



Glean Education's Ed Leaders in Literacy Podcast  
Episode #21:  
Nan Sterling, Dr. Jawan Brown-Alexander  
and Adrienne Dowden  
(New Schools New Orleans)

Nan Sterling: We wanted this to be applicable. We want the teaching practice to change after you experience one session. So, every time you go to a session, you are changing. What we've noticed already from leaders, from teachers, they're saying, "Where has this been? And I've done disservice to my children, because I just didn't know. Theory is one thing, application is another."

Speaker 2: The results, they've been immediate. And we had one of the biggest shifts in the state.

Speaker 3: It's almost magical when it all comes together. And I think to myself, "This is what education is about."

Speaker 4: There were inequities everywhere. My students in south Texas ultimately taught me more than I taught them.

Speaker 5: 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 6: 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 rooftops, "It can be done."

Speaker 7: 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. First, a word from our sponsors.

Speaker 8: Go ahead and state your name and title and what you enjoy about working here.

Alisa VanHekken: My name is Alisa VanHekken. I serve as the Chief Academic Officer for Heggerty Phonemic Awareness. What I like most about working for Heggerty is the impact that we have on classrooms across the country, across the world, with instruction that aligns to



the science of reading, is engaging, and is really helping our students to be readers.

Speaker 7: Heggerty's daily Phonemic Awareness Curriculum is used by over 450 school districts nationwide. Learn how you can get started @heggerty.org. That's H-E-G-G-E-R-T-Y.O-R-G.

Jessica Hamman: Today, we are thrilled to connect with Dr. Jawan Brown-Alexander, Nan Sterling, and Adrienne Dowden. Three school leaders from the New Orleans area.

Jessica Hamman: Dr. Jawan Brown-Alexander is the Chief of Schools at New Schools for New Orleans. Prior to joining NSNO, Jawan's experience as a school leader included her work as Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Lake Forest Charter School, Interim Director of K-8 Instructional Strategies at ACSA, Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Recovery School District, and Assistant Head of School for Accountability and School Performance at Lafayette Charter School. Jawan helped found Collab Lab, an organization committed to providing guidance and support to school leaders.

Jessica Hamman: Nan Sterling is the Executive Director of Instructional Quality at New Schools for New Orleans. Before joining NSNO, Nan served as the Chief Academic Officer of New Beginnings Schools Foundation, a charter school community of two elementary schools in one high school in the Gentilly neighborhood of New Orleans, and as the principal of the elementary school in Jefferson Parish.



Nan got her start, teaching as an English Language Arts teacher in the Richardson Independent School District, a suburb of Dallas, Texas, where 90% of her students mastered Texas's reading and writing assessments. Before entering the world of education, Nan was an auditor at Ernst and Young in Houston, Texas.

Jessica Hamman: Adrienne Dowden is the Student Support Services Coordinator at Lake Forest Charter School. An educator for over 40 years, Adrienne is a certified reading specialist, and is currently in her final year of Xavier University's doctorate program for Educational Leadership. Over her career, she has worked on the national state and local levels, helping schools and districts deliver reading instruction to improve reading achievement scores. Adrienne is the owner of ASD Educational Consulting Group, LLC. ASD is a premier educational consulting company that specializes in providing ongoing, job embedded professional development.

Jessica Hamman: Well, Jawan, Nan, and Adrienne. Welcome to the podcast. Thank you so much for being here.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Thank you so much for having us.

Nan Sterling: Thank you.

Adrienne Dowden: Thank you.



Jessica Hamman: It's such a pleasure to talk to you all, and listen to the amazing work that you guys are doing in the New Orleans area. Dr. Jawan Brown-Alexander, can you orient us to what New Schools for New Orleans is, and what we should know about your organization?

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Yeah, first of all, just a huge thank you, Jessica, for having us. We appreciate having the opportunity to talk about, just our work, with your podcast audience. Our work here in New Orleans, it's all about our overall mission, which is to deliver on the promise of excellent public schools for every child in New Orleans. We are a nonprofit organization, established right after Hurricane Katrina, and at a high level, we support charter schools, charter school leaders, and teachers. The specific work that we do is around policy, portfolio, talent, and curriculum. And curriculum is the work that I've been blessed enough to lead for the past four years, or so. We have Nan Sterling joining us. She's our Executive Director of Instructional Quality, as you mentioned. And we have another partner in this work, April Carter, who's our Coordinator. And without her, this work does not happen. That's a little bit about our organization and a little bit about our team. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention our CEO, Patrick Dobard, who was the former superintendent for the Recovery School District.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: We have an amazing team over at NSNO, and we work very, very closely with the Department of Education, but specifically, with our school district. Superintendent Henderson Lewis and his



team, we collaborate with all the time. It is a joint effort, the work that we've established here, in supporting our schools.

Jessica Hamman: Tell me a little bit more about the day to day. What is the work that New Schools for New Orleans does?

Jawan Brown-Alexander: In terms of policy, Holly Reid is our Chief Policy Officer. She really understands policy at a deep level. Her team is always looking at ways that we can improve policy here. We have a very unique system, and I know we'll get a chance to talk about the unique way in which New Orleans now exist, in terms of our community of schools. Portfolio is also under Holly. And that really means... And some folks are like, "What is portfolio?" The portfolio work is really about creating quality seats for students, making certain that in our very unique system, our charter system, parents each year have an opportunity to select the school that they want their child to go to, or to attend. And it's really about understanding what that whole layout looks like. That's the work that Holly leads along with that policy work.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Talent is led by Alex Jarrell and his amazing, amazing team. And that is all about teacher and leader retention. Because, as you know, especially with COVID, we've been challenged like every other school district and every other city, with retaining quality talent. And so, he leads that work. And then the curriculum and work is really about making certain that we have high quality curriculum in our schools, along with high quality professional development. A curriculum without the professional development,



doesn't really make sense. And we really encourage school leaders to participate in our offerings, but we also encourage leaders and teachers to create their own spaces, their own professional learning spaces at their school sites. And we partner with them in terms of making certain that they have everything that they need, that they're equipped with all of the essentials in terms of professional learning.

Jessica Hamman: Can you give us a little context regarding the unique educational landscape in New Orleans, in Orleans Parish, and the public schools in your city?

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Yeah. In terms of Orleans Parish schools, we have the most, as I said before, the most unique system in the country, and arguably, in the world. We are a system of charter schools. We work individually, yet collaboratively. Parents have the opportunity to select their own specific school for their kids. We have about 80 plus charters in the city. There are 80 plus charters. There are about 40 plus organizations that run those charters. Each of those charter organizations has its own individual board. We also have an elected school board that... They're the authorizer along with the superintendent, they authorize all of these charter schools. They oversee them, monitor them, making certain that compliance wise, everything is in order. We have a very unique system, unlike any other. And that comes with a lot of really innovative ways that we can approach learning and professional learning. It comes with some challenges, but it definitely comes with ways that we can, again, be very innovative.



Jessica Hamman: Tell us a bit about the work that you guys are doing regarding literacy instruction and how you've built this amazing Hub and network, and the work you're doing around literacy.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Yeah. I definitely want Nan Sterling to chime in on this. Nan came to me, maybe about a year and a half ago... I'm losing track of time with COVID, I apologize, but maybe about a year and a half ago. And she... We've launched so many different Hubs, from our Curriculum-based Hubs to our SPED/ RTI Hubs. We have a number of different professional learning opportunities for teachers and leaders.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: When Nan came to me with the K-three literacy... And I think she was ahead of even the state thinking about how essential having a Literacy Hub was, especially for our city. And so when she came to me, I was like, "That is a brilliant idea. Let's get to work." I knew that I wanted to have a partner, someone to partner with Nan. And I was like, "Oh my God, Adrienne Dowden, is the person." And so connecting them, making certain that we carved out the time for them to meet, that first meeting. Nan came back to me, she was like, "Adrienne is amazing." To have two amazing people working on this, that for me, was so super special, to be able to launch this, knowing that I have two big brains attacking this one issue. But I want to hand it over to Nan so that she can speak to just how we developed the Hub, and how we included Adrienne, which was so super important.





Nan Sterling: Thanks so much Dr. Jawan Brown-Alexander. I like to call her Dr. [J 00:12:30]. That's what we affectionately call her at NSNO. I remember the day to the T. It was during the pandemic. I had been looking at a lot of data. The literacy data was just glaring at me. And I think, the pandemic gave us a time, unfortunately, to pause and look at things and the way that we have been teaching and doing education, and say, "What can we be doing differently? This hasn't been working."

Nan Sterling: I'm looking at this data, our statewide data, and third grade scores aren't moving. We had adopted Tier 1 curriculum, but kids were getting to third grade and it just wasn't moving. I was spending this time with this data, and then I wrote this proposal, this idea in my mind, and then I flushed it out. And I remember calling Jawan on a Tuesday afternoon at 4:30, I'm like, "Do you have five minutes? I just want to run something by you." And so I said, "What if we created this collaborative space, where teachers, and leaders, and interventionists, and everybody who touches a K-3rd grade child, is trained in the science of reading. How amazing could that be?" And she was like, "Wait, say that to me again, Nan." And I said, 'Everybody who touches the K-3rd grade child, is a reading teacher. Basically when they get to third grade, they either know how to read, or by the time they end, they are reading.' And she said, 'Oh my gosh, Nan, I think you're on to something.' And so she said, 'And I think I have someone I want you to talk to.'

Nan Sterling: We got off the phone, she sends me a text. She was like, "I want to connect you with Adrienne." Adrienne and I talked on the phone for two hours, the first time we met. We just... We geeked out over



literacy. We both love literacy. We love little people. She was the yin to my yang. This is the person I've been looking to work with this entire time. I remember calling Jawan back that night, I was like, "Where have you been hiding Adrienne from me? I could have been right underneath her the whole time." I shared my idea with Adrienne. And we started talking about the research element, and then we just started brainstorming. I'm going to ask Adrienne to chime in and talk about those first few days when we just started planning, and her thoughts around it too. So, Adrienne.

Adrienne Dowden: Oh my God. Nan hit the nail on the head. I mean, we were just two peas in a pod. We both love literacy. We both love research. And so does Dr. J. We all are on the same page. When Nan and I first talked, we talked about what the research says, what needs to be in place, basically looking at those five components of effective reading instruction with, phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Writing is also part of that in spelling. Although, the National Reading Panel report did not include that part into their report, we know how important those things are. We talked about all the research by Jean Shaw, looking at Steven Stahl's research, what it says, what needs to happen in schools. We looked at Isabel Beck's word building series, and what needs to happen in school.

Adrienne Dowden: We just had this long two hours... We could have gone on all day, just talking about how we're going to implement all of this, and making sure that our teachers aren't intimidated by all of that research. We wanted to make sure that we really take this research and put it into real practice, practical applications for the teachers. Nan and I, we talked, and we ruled out what we thought would be



good beginning points, and then stressed it all the way out to where we are now and continuing to go, with making sure that our leaders have a say, our principals, our CEOs, our teachers, everybody that touches a child. And we wanted buy-in from them too. It wasn't like, "Oh, you have to do this." It's like, "Do you want to do this? What do you think?"

Adrienne Dowden: Once Nan starts talking, and Dr. J starts talking, really, it just lights up the room, and everybody's like, "Yes, I want to do this. I want to help. I want our kids to be readers." And many of them also said, they weren't really sure of what to do and how to effectively teach reading instruction. One of the comments... Many of them was, "Well, I didn't get that in school. Who are you talking about? I don't know these people. I never heard that I need to be more explicit and systematic when I'm teaching phonics", and those kinds of things. It was such a great buy-in from the schools that we're working with, leaders and everybody.

Jessica Hamman: How many schools are you working with on this particular literacy initiative? Is it open to all the schools that you guys support? Or are you doing it in pilot schools, to begin with?

Nan Sterling: This was originally a pilot. We wanted to start with 10, but it was going to be a lot of teachers, because we wanted all K, all first, all second, all third, and along with special ed teachers, anybody who would touch those children that are young, also the instructional coaches. We limited to five pilot schools. And what Adrienne was mentioning earlier, that we also did a focus group. And so those



schools that participated in the focus group, really got the first buy-in to be a part of the Hub. And it was something that New schools for New Orleans has funded, but we wanted to see, if we do this really well with a small group of schools, what would that impact be?

Nan Sterling: We fleshed out a scope and sequence presented it to TNTP. We had TNTP, Adrienne and myself, just consistently correcting the scope and sequence. We went minute by minute, slide by slide. This is in the middle of the time where the Delta variant came out. We were going to be in-person, and we had to pull back to virtual. We were saying, "We need in-person coaching. No, we need virtual coaching." We were very specific about every piece of this Hub that the teachers would be engaged with, because what we didn't want to happen is that, we didn't want this to be a sit and get, and something that you experienced, and then you put it aside. We wanted this to be applicable. We want the teaching practice to a change after you experience one session. So every time you go to a session, you are changing.

Nan Sterling: And what we've noticed already... Consistently, I get the feedback from leaders, from teachers, they're saying, "Where has this been? I've done disservice to my children, because I just did know. I just didn't know. I didn't know that if I skipped 25 on that phonic lesson, that it could hurt them in fourth grade. I just didn't know."

Jessica Hamman: What is that magic component that allows you to take that knowledge building and transfer it to practice for them? Is there...



Do the teachers leave with something every time? Do you ask them to do something? Can you tell us a little bit more about how you do support that implementation?

Nan Sterling: We partnered with The New Teacher Project, TNTP, to actually deliver the material for the Hub, or all the instruction. And they're a national vendor organization that we partner with, on different projects, but we affectionately call them TNTP. That's what they call themselves. We really work in conjunction with the consultant on this project. She has been so flexible.

Nan Sterling: Something we didn't mention also, when we launched this Hub, we also had a hurricane, a pretty big one. We were displaced. Leaders were still communicating with us about the Hub, and teachers were ready to get back into the practice of learning, because literacy, we know every day counts, and especially for our young ones. Our consultant through TNTP, she has been so flexible. She said, "If you want me to come in, I'll come in." She started going into their PLC. She would be with teach... She's meeting with teachers. Today, there's a session, today at one of the schools, she's there all day. She's going to watch them in their classrooms, give them feedback, follow up with a PLC session on what she sees. Now she's tailoring it to the school's individual needs.

Jessica Hamman: Oh, that's great. And having someone in the school sites, that's everything, and actually witnessing the practice and offering suggestions. Tell us a little bit more about the training itself, for the scope and sequence. What are the things that you guys want your



K-3 teachers to know? Adrienne mentioned at a high level, can you dig in just a little bit more, to tell us what people should look for from this high quality type of ongoing training?

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Yeah. I would love Nan and Adrienne to really give you the framework for the scope and sequence. But I think one key thing that I want to highlight again that Nan mentioned a moment ago, was the focus group. That focus group was amazing. They unpacked for us what their experiences were, what their experiences have been over the course of, however many years, they've been a teacher or a principal, et cetera. And I think that really unlocked for us what we needed to do with this Hub.

Jessica Hamman: I think that's so important, because a lot of this work on mindset change, even some teachers don't need to have their mindset changed, really, they just didn't know, like you said, beforehand, and when exposed to it, they thought, "Where has this information been all along?" A lot of that work comes from being realistic about the barriers that they're facing. And the focus group, I imagine, was incredibly helpful in telling you how to support them.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: It was super helpful. We engaged in conversations with teachers and leaders. That sounded a little bit like my pre-service development did not include any of this. And to Adrienne's point, and to Nan's point, around the true science of teaching reading, one teacher said, during our time with them, during the focus group, she was like, "I am kind of embarrassed that sometimes I don't know what to do when I'm in the classroom." What we forget



as educators sometimes is that we're not learning every single thing about teaching in our pre-service classes, et cetera. Like at the higher ed level, some of it doesn't happen. The development doesn't happen until our feet hit the ground and we're in the school.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: We took that concept. We took that bit of information, that feedback, and really, were able to add even more layers to what was already turning out to be something special, during the planning that Adrienne and Nan were doing. Kudos to the leaders and teachers that were a part of that focus group. It, for me, was non-negotiable. I say that to Nan, I was like, "Nan, we're going to have to have a focus group, because I want to hear from folks as you guys are planning this out. And I think she hit a home run in the selection, in getting folks that were going to really, truly open up, and say to us, "Yeah, there are some things that I'm getting right, but there are some things that I'm struggling with."

Jessica Hamman: Nan, what did you learn from that focus group, that you then collaborated with Adrienne to build? What were some takeaways?

Nan Sterling: One thing that came out of that discussion was the idea... And it was a teacher who said that, she said, "We say legal practice, we say medical practice, but truly, teaching is a practice too." She said, "I went to school for education. I went to..." She went to Columbia, and she was like, "I learned all the things. And then I moved to New Orleans, and none of those things came to my recollection when it was applicable." She was like, "I remember thinking to myself, I didn't learn this at all in the books. And then the practicum that I



had, I didn't do any of this, that I'm doing here. And so, theory is one thing, application is another."

Nan Sterling: What we really wanted to do within this Hub, is marry the two. Adrienne and I really worked on, how do we combine the research and ensuring that they get the theory well enough to say, when you receive a child, almost like doing a prescription, this child is coming to me here. Hmm. Theory wise, this is saying this, applicably, I need to do this. And they're taking their curriculum and making those decisions. And that was something we poured in a lot of time.

Nan Sterling: Adrienne, I would love for you to chime in and talk about our process of going back and forth with TNTP. I mean, we were going back and forth. We were like, "Yeah, we have to say this. We can't go further until we talk about this, and give them an example of this, and have them practice this." Adrienne, would you like to say more about that?

Adrienne Dowden: Yes, I would. In the going back... Thank you, Nan. Going back and forth, one of the things that I really wanted to stress was, when we're talking about phonics and phonemic awareness, and we are right here in New Orleans. We have a thing called a AAVE, African American Vernacular English. We know that we all have our dialect. We know that we have all these things going on, but that's the elephant in the room sometimes that hasn't been addressed. Nan and I wanted to make sure that, that was addressed when we're talking about phonics and phonetic awareness. We wanted to make sure that TNTP was able to give examples, and also give some





research, and also give some practical applications for that. As we were talking about phonics, for example, we wanted to make sure at our teachers knew phonics had to be direct, and explicit, and systematic. What that was, what it looked like.

Adrienne Dowden: And also, if you have students and they're pronouncing words incorrectly, we want you to correct them. It's not harming them. If a child comes to you and say, "I want you to open the dough", and not the door, we don't want to make a child feel bad, and say, "Oh honey, no, no, no." But what we want to do is say, "Great, you say that at home. And that's fine, but in class we say, door. Let's look at the word." The kid can look at the word, the orthographic representation of that word, read it from left to right, and pronounce it, so that when they see it, they will also get a mental image that this says, "Door", D-O-O-R, and that's also a door. And when they see the word, "Dough", like, "I'm kneading some dough", then they'll know that that's different, D-O-U-G-H.

Adrienne Dowden: We want the teachers to understand these are two different things, but make sure that we don't harm the child. But make sure we just make it explicitly clear that, "Hey, this is what we're saying." If they're reading a passage... Because it's all about reading connected text, if they're reading a passage and they come across something and it says, "A baker was kneading the dough to make the bread", and the child has a mental image of dough, thinking about a door, because that's what they've always been saying. Then that's going to impede their comprehension of the text. We needed to make sure that, that was clear. Our teachers were like, "Oh wait, I didn't really think about that." And they've embraced it. When they're teaching these sounds, they're teaching these word [inaudible 00:28:06], they



know exactly what they're doing, and they know exactly at what point they need to make a correction, gently. Because we want to make sure that we respect home language and school language. That was our back and forth, making sure that, that was a part of the training.

Jessica Hamman: Well, I think you're pinpoint a real lack of culturally responsive instruction that we have in coordination with literacy instruction. And I think that, that is one bridge to implementation that needs to be established more readily. We just don't have that coordination, that much in trainings. And we need more of that culturally relevant instruction to make it applicable to all the kids that we serve.

Adrienne Dowden: Right. Because we always talk about EL learners, but we don't talk about our kids. And since we're in New Orleans, our New Orleans kids, they're very smart, they're very bright. But we need to make sure that we're teaching them explicitly and systematically, taking in their cultural language, so that they can become as successful as anybody else, because they're excellent kids. They just need that down to earth training, so that they can become better, and better, and better. Kids come to school every day. They want to learn, they don't come to school [inaudible 00:29:26] they don't want to learn. They just want a good, friendly environment. And I just want to say this one more thing. And I'm [crosstalk 00:29:31] because I could talk so much, but the-

Jessica Hamman: No keep going, please.



Adrienne Dowden: The brain... We already know from brain research that, if there's a not so good, happy learning space, that the synapsis will shut off. There's no connection. Nothing can happen. But when the synapsis is opened up in a great learning environment, then it can make the connections, because the brain works on connections. I always give this example, if I'm in a mall and I see a parent who knows me and starts talking, my brain's going crazy, crazy, I'm like, "Who is that person?" And they're still talking, and I'm not noticing. They leave, and I'm like, "Oh Lord, that was miss [Cynthia 00:30:07]." Well, the reason why I remembered who that was, was because she left and I was no longer stressed. And so it allowed my brain to relax and make the synapsis, make the connection, so that it could retrieve the information that I needed.

Adrienne Dowden: That is what we're talking about with our teachers. We want to make sure they understand that the kids are also in a stress-free environment to learn, so that when they're teaching effectively, and explicitly, and systematically, that the kids can retrieve that information and do a real good job.

Jessica Hamman: Do you feel that the curriculum that is there, or the materials that the teachers have to deliver this instruction, is sufficiently and culturally relevant to, or that there's a lot of supplementing that needs to occur through that ongoing professional development?



Adrienne Dowden: Well, I want to say that we are using a Tier 1 curriculum, what we need to make sure... And this is one of the points that we have to make... Tim Shanahan talked a lot about this. It's the program, the program is just one part of it, but we wanted to make sure that the teachers had a deeper understanding of what those components were. When Nan and I talked, we said, "Okay, what does the research say about those five components? All right. Now, let's see where they are in the curriculum. Now, how are we going to deliver that? What is the cultural part of it?" All of that's part of good teaching. It wasn't a lot of supplementing. It was about making sure that our teachers had a really deep understanding of what they were going to teach to the children. And then, that way they can pull those necessary pieces into play. That was our foundation, one of the things that we wanted to stand on.

Jessica Hamman: Excellent. Nan, take us to the next step for this Literacy Hub. You piloted in five schools. It seems like it's been an interesting journey so far. I'd love to hear about some of the data, as well. And then, I'd love to hear about where you see it going in the future.

Nan Sterling: We're excited. We will have a part two of this Hub. We really want to launch it in person, the way it was intended, because part of the Hub experience is bringing people together. I'm a connector. I like to meet people. I like to connect people. And, I would say, "Jessica, you like this? I know somebody else who likes this." And the whole idea in New Orleans, because we are disjointed in charters, is that teachers also don't really get a chance to meet other kindergarten teachers, unless they're in their schools, or first grade teachers, et cetera. We really want to bring them together, so they can



experience this, again, in depth in-person, that's the next step for next year.

Nan Sterling: Also, we would like to look at their data after they have their kids tested, we use DIBELS data for those lower grades, we would like to look at that, just to see where they're going. But I really would like to take another deep look at that data, beginning next year, because we wanted the Hub to roll out as it was intended, as it was planned, in-person, moving forward. We're also thinking about those older grades, because now they know what has been happening for the younger grades. They're like, "Well, what about us?" Well, we're working on that right now.

Nan Sterling: Actually, Dr. J and I had a call with another literacy leader in terms of bridging the gap for fourth grade to eighth grade, and giving them the science of reading. And then, how does that apply in their text, in their contextual areas, in regards to the text. So, really taking a look at text comprehension, writing, why understanding multi-syllabic words is important, where those kids might have missed those digraphs and blended learning lessons down below, and how they can remediate and intervene on that, without losing the depth of the text. That's something that we're working on. Fingers crossed that we get that launch next year. Just really excited. I'm very passionate about literacy, Adrienne and Jawan are, too. And I just firmly believe literacy is what's going to unlock this world for our children of New Orleans. And I feel deeply about that.



Jessica Hamman: And I love the focus on adolescent literacy too, because we can't leave those kids behind. Are you guys also focusing on content area teachers and how they, in fact, also are reading and writing instructors, or is this focused more on Tier 2 interventions, with regard to the adolescent learners?

Jawan Brown-Alexander: We are focused on all of our teachers, in terms of making them, either reading teachers or better reading teachers. It's always been this cliché, all teachers are reading teachers, but if we're not training them up, then they're actually not. It is our passion, we're driven, in terms of making this a reality for the teachers in New Orleans. As I said before, the pre-service part of this, is a little disjointed. We have to make certain that the in-service aspect is aligned, and that our teachers and our leaders have the opportunity to be able to receive this very important, this type of training that really, as you said Jessica, bridges the gap. The scaffolding element, when we get to the four-eight, it's going to be super, super important.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Making certain that teachers are comfortable. I was a middle school ELA teacher, and there are certain aspects of teaching kids how to read, that I just was not provided that level of training. And I had to go and investigate. I had to go and research. We want our teachers... To Adrienne's point a moment ago, to be... When she was talking about making comfortable spaces for kids, we want to make comfortable spaces for teachers. That is super important to all of us, that when a teacher walks in a classroom, that they feel confident in their ability to work with any and every child that walks into their space. And so for us, we can't wait to really dive



into the development of, what we're going to call now, the Middle School Science of Reading Hub. Nan and Adrienne will come up with a more sophisticated name, but for now that's what we'll call it. We're super, super excited. We left that call yesterday, Jessica, super excited. I can't wait to connect Adrienne with the consultant, and have this team to put something out special for our middle school teachers.

Jessica Hamman: We recently had a call with some leaders at the Department of Education in Louisiana, and it strikes me that all this work is coming together and coalescing at a very similar time. And you're backed by... Like you said, backed by policy, backed by the actual energy and the roots of the professional development and the desire to impact practice. It feels like a really exciting time in Louisiana and in New Orleans, for this work to be happening with a lot of positive pressure that happens through policy work too. It's really thrilling to see both Louisiana Department of Education and New Schools for New Orleans at the beginning of this journey. And I love the idea of checking back and seeing how this work is growing with you guys. It's clear from your discussion that you understand this is undertaking that's just beginning. And that it's like the beginning of this journey. And I just can't wait to see where you guys take it for your teachers and your students. It's thrilling.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: We're super excited, as I said before. And I'll add this one thing, and we talked about this in one of the focus groups, most major professions have ongoing learning. They have ongoing... If you're an attorney, if you're in the medical profession, as educators, sometimes we get into this mindset, "Well, if I provide the training, quote, unquote, to a teacher, then they're set. Just put them in the



classroom and they can do it." I think what is so unique about New Schools for New Orleans and the work that we're currently doing with our district and with the State Department of Education, is that we're pushing this concept around ongoing professional learning for teachers. If I could highlight anything today, I really want to stress that particular point, the job that Nan and Adrienne have done, really underscores it, the importance.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: I mentioned the other Hubs that we've launched. I think we're going into what our... We're in our third year of the SPED Hub. We've launched a Trauma-Informed Hub this year, a pilot. And we have an Instructional Technology Hub that's going into a second year. We have an EL Hub that I believe it's going into its second or third year. We've had Curriculum Hubs. We are all about promoting ongoing professional learning, while looking at data, while hearing anecdotally from teachers and leaders, their feedback, and making certain that we're hitting on all cylinders. That is really the work that we want to continue to engage in, moving forward.

Jessica Hamman: I'm so interested in the fact that you use this really strong research base to guide the work, too. I mean, I think that's one of the most impressive pieces of this. It's not haphazard, it's very much rooted in research, and that's very likely what is making it successful. That's thrilling.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Yeah, definitely. Nan and Adrienne are research geeks. I am more of a data geek. I think we balance each other out in that. I also am a person that wants to hear from the folks that are receiving the





development, Nan and Adrienne are both like that, as well. I think when you triangulate it, at all, the data, the research, and the feedback, I think that's why we've been able to launch these Hubs in a successful way, because they're really all about the educators that are on the ground in the schools. It's not about us. It's not about NSNO. We're driving the work, we're creating these things, but it's based on what we're hearing, and it's based on the research and the data.

Jessica Hamman: Can you talk a bit about the data, all of you... At the different levels that you're seeing it, but, what data are you collecting? And then, there's a separate question, but are you supporting the teachers to understand their data too, as part of this exploration?

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Yeah. I want Nan to chime in on this as well, but I'll say, in terms of data, we're looking at our end of year data, which LDOE, our Department of Education puts out in terms of assessment data. We mentioned DIBELS. We didn't mention survey data. We survey folks all the time. We try to be very deliberate about when to send out surveys, because they can be overwhelming, especially in this climate. We're looking at all kinds of data, again, along with the research.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: When we created... And I'll throw this in real quick, when we created our Trauma-Informed Hub, that was one important element. We went out and found a consultant that really majored in research. Bring us back the research. What is the research saying? It's the same with this Literacy Hub, with Adrienne, with Nan,



figuring out the best way to utilize... Because you could have all sorts of research, but how do you really connect the dots in terms of what you're seeing in the research. What are the most important aspects of it? And how do you really emphasize that? Especially when we brought TNTP in, with their research heavy as well, and their data heavy as well. I'd love Nan to chime in, because she also assists our team with putting out surveys and collecting that level of data.

Nan Sterling:

Yeah. Right now, Jessica, we are doing anecdotal data on the teacher's experience within the Hub. There's the DIBELS data that they have done with their classes, realizing that started really late in the year, because remember we had the hurricane, children really didn't start school. And some of those schools that's in our pilot, they were staggered due to storm damage of their schools. That data is already backed and skewed, in a way. But what we are... We're going to look at the end of the year data, DIBELS data for students, to see growth over time. We're going to get with [inaudible 00:43:15] to get that data, because we got to work out a data sharing agreement there, but also anecdotal data from the teacher's experiences.

Nan Sterling:

We have a survey that we've created. Our vendor TNTP gives it out after every session. We have check-ins with her. We have bi-monthly check-ins with her, looking at that data, because we want to make sure that the training that the teachers are receiving is relevant to their experience in the classroom. We know that if they're just in a development session and they're saying, "This isn't applicable to me", they're not doing anything with it. We want to make sure that if something has changed, we have to be flexible enough change



with them. We do rely very heavily on that data. And then of course, we'll wait for the end of the year data. But like I said, realistically, I mean, we had a hurricane, people are still working on houses here, literally across the street, there are still tarps on the roof, across the street from my house. We have to have some grace too with folks.

Adrienne Dowden: Can I talk a little bit about that as well? Although, we're looking at our anecdotal data, one of the things that the Hub has talked about was, when the teachers are looking at... Let's say, their DIBELS data, right now, they feel more comfortable looking at that data and pinpointing the needs of their students. They know, based on the training, that if the DIBELS data is showing that the kids are really low in phonemic awareness, then I need to do X, Y, and Z, and they're able to group their kids accordingly. Although we don't have the numbers right now because of the hurricane, everything pushed back, one of the great things from the Hub was that, just informing teachers and having them have that eye to look at that data effectively, knowledgeable, and also understand, "Oh, wait, I need to do this, this, and this." And so, that's where they are. And we're just looking forward to seeing the growth at the end of this year.

Jessica Hamman: I think that's sometimes the biggest convincer of how this is working when teachers are able to look at their data and progress monitor and see the changes in their students, it's the most powerful thing. It's the most powerful thing out there.



Adrienne Dowden: It is. And then for them not to be intimidated by it, it's like, "Oh, okay. Great, let me-

Jessica Hamman: This is clues.

Adrienne Dowden: ... its okay." It gives the clues. And I'm okay. They feel confident enough to look at it, discuss it with us, discuss it with TNTP, and say, "Okay, these are some of the things I want to do based on my data." "Hey, this is working". Or, "Hey, this isn't working. I had to change and tweak it." They're comfortable. And that's what we want.

Jessica Hamman: I love it. Well, I'm just thrilled to hear about this work that you guys are doing. I do feel we could talk for another three hours and delve deeper, and hopefully down the road, we get a chance to connect again and hear how this good work is progressing. But until then, thank you for taking the hour to chat with us. And I just really appreciate the work that you're doing.

Jawan Brown-Alexander: Thank you so much for having us.

Nan Sterling: Thank you so much.



Adrienne Dowden: Thank you, very much. Bye, bye.

Jessica Hamman: If you'd like to learn more about the great things happening with New Schools for New Orleans, visit [newschoolsforneworleans.org](http://newschoolsforneworleans.org). You can follow Dr. Brown-Alexander and Nan Sterling on Twitter @NSNO\_NOLA. You can also Adrienne Dowden on Twitter @DowdenA

Speaker 7: 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](http://gleaneducation.com/edleaderspodcast), and access them in the show notes. Bye for now.

Speaker 9: This episode was edited and produced by Nita Cherise.

