really started gaining traction and closing the gap though with high-quality, tier-one instruction.

Angie Hanlin: Now, part of it though, was, and had to be, a mind shift on the teachers, because we actually... I did a survey when our work first started, one question was, do you believe that certain students are good at math and certain students just aren't good at math? Do you feel that certain students will never be able to learn to read? And the teachers had those feelings, those mindsets, but then we heard the fact Jan Hasbrouck presented in our district, and then Pati also told it to us when she came onsite, that the number between 95% and 97% of students can read on grade level, there is only that small 3% to 5%. And I know so many people hear that and think it's just



completely unachievable. And our story proves it is achievable and it is totally doable by research-based instructional practices.

Angie Hanlin: And we threw out practices that maybe a teacher had held on to for their entire career. But if it wasn't research-based, it was gone. There were non-negotiables such as a systematic approach to vocabulary, lots and lots of coaching and support. And then two, we gave the teachers the science of reading, but that wasn't enough, they also had to see that modeled in the classroom because teachers can know the science of reading, yet still not know how to actually implement it in the classroom. For [inaudible 00:32:53] does that sound like, what does that look like? What do I need to say out of my mouth for that to happen? And so once we started those things and got those things in place, that's when the data started moving.

Jessica Hamman: So in 2015, only 13.7% of third graders were at reading level. Take us to 2019 and tell us what you found.

Angie Hanlin: Okay. I would love to share those numbers. Thank you so much. So on our end of year state assessment in Missouri, it's the Missouri Assessment Program, so it's called the MAP test, M-A-P test, our third graders in spring of 2019, 95% of our third graders were proficient or advanced, with the majority, right around 70% of those, were advanced. And that year's end of year benchmark scores for AIMSweb plus for the whole school, K-5. Over 85% of our students were reading at the 50th percentile or higher, and we had less than 20% of students reading at that level before we began our work.



Jessica Hamman: Did you see a gradual transition to these levels or was there a dip at all in the first year of implementation? People who are thinking through possibly instituting this type of change, what can they expect from that data line and how it may or may not grow?

Angie Hanlin: We have two things that I feel are very encouraging to any other school or educator that's listening. One, it was gradual. So we did not go from 13 to 95 in one year. And it took a lot of work and a lot of persistence and a lot of doing everything with fidelity, but it was a gradual increase. We just kept getting higher and higher, especially on our end of year reading benchmarks. The other thing though, was that we did, every now and then, we did see a dip. Now, it came from our state had changed the standards and they had changed the testing. So we looked at that as... We were very concerned in the beginning, but then you aren't quite comparing apples to oranges. So our model now is a low number doesn't scare us, because we've got such a kind of pulse of where the students are because we are weekly looking at the progress monitoring data, which I feel is so important.

Angie Hanlin: We're weekly looking at that, where in the past, we would only look at it at beginning, middle and end of your benchmark. If a student drops from beginning til the middle of year, I mean, you've lost half of the school year. So now looking, we have weekly meetings on those students. We aren't as nervous or as scared going into those end of year assessments. But we did have a drop in our fourth grade from 2018 to 2019, it took a slight drop because the entire makeup



of the classroom changed, the students in third that had been advanced, every one of those children moved out of the school. We had 13 new students that moved in last year into our fourth grade and they were all intensive reds. So they had all scored below basic in their third grade test. But what we were able to do in that one year of instruction, a lot of those students, we did not even have for five months prior to the test, we were able to eliminate though the tier three.

Angie Hanlin: We were able to get all of those students out of the below basic category and get them to either basic or proficient. And so that's one of the things that I think I love about our story is because what put us in focus-school status were two types of data. One, we had no child with an IEP that had scored proficient or advanced on the [inaudible 00:37:09], nobody. And the other item that put us there, our tier-three students were completely trapped and stagnant, and so by doing the work, we immediately saw movement. Now that overall score, it just gradually went up. We had a big jump the first year, went to 66% [inaudible 00:37:28] average, little bit of a dip with the change in test, change of standards, jumped right back up though, and now it's just steadily climbing.

Dr. Sam Duncan: I need to insert one piece of information. The state does not readily give us what I'm about to tell you, but you can extract the raw data, and I did that. The numbers that we see, even though there was a dip, Matthews Elementary, their average scale score from 2017 to 2019 is... Their growth of their average scale score far surpassed any other building in the state of Missouri. And in doing so, they did that spanning the test change from '17 to '18, the test changed. So not only did they... They might've seen a little dip from '17 to '18,



but the state threw a new test in. They admittedly didn't give districts enough time. So everybody dropped pretty much, but Matthews ran strong into the next test without even having enough preparation to do well on the 2018 MAP test, ELA and mathematics, they still from 2017, changed the test in '18, '18 to '19 grew faster on their average scale score than any other building out of the 1,970 school buildings that take the MAP test in the state of Missouri.

Jessica Hamman: It is incredibly inspiring and affirming to know what your population looks like, the amount of transient students that you have coming in and out of your school, and that with this incredibly focused core instruction in school systems that are in place, you're able to support these students' learning, even if they're only with you for a small amount of time, and then they go back out of your school district, you're impacting them so positively. That is an incredibly important and inspiring message that we can support these transient students just as one small element of your population.

Angie Hanlin: Yes, because when the teachers become so skilled and knowledgeable at how to look at the data and then how to plan a targeted, specific intervention for those students, no matter where they are... We say it doesn't matter where they come in because they aren't going to stay that way. It doesn't matter what that beginning of your score is because it is not going to stay there.

Jessica Hamman: That's fantastic.



Angie Hanlin: We are going to go up and we know for a fact we will move those students. And if something happens, if we've done an intervention three weeks in a row and progress monitoring hasn't moved, we know we've got to change something. We have to increase the number of repetitions, we've got to go in and watch those students and give more specific feedback to those teachers. So when you have the systems, the structures and strategies in place, things can change. The standards can change. The tests can change. The students can change. You can even change our teachers, but when all those things are locked in solid, you've got agendas, you have the protocols, you know the work that has to be done, you can still make growth and gains all the time.

Jessica Hamman: Fantastic.

Dr. Sam Duncan: Okay, and I just have a few closing things from what Angie said. So Plain Talk four years ago, and here we stand-

Jessica Hamman: And tell us a little bit about Plain Talk for educators who are listening that don't know about what it is.

Dr. Sam Duncan: I'm going to let-



Angie Hanlin: Okay.

Dr. Sam Duncan: ... Angie talk about Plain Talk, then I'm going to tell you what [inaudible 00:40:59] from it the first year.

Jessica Hamman: Please.

Angie Hanlin: It is, I think, the largest literacy conference in the country and the beautiful thing that they do is they always have the top people in literacy here, you get the latest, the newest information, the newest research.

Dr. Sam Duncan: It's the underground.

Angie Hanlin: I mean, you get the best information from the leading consultants in literacy. Like here this week, I've been able to listen to Anita Archer, David Kilpatrick, Doug Fisher, Jan Hasbrouck, Deb Glazer. You literally get kind of that who's who list of educators. Steve Dykstra's here, it's the people that are truly making gains and growth in education.



Dr. Sam Duncan: So what I'd like to mention is four years ago, and Angie talked about the building being able to sustain itself, we talked about how fragile this is. Obviously, we have a sense of urgency that makes it work. And we do have the understanding though that not only is this something we want to sustain, but it is fragile because people come and go, kids come and go, superintendents come and go, for that matter, and principals. We've had a lot of turnover. So as this is all so fragile with 60% turnover in last four years in this district, 20% were just people that we moved to other positions, 40% left us and were replaced. We average 10% turnover a year. How do you sustain something in that climate when your employees are turning over that fast?

Dr. Sam Duncan: Well, a lot of things happen. First of all, we did establish a new way to interview. We have a rubric that works. Our leadership team, building leadership teams are in place. We went full PLC, our building leadership teams are fully functional and they interview the next building leaders, and they will put to before the board that the building leadership team and myself and as [inaudible 00:43:01] are the next leaders based upon the criteria that the school board set. So the school board wrote their lead indicators, number one's literacy, and one of them on the top is career tech ed, what are students going to do if they don't go to college? All of this having been said, sustainability is something that nags at us constantly. We have not arrived, we're still trying to sort through things. And I think that there are some underlying psychological features that the people doing the work that are closest to this system side have to understand.



Dr. Sam Duncan: And that the other part is that people closest to the actual work have got to be sold out and sitting around the table and understanding why they're doing what they're doing, causes them to be sold out, causes them to have the opportunity to let their guard down. And in the silence that we had, that I mentioned, where we just stopped bringing anybody in, I think we kind of found the things that we needed to hold on to. And the people closest to the system, the board, the district leaders, the people who were coming on board saw how important it was that we carry those things under every curtain that dropped into the new way we would do business.

Dr. Sam Duncan: Having said all of that, we have tried to replicate it, we have basically a year three school, which is Matthews. We try to say year three, year two, year one, year two [inaudible 00:44:33] elementary and year one is [inaudible 00:44:35] elementary. We've had leadership changes in the other two buildings. Both of the leaders look a lot like Angie's background, they were both coaches and literacy, they were both classroom teachers in the elementary, and now they're in position to do great things. They understand, they can speak the language. There is a language to the science of reading that you have to understand and be able to attach to prior knowledge, either as a teacher in an elementary classroom or as a reading specialist or as whatever, all the wonderful experiences Angie's had in order to make the system see how it needs to move forward.

Dr. Sam Duncan: It's a very specific process that we didn't really know how to offer it, but there it sits. Those are the types of things that I will say and one more, we were able to do it and still stay in business and balance the



budget four years in a row, even the first year we balanced the budget, and we're not sure exactly how some of that even happened, but I'll tell you, there was a whole lot of prayer.

Jessica Hamman: It's a very important point concerning the budget, because I have heard that some excuses for not instituting this hard work of school change is that it'll be too expensive, we don't have room in the budget, we couldn't possibly take on instructional coaches, we couldn't change the curriculum, we couldn't change teaching practice, it's just too expensive. So that also proves that that's not necessarily the case and that you're actually making room in the budget when you're reducing the costs of special education and you're improving student outcomes.

Angie Hanlin: Yes.

Dr. Sam Duncan: And if I might say one more thing on that, so we are still down \$2.1 million, we're down 10% in our operating budget from when I started still, even though we've built up a few things. Having said that, we didn't go out and hire people, we didn't go out and try to reduce class sizes. We started cutting, and we cut back until we figured out what it was that actually worked. And then we slowly have tried to rebuild our structure to have enough people. It doesn't have to be a \$60,000 classroom teacher. I mean, it doesn't have to be the teacher at the end of their tenure that wants to be an interventionist now, it can be an assistant teacher. And we don't want to not pay anybody all the money in the world, but we only have so much money to pay people. So I think that what happened



on our end, I think it's like Angie said, I think that that financial crisis, some people would say it's probably the best thing that could've ever happened because we got lean and mean, and that was our objective.

Angie Hanlin: The other thing, we had made purchases in the past that weren't based on anything, that were not based upon the data. Now when we make a purchase, I mean, we've got evidence as to why we need that, such as the program of Heggerty. We knew we needed that because their students were so weak in phonemic awareness and final logical awareness. So we just started making smarter purchases based on data, where's the evidence that that's what we need? Where's the evidence? I know that we had purchased, we had been guilty of purchasing curriculums just because, I mean, they had beautiful illustrations in them, and we would not go and look at the validity, the reliability, the evidence of effectiveness of those programs, and so it was also smarter choices and looking at things and buying things because our data told us that we needed them.

Jessica Hamman: And it brings me to my last question for you, which seems like one thread of your success is based on your dedication to data and your ability to be transparent with the people within your district. So tell me a little bit about the importancy... I'm sorry, about the importance of transparency with respect to these elements of data for your teachers. Were they aware that only 13% in 2015 of the third graders were reading at grade level? And how did that awareness shift their mindset to enable this change?



Angie Hanlin: Well, the teachers, when I first put the numbers up after we had gotten them and we were in a faculty meeting in the library, they argued about those scores. Their first thing was, "There's no way. There's no way those scores are that low." And so it took a little bit of time for them to own the scores, but this is what I said to them, and this is what we still cling to, I said, "We have to own the data, no matter what it is, no matter what the number is, we have to own it. And we have to own the responsibility and own it and take accountability for it, because if we don't own that 13%, then when it goes higher we are not going to be able to own those scores." And so Dr. Duncan alluded to earlier, now when we have had growth and change, we can tell you exactly specifically what it is that we've done, because the work has been so transparent to everyone.

Angie Hanlin: Every single staff member at our schools, they know what the data is. Our custodians, our head maintenance person, they are in our faculty meetings. We never bring a group together without reviewing data. We never have collaboration for teachers without reviewing the school data. Our teachers though, in the past, our mistake, they had been allowed to basically almost in a sense, hide from it or run from it, it's like, "Okay, here are your numbers." But, I mean, if that student had gotten a few more right, the score would have been this, we're kind of thinking along those lines. Where this, one of the biggest changes that we did that had the most powerful impact is we created a data room, we put the numbers on the wall, you cannot escape from it. We began to have our meetings in there. We began to gather weekly to talk about the scores in an entire group, because a mistake we had also made is when we would do our RTI meetings, each teacher would come in for their grade level, which we do now, but they were only aware of their scores.



Angie Hanlin: The second grade teacher, they never knew what the first grade teacher's scores look like or what the third grade data looked like. This is a living, breathing room in our building. I feel like it's the heart of the school, and it guides every single thing we do. It guides what we do in whole group. It guides what we do in small group instruction. It guides what we do in intervention. It guides what we do in the resource room for our students that have a specific learning disability. And it guides who we actually refer for special education because in the past, if a student was, quote unquote, low, if they were below grade level, the reaction was, "Oh, my gosh, this has to be a special ed referral." No, what we found is the students needed targeted, specific intervention that we could close and then we could get them back on to grade level and then go on.

Dr. Sam Duncan: And our year two school, on the topic of replication, if I might-

Angie Hanlin: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Sam Duncan: ... the year two school where Angie's building... Our year three school where Angie's building has actually outpaced the entire state from '17 to '19 on the average scale score in their building from grades three, four and five on math and ELA, our year two school is in second place out of 1,970 buildings on growth from 2017 to '19, and our year two school outpaced every other building in the state, including Matthews for '18 to '19 in average scale score growth on ELA and math. Now these are buildings that are not yet at the top,



as far as the status points in Missouri. If your average skill score is 450, you may be the highest average scale score in the state.

Dr. Sam Duncan: But Matthews Elementary went from the 1,700th to the eighth in the state on their average scale score for ELA in three years. And New Madrid Elementary went from 1,820th out of 1,900 schools. We were in the cellar, they went to 404 in growth. They went to status in 404, but they grew faster than any other building in the state of Missouri from '18 to '19, and that's our year two school. So the big picture on the wall that we painted originally, as I was mentioning, Plain Talk was four years ago. We heard somebody here present high collective team efficacy. And then we started thinking effective use of data, plus high collective team efficacy, if they know it and they can show you how they did it and they can show you the numbers and they know how they got them, your growth, your success is off the chart.

Angie Hanlin: And we do reflection at all times. Our staff meets every single Friday afternoon. The teachers bring in the [inaudible 00:54:00] that they've talked about. I mean, they've already answered. They've looked at the progress monitoring scores. We have dotted it on a card. If this [inaudible 00:54:09] who has made progress, who has not, why not? Is there any class that's had multiple students not make the growth for the week? And the data tells me as the building leader, and I think this is such an important point to point out, it tells me where I need to devote my time the following week. It tells me which room I need to be in, which intervention room I need to be in, which students I need to keep an eye on and sit in there and listen, and just constantly to be giving feedback, to constantly be working to close that gap.



Angie Hanlin: It is relentless work. It is daunting. It never ever stops. I've had people ask me, since we were able to exit focus school, they said, "Oh, my gosh, aren't you so relieved that you can back off for a little bit?" And I tell them, "It's the complete opposite of that," because now that we've gotten here, now we've moved into sustainability. We are confident now. I mean, as a staff and as a team, when we come together, we know one, if we don't know the answer, we won't stop until we get the answer. And that happens a lot. I can't tell you how many times I reach out for answers. There are things I don't know all the time, but I've got a network of people such as Jan Hasbrouck, Deb Glazer, and I mean-

Dr. Sam Duncan: [inaudible 00:55:33].

Angie Hanlin: ... Pati Montgomery on speed dial. I can't believe she's not shut me out or blocked my number at this point. But I mean, it's constantly sending data and what do we need to do for this student? [inaudible 00:55:46] down to really get to every single individual student.

Jessica Hamman: It's no doubt that that curiosity has fueled a lot of the success and your drive to find answers and solutions to the problems that are facing you. And that's what's partly so incredibly inspiring, and why I find this such a wonderful recipe for other educators who may not have the means to seek out or the connections to find these people in the network that you have. However, this is a recipe for progress



that you've created that can be followed, that can be scaled and can happen in other places as well.

Angie Hanlin: Absolutely. It's just always our phrase that we use is we always strive to be better than our best. It's just a constant pursuit and diligence to be better than our best, just to see really how high can these numbers go? How high can these students achieve? And it's just constantly wanting to be better, do better and to really perfect our craft.

Jessica Hamman: It is so exciting. And I just want to say thank you to you both for taking the time to talk to us about this, sharing your recipe for progress and your commitment to hard work and to students. So thank you very, very much for your time today.

Angie Hanlin: Well, thank you, Jessica. It's been lovely to meet you and talk to you, and thank you so much for the opportunity to share our story and what we've learned.

Dr. Sam Duncan: Very meaningful. Thank you.

Jessica Hamman: If you'd like to learn more about Dr. Sam Duncan, principle, Angie Hanlin, or their work at New Madrid county, R-1, take a look at their website at nmceaglenation.com.



Jessica Hamman: Thank you for listening to our Ed Leaders In Literacy podcast. To find links to the articles and resources mentioned in this podcast, go to gleaneducation.com/edleaderspodcast, and access them in the show notes. Bye for now.

Nita Cherise: This episode was edited and produced by Nita Cherise.

