Episode 102: Real World Learning in USD 232
Show transcript from May 17, 2023

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00:00:01,799 --> 00:00:04,989
This is what's new in 232 podcast edition.

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00:00:05,000 --> 00:00:09,649
A place for news information and discussion with interesting topics and guests.

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I'm Alvie Cater and over the next 15 minutes or so,

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we will discuss real world learning and it is a term that we've been using across the system with our board of education and with our families.

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00:00:28,819 --> 00:00:33,119
And uh before we start talking about real world learning,
don't say that too fast.

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I'm going to introduce our guest that we have with us this morning.

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00:00:37,610 --> 00:00:40,790
So I'd like to say hello to Doctor Cindy Schwartz.

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00:00:41,299 --> 00:00:41,950
Good morning.

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00:00:41,959 --> 00:00:42,590
How are you?

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00:00:42,599 --> 00:00:43,310
I'm doing well,

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00:00:43,319 --> 00:00:47,689
Cindy and tell us a little bit about what you do and uh how long you've been with us?

14
00:00:48,290 --> 00:00:55,709
I am the career and technical education coordinator for the district and this is my 16th year in USD 232.
Well,

we're looking forward to hearing what you have to share with us today and then uh sitting across from me is Kevin Jeffries.

Hi,

thanks for uh being here today and Alvie,

thanks for including me in this.

Um I am the real world learning business to education coordinator for the district.

I've been with us just a little under a year.
And,

uh,

prior to that I'd been,

uh,

the Chamber of Commerce executive in Leawood for almost 24 years was a banker.

Was a CPA,

was an urban planner,
done a lot of varied business things over the years.

Well,

I, and I think your background is really critical to what we're gonna be talking about today.

So we'll come back to that.

And uh our final guest with us today is Dr Joe Kelly.

Good morning.
Uh Pleasure to be here uh And excited to talk about real world learning.

Uh I am the director of secondary Curriculum and instruction for the district.

Uh I manage resources uh and I help teachers with anything that they need in the district to help kids.

So real world learning,

it is something that a lot of districts uh especially here in the Kansas City Metro are using and our families are going to hear a lot about this in the coming years,

but really to understand and define what that is.

We,
we need to take a step back and go to sort of the foundation for all of this and that is work based learning.

And with that,

I'm gonna turn it over to Doctor Schwartz.

All right.

Thank you.

Uh We started our workplace learning initiative um about three or four years ago,
there was a grant opportunity that was available and I talked to the superintendent about whether or not we wanted to take on this initiative because it was just a pilot opportunity.

And we were accepted.

We were one of um five school districts in Kansas who were piloting this, this opportunity.

It was a three year grant and the whole purpose was to support the Kansans Can initiative.

So we had um focus on career awareness at the elementary level,
career exploration at the middle school level and then uh career preparation at the high school level.

And so all of those,

we had leveled committees just to help out to make sure that everyone was aware.

Uh The committee is really focused on sharing with each other,

which was uh a really great opportunity just to have everybody um sharing what they learned,

especially when it came time to then merge into real role learning.

OK.
So with that framework in place,

uh uh there's this uh organization known as the Kauffman Foundation here in Kansas City and the Kauffman Foundation really got behind uh this,

this concept of real world learning.

And uh in fact,

we are participating in one of the cohorts for that.

Is that correct?

That is correct.
We are and we um same actually,

same uh starting point,

we had to get support from the superintendent,

support from our Board of Education.

And then that led us to kind of where we are now with that,

uh,

we should talk about how this fits in then to what we want from our schools.

And,
and that's kind of goes back to the redesign,

uh from uh the state level uh of how we educate students.

And so I'm gonna turn it over to Doctor Joe Kelly to help us with that.

Thank you.

So,

uh,
several years ago,

Doctor Watson,

who is the Commissioner of Education in the State of Kansas,

uh did a tour,

a listening tour uh across the state,

uh and found out that a,

a lot of our communities and businesses wanted schools to help students understand the importance of soft skills,
uh being able to communicate clearly showing up on time being responsible.

Uh and one of the ways uh that uh we've come together to uh help students do that is uh providing them more opportunities to learn more about the workplace,

uh identify what they're interested in what they have an aptitude for and what they can earn a living uh at doing uh in the future.

And so getting kids out and connecting them with uh businesses and helping them understand the importance of uh you know,

those soft skills has been an emphasis uh in public schools across the state for several years.

We also look at um making sure that every student who graduates from us D 232 uh is prepared to go to college.
But we also know that they don't necessarily need to go to college,

they can uh achieve other certifications uh and find meaningful uh and valuable career options.

And uh so talk a little bit about the success rate that ties into this uh whole real world learning concept,

right?

So the state defines a success as a student completing two years of post secondary study,

uh or earning a professional certification.

Uh And so those are the ways that we are measuring it currently in our district.

Uh And really a goal of ours is to improve that every single year.
So that students can basically get a uh into a position where they are, are earning a livable wage uh and contributing to society and something that they're interested in doing.

So we're gonna come back to that, that concept of helping students figure out what it is they'd like to do.

Uh But when we look at um the success rate uh and, and helping students be successful post education here at us D 232,
we have to connect students to their interests.

And so Kevin,

that's where you uh have played an important role this school year,

I've been really pleased to kind of help with our district's mission,

you know,

maximizing each student's success and,

and how they uh become self sufficient.
And so I was also when I was at the Chamber of Commerce involved in a program through the University of Kansas, their Edwards campus to talk to them with other businesses about what do businesses need.

And these to echo what Doctor Kelly said,

these soft skills are important.

So we as a business community are very aware of how important that is.

And so what I've used done is use my business connect.

I've gathered over the years to help connect students with opportunities to learn more about it.
And I've done it at a variety of grade levels and age levels and try and make it appropriate for what that age level needs.

So they can learn about a career as an engineer or maybe working in a machine shop.

There's so many different things kids can do and we wanna try and match them with what their interests are.

So now we're gonna get down to some of the practical things of this R W L because it's easier to say that real world learning.

Uh But what does it look like in our schools?

And I think I'm gonna uh pitch it over to the doctor because she's been really involved.
going back to the framework of work based learning and now that it's evolved into real world learning.

So talk uh uh a little bit about what we can see uh as we go through the levels.

So as we go through the levels,

uh we can really see a lot of those essential workplace skills um kind of it,

it takes me back to if you've ever seen the,

the sunflower that,

that the Kansas State Department has,
that advertises C T E and there's a sunflower for each of the levels.

So I went to ce career and technical education.

And the sunflower in the middle of the sunflower is the essential workplace skills,

um which is all of your,

you know,

communication,

problem solving,
collaboration,

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willingness to learn.

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Um And then ultimately,

00:08:28,420 --> 00:08:32,539
that ties into K S D E s Kansans can outcomes.

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So the Kansas State Department of Education and their outcomes um and they are a part of our US D 232 portrait of a graduate which soon we will unveil.

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Uh We did a lot with all of these different levels.

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Um They each have their career fairs.
We've,

157
00:08:49,408 --> 00:08:51,838
we've done a lot to really help uh you know,

158
00:08:51,848 --> 00:08:55,679
support our student interests and what some of those activities are.

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00:08:55,689 --> 00:08:56,088
So,

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00:08:56,098 --> 00:09:03,838
uh our most recent example was uh at Stars Side Elementary uh which is one of seven elementary
schools that we have here in US D 232,

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00:09:03,848 --> 00:09:06,958
they had a career on Wheels Day.

162
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Uh But that,

163
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that simple concept of exposing students to a variety of careers is an example of that career exploration that's happening at the elementary level.

And then as we cycle up into middle school and high school,

now we're looking at individual plans of study and Doctor Kelly,

you want to talk a little bit about that,

how that ties into real world learning,

right.

You know,
and we're fortunate at the middle level to actually have 1/5 core class.

So we usually look at four cores English math or studies and science.

Uh but we were able to add a class called pathways.

Uh and in the pathways class,

students are able to explore their,

what they have an aptitude for and look at possible jobs uh in the current market uh through the pathways course curriculum.

Uh And they use a platform called Ze O to do all,
all of this exploration and they create an electronic portfolio uh that includes a resume uh and uh some of their interests and skills and communications to businesses who may be interested in uh employing them in the future.

And so the idea is that uh when uh I finish eighth grade as a student,

uh and I'm going to start my freshman year,

what does my individual plan to study look like at that point?

So,

at that point,

uh you know,
we're not asking students to um commit to uh four years,

but they have a plan at least.

Uh And so that plan can change through the years.

Uh But when they start as a freshman,

they know uh they have an idea of what their course load will look like for all four years.

And so that ties in into our C T E which is career technical education pathways that we have the course offerings that we have.

So,
a student,

Dr Schwartz will then have an idea of which path they want to take by the time they're, a junior and a senior in high school.

Is that correct?

Exactly.
Yeah,

it's really nice just to have those opportunities,

you know,

within the high school that students can experiment on what they feel is best for them.

Um,

just to kind of help them with their career journey.

So uh just to recap,
we're talking about uh at the most basic level at the elementary uh exposing students to a variety of jobs and careers,

uh things that they may not have known about.

Uh because as you know,

that sometimes we,

we know about jobs and careers because of relatives or something that we see on television.

Uh but this idea of,

of bringing in the community uh engaging with our students really sets the,
the stage or the creates that foundation for middle school and then high school that gets us to uh job shadows internships and client connected projects.

And that essentially is real world learning right there.

So, um talk to uh let's actually kick it over to Doctor Swartz again who's done a lot of work in that area.

Yeah, it's really important for our students to uh experiment and kind of basically try on a career before they spend a lot of money on a college.
Education and then get there and realize,

oh,

this is not what I want to do.

And so having these opportunities and connections to business and industry are going to be vital to us.

Um especially we tried out one just recently,

there's a pilot,

we tried it in our English 12 classes.
And uh Kevin Jeffries and I are,

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are really thankful that we,

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you know,

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had two teachers who were willing to do this.

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But a client connected project is something where exactly like it sounds.

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Uh the students are solving a problem that the client has and the client brings the problem to us and the students work in groups to try and figure it out and then present their findings at the end after they've done some research.

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And so this took us through uh almost a whole semester of the students really working on the problem together and trying to solve it.
But I know that sounds really simple.

It does take a lot of set up.

Um We had some other companies involved that help us with professional development.

Our students didn't understand,

especially um English 12 students,

they didn't understand how to use design thinking.

And so we brought in an outside company to help us give professional development to the students and the teacher just so they understood that process of kind of going through the problem solving process and what do you do with that?
Uh But the set up of this.

Um it was so important to have Kevin Jeffrey's position because if we didn't have him um opportunities like this would not be available.

So I will say that uh the Coffin Foundation uh is underwriting uh the funding so that we can have Kevin Jeffries here with us.

So,

uh Kevin tie into uh um uh everything that you're doing when it comes to job shadows,

internships and client connected projects.

Well,
you know,

one of the things I think has been most interesting too for the students is to learn how to interface with the business.

That's something that I think that in normal classroom study,

you don't learn about how to communicate by email,

how to set up appointments,

how to,

you know,
present information to a business and that,

you know,

businesses may not be sitting there waiting for you to,

to schedule an appointment with them,

they have other things they're doing every day.

And if you're an extra project,

you're just like one of their departments and you have to think ahead plan your appointments with them.
And so I think this has been a very valuable skill for our students to see this year is that,

that is how business works.

So then when they go out in the workplace,

ey'll be aware of that.

And even our middle schoolers too,

you were talking about the things they might not have thought of before.

I think that's been a very interesting part.
Of it too is like I was helped being with some mock interviews with some middle school students and they were wanting to go down a certain career path,

but the career they wanted to follow and the job they wanted at the end didn't necessarily match with their educational goals.

So again,

drives us an opportunity using these pathways,

classes in the middle school to help kids kind of understand what they need to do to get there.

So give me some examples of some of the companies in the Kansas City area that are working with our students.
we've been very fortunate that a lot of great companies,

well known ones and some maybe not so well known ones have uh helped us with these projects.

You know,

of course,

we've all heard of Black and Beach and Advent Health and uh now known as Oracle um have have worked with this GB A.

Uh but we also had some kind of ones you might not have thought of normally like the Kansas grade Grain and Feed Association up in Topeka worked with us on a project uh AAA Party rental.
They helped us on some things.

Um you know,

a small American family insurance agency here in Shawnee in the Shawnee area actually helped us with something we've worked with Merck.

I mean,

again,

we've had some really,

we had a young young person work with finite element analysis 3D,
which is a small engineering firm.

So we've had a lot of different kinds of opportunities for the students.

And again,

I've been very fortunate or we've been fortunate that we've not only used my network,

but I've used the network of all the other educators and administrators here in the district to really build on this program and help it continue to grow.
I believe what I'm hearing is real world learning is just that it, it's taking some real world problems, having our students get involved and help solve those problems.

And along the way, they're learning all these valuable skills that's going to help them in their future.

So, what is the ultimate objective?

And so Doctor Kelly,
um I think that kind of ties into our vision and mission for the school district.

It does and I think it,

it helps students uh connect with their futures.

Uh And uh you know,

in order to do that,

we have to think outside the box uh in ways that we may not have considered before.

Uh and that's where innovation comes into play.
And that's why teachers are such an important part of this process, as are the businesses that we are partnering with.

And what's really neat is we have a lot of parents who are employed outside the home and they have been more than willing to come into our classrooms and help get involved in this important thing that we call Real World Learning.

Well, thank you, Doctor Kelly.

I believe that's all the time we have for this episode of What's new 232 podcast edition.
I do want to thank our guests for being here today.

Thank you,

Doctor Schwartz.

Thank you so much.

And Kevin Jeffries,

glad to be here.

And once again,
thank you,

Doctor Kelly.

Thank you.

Uh We are going to have some information in our show notes uh for you to learn more about real world learning.

We're just scratching the surface.

Uh a couple of organizations uh websites that you can check out would be one real world learning 10.0 R G and of course,
D 232.0 R G slash R W L.

And again,

we're gonna put this information in our show notes.

All right,

that's it for now.

Until next time.

This is what's new in 232 podcast edition.