



MILES: Hi everybody! Welcome back to our returning listeners, and welcome if it's your first time listening.

SHARON: Yeah, we are thrilled you are here listening to our fifth episode of the Lion Pride-Cast, a podcast created by the Lansing Unified School District 469 located in Lansing, KS.

MILES: The purpose of this podcast is to inform our Lansing stakeholders, being our community members, students, and staff about all things education. We are your hosts. I'm Miles Azzeh, Director of Teaching and Learning in Lansing USD469.

SHARON: And I am Sharon Burns, the Director of Communications and Marketing. So, during our last episode, we interviewed our Intermediate School principal Mr. Martin Altieri. We learned how to say his name during that episode.

MILES: You said it right there, good job.

SHARON: Yes, so for today's episode I'm gonna put miles here on the hot seat. Yes, I am.

MILES: I'm nervous. I'm nervous. Martin Martin killed it last time.

SHARON: He did. You're gonna have to bring it. So I want you to focus on a few topics that you are passionate about. We've talked about this, but

MILES: The Chiefs. Yankees? Oh no, not sports.

SHARON: Education.

MILES: Oh yeah, this is that podcast, isn't it?

SHARON: OK, yeah. Before we get started with that, could you share a little bit about your background since our audience doesn't know much about you? I know they got to know me in Episode 3, so now it's your turn. So, tell them about your background and how you ended up here in the wonderful Lansing USD 469.

MILES: Sure, and now I'm even more nervous because Martin was last time, and he did fantastic. And now it's me being interviewed, and you did very well - we got a lot of positive feedback. Thank you very much to our listeners who reached out, and so

SHARON: And Dr. Penrose - don't forget Alan. You're gonna make Alan mad.

MILES: Which one's Dr. Penrose? No, I'm just kidding. Alan, you did well. You did well. You're top three- you're top three so far. There's only been three. And so a little bit about me- it's my second year in Lansing. I love it here - amazing colleagues to work with, great people.

SHARON: Thank you.

MILES: Yeah, amazing colleagues at all the buildings. Just kidding- you Sharon, you're great. Everybody here at district office has been amazing, and I love our students. You know I think that it's cliched, but we have the best students- we have the best students. Our kids are out of this world. Sorry to other district kids listening right now. So, my background. I started my career in the Kansas City, KS School District. I was a teacher at Washington High School. I was an English teacher, and I really enjoyed it, and during my tenure there I had a chance to be a reading interventionist and toward the end after I got my masters degrees, my first one being in literature - liberal arts and literature, it opened the door for me to teach the dual credit lit and comp one/ comp two classes, so that was fantastic. I got to teach all those courses, and to this day I'm still adjuncting at the Community College, so that was great and then I was approached about applying for an instructional coach position, so I did. And honored enough that they gave me the position, and I started working at FL Schagle High School also in KCK and that's probably where I realized how much I love education, like I really have a passion for it. I knew I liked learning. I knew I liked teaching, but those two years of Schagle really opened my eyes, plus the amount of professional development and relationships I made were great and an opportunity opened for me to move to the district where I live in actually - Piper - to be a secondary instructional coach. They'd never had an instructional coach, so I applied, and I was the secondary instructional coach there for two years after Schagle, and honestly was doing great there and learning so much, but I got so lucky that this position opened up, and I'm honored, like I said, that I'd be able to join the ranks here. It's been it's been fantastic.

SHARON: Yes, we love having you here. Miles has been a very positive vibe here in the district office and the district as a whole, so thank you. Thank you for choosing Lansing.

MILES: No, that's that's my pleasure.

SHARON: So, yeah - I'm hoping everyone listened to our last podcast with Martin, and if you haven't I hope you'll go back and listen when we're done. Finish this episode.

MILES: Yeah, listen to me first.

SHARON: But then yeah go back and listen to Martin, but Miles referenced a book titled Focus during that episode, and I know he has recommended all of our admin read it, which they are doing.

MILES: We are doing a book study on it.

SHARON: So, was this book recommended to you or how did you find it? How did you stumble upon it?

MILES: I actually, yeah, I didn't stumble upon it. Luckily my quasi mentor, he is a friend of mine, but I call him my mentor. He was my first instructional coach, Joe Graham, Dr. Joe Graham- he's the principal,

SHARON: I've heard a lot about him.

MILES: Yeah, I love him. He's the principal at John Fiske Elementary in KCK. If I didn't have him as a mentor... if I didn't have him as an instructional coach... I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt I wouldn't be who I am today. He's brilliant, and I've learned so much from him, and he told me about Mike Schmoker's Focus mainly because I was getting so worked up about initiatives and things on my plate and what to do, and he told me to take a deep breath, and he told me about Mike Schmoker's Focus and to read the book. His principal, Joe's principal before I came, he wasn't the principal when I was there, was a real big fan. If you think I'm a big fan, this guy was a huge fan of Mike Schmoker. He literally flew him out, picked him up at the airport, and had him come to the school for like PD days. I wish I would have been able to be there for that, but Mike Schmoker's Focus- yeah, I read it once a year, and it's fantastic.

SHARON: Can you elaborate a little bit about what its premise is?

MILES: Yeah, yeah, a quick summary is that it's all centered around the notion that we have strayed away from what works in public education- what works in learning and there really, there should- we need to focus on the three major things - the first one being a clear and concise curriculum. The second one being sound instructional strategies that are affected, and the third one being authentic literacy. It's probably one I love the most. The idea of reading, writing, and speaking, and listening in all disciplines to make us better readers, writers, critical thinkers, speakers, debaters and so yeah that's that's what it's all about and I've really been trying to make that happen here. The first one - the clear and concise curriculum - that's the GVC work that we've been doing.

SHARON: Yeah, can you go into what that is?

MILES: Yea, yeah. Sometimes we get caught up in these acronyms, I forget not everybody knows them.

SHARON: Us n non educators.

MILES: Absolutely. It's fun stuff, well I don't know if its fun stuff, but people are like Oh, yeah that makes sense. It's another acronym, but it actually is a good one. A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum means that every kid will learn the standards, the skills that need to be taught during that class or in that course or whatever it may be- that's the guaranteed part. So, there's no more of that teacher lottery that we hear about. Every kid is getting what they deserve. The

second one is the viable part, that a teacher can teach everything in a calendar year or in a school year that is on the pacing guide or in the curriculum. You'd be amazed how many times I've talked to teachers and they're like, well I would love to teach that or get to that, but I'm sorry I ran out of time, the pacing guide is too big. We gotta change our pacing guide then, we gotta prioritize because its obviously not viable. So I really love that viable part, and teachers really love that too because they're always talking about there's too much, there's too much, and there is. There are too many standards - we have way more standards than we did 30 years ago and I'm not anti-standards at all -it's great, but sometimes I think that if we keep adding, what happens is that we're doing a quantity over quality kind of thing and that's never good for kids

SHARON: Right.

MILES: So that's the GVC type of work and thanks to the help of my instructional coaches and the teachers, we are getting pretty close to having a K12 GVC. That's the goal by the end of year is to have everything laid out on the website. Thanks to you for putting it on the website for me for K5, and we'll be good.

SHARON: Right, love it. OK. So one thing that my family has benefited from is the concept of recreational reading or the importance of it. So, I have a fifth grader, Brooks. Miles brought the sustained silent reading initiative last school year - it's called DIRT, daily independent reading time. Brooks loves it, and Brooks also loves getting shout outs so this is another episode we're talking –

MILES: 2 for 2

SHARON: I think it's 3 for 3 now. But yeah, can you talk about that? Can you talk about the recreational reading and why it's so important?

MILES: Yeah.

SHARON: What it is you know, DIRT.

MILES: Yeah, I think one of the best things that I've ever and the reason I love it so much is - I'm a reader, and a lot of people are - they don't – they might say they're not readers and stuff, and I get that, but I'm a reader, and I wouldn't be who I was if I wasn't a reader. There's a quote by Jacques Jacques Barzun, he's like a is a French American historian and author and it says -

SHARON: Jacques Barzun.

MILES: Jacques Barzun.

SHARON: Barzun. OK.

MILES: I don't know if I'm saying it right.

SHARON: Okay - It sounded good.

MILES: I know the quote, that's why I like it. yeah yeah I'm saying it right.

SHARON: okay.

MILES: I'm French. No, I'm just kidding, I don't know. "No subject of study is more important than reading. All other intellectual powers depend on it." I always come back to my dad. My dad doesn't like to read fiction, but he loves to read nonfiction. My dad is brilliant. He is a super smart guy. My mom is brilliant. And the reason they're both so smart is they're avid readers. Once again, my mom's the fictional reader. She's like me. I'm a fiction person, but it doesn't really matter, because the more you read, the more you're exposed to vocab, the more you're exposed to background knowledge, the more you can build up something called schema and it's just fascinating to me, and I want our kids to have that. Because you if you know if you think about it- you've never met somebody, I always like to say this and I'm a Harry Potter nerd, so I'm allowed to say it, like you never meet really like a stupid Harry Potter fan, you know what I mean? Like you never meet somebody who's like not you know able to handle something or do well on an assessment, you know, whatever it may be, if they're an avid reader. So I really want that to happen, and I just love the idea of our kids loving reading and that's the years that matter- 4th, 5th 6th, 7th - kids lose their love of reading during those years. Research shows that 15 to 30 minutes a day of recreational reading will give you like thousands more words a year, much higher chance on state assessments, higher earning potential, literally life expectancy is longer because what usually happens is you earn more, so you have access to healthcare all these kind of things. I do want to make a note though with the reading just because I'm - somebody might be listening to me and not really sure - there's more to it than just saying here's a book, kid. Read.

SHARON: I was gonna go into that too.

MILES: Sorry.

SHARON: No, no, no. I was going to ask you to elaborate on that piece.

MILES: It's much like when we take our kids to the library, you know, and there's a parent listening right now, there's a teacher listening right now, and they love their own child, and they took them to the library when they were four or five years old. You didn't just walk the kid to the kids area and walk away. You talked to them about the different books. You showed them maybe like Moe Williams or whatever it may be and you talked about your favorite books. It's those things. You made sure that it was age appropriate. You were making sure that you scaffold it like you read a little bit and then released the kid if they could and if the child is two years old and they can't read you probably read to them. So when I say recreational reading, I do think sometimes I have to be aware of this and make sure I explain it. They're not just giving

a kid a book. You're finding the right book in the right hand. You want the kid to be engaged. You want the kid to say I want this book.

SHARON: Right.

MILES: And then you confer with them. You don't need to do anything deep, what's your book about? Do you like it? What's happening? And I have no problem saying this- I adopted this about my second or third to last year at Washington, because I really got into reading and I hated that my kids hated reading because we were reading the same text from 1944, and then some of those - the canon's wonderful, don't get me wrong, but my kids weren't reading. They were either Spark noting or not reading. And so a colleague of mine and I went through a class, and we were like, why don't we give him some YA novels, and why don't we do a Lit circle? Why don't we have them do like a book club essentially. Kids were like stealing books from my class. My principal was getting frustrated 'cause I kept asking for money every year. I'm like I'm sorry I can't make them so I'm sorry they stole *The Uglies* it's a really good book apparently, my bad. And that's what it was. It showed me like you give kids the right book, they're going to want to read. So that's what we need. We need kids to choose their own books. We need to make it engaging. We need to just give them time. That's how they become better readers plus they'll be better writers

SHARON: Right.

MILES: I better stop 'cause I will talk about this for an hour, so all I'm saying is

SHARON: I can speak for Brooks. I kept trying to pick out different books for him and then he kept going back reading about just different NFL teams. He kept picking those books, and I was like, you know what? That's what he loves. That's not what I would pick, but you know what? Good on ya' dude. Love it. Yeah. So he reads them all the time and he loves it so-

MILES: And I mean, I know somebody will be, Well, what grade level is it on? Sure, sure. If a fifth grader, Brooks is in fifth grade.

SHARON: Yes.

MILES: If he's reading a kindergarten level, let's have a conversation.

SHARON: Right.

MILES: If Brooks is trying to read an 11th grade book and he can't understand it we gotta have a conversation. But if a kid engages in a book that's at his level, his or her level, or maybe a little bit less or a little bit higher, it's okay. Just let the kid get it. Because what happens is you enjoy it. It's like working out.

SHARON: Right.

MILES: It's like whatever it is. If you wanna get healthier, you wanna workout more - go workout more. You wanna be a better reader, read more. It's pretty easy. So let's read more.

SHARON: That's great. We get started on that topic.

MILES: OK. I'm done.

SHARON: So now that we know a little bit about your background. We know how passionate you are about recreational reading- for sure about that.

MILES: I would say so. Yeah a little bit.

SHARON: So now let's delve into a topic that you and I have actually discussed on multiple occasions, and that's actually important in all facets of life, but we're going to talk about here in education and particularly with students, and it's building relationships. So it's the importance of relationships- in this case with students and teachers. So can you talk about the importance of building relationships and then how that effects things like grades, truancy, behavior, all those things? Can you talk about that?

MILES: Yeah, absolutely. I hate to keep talking about my own time in the classroom, but I think that's when we learn from things. I came from a much different background- a much different school than the first school I taught at, Washington High School. I grew up, I lived when we moved out here I went to high school in the Blue Valley School District, and so Washington High School is not the same as Blue Valley High School. So I think I had this idea of what a classroom was supposed to be like and how a teacher was supposed to be like based on what I had. Not to say that I was mean, 'cause I'm just not naturally that kind of person. I'm a pretty, I'd like to think I'm a nice, kind, approachable human.

SHARON: Right.

MILES: But I definitely had, for awhile, the idea of like, I'm the boss. You want respect? Well then you better respect me first, and I learned pretty quickly that doesn't work. And people that think that works- it typically doesn't work. If it does work it's just because the kid's, like I'm not gonna put up the fight, but you're not building an authentic relationship. What I really realized was it's OK to show a little respect to kids. It's OK to treat them kindly and like they're humans even though they're only 16 and then frankly what I realized was like, just be yourself with them. Like, ask them about themselves like you would a friend or a colleague. Ask them what they like and what they care about. There's a Ted talk that I love - I referenced it, last year we watched it as a district. I sent it out during Pride Press. Shout out to Brooks Jenkins who showed it to the middle school. It's Rita Pierson's Teach Like a Champion.

SHARON: Yes. Did you? Mighta been one you had me watch.

MILES: I may have, I may have, and there's this one part, it's pretty short and I would recommend everybody to watch it, where she says kids don't learn from people they don't like or from teachers they don't like, and ya know I know some people, I always bring this up, some people are like "that's not true. when I was in college I had a physics professor that was awful." It's like - stop talking. Like we're not talking about that. You paid for that class. You were 20 years old. Stop. Stop. I'm talking about when you're 8. And if you don't like your teacher, you have a less chance of learning. There's research that shows that- especially the younger the kid is' It's, like I said, your gonna have a 17 year old that is gonna be fine with not liking a teacher and they'll just put their head down because they can't wait to get accepted to some college and they know they got to maintain their GPA, but I will tell you I think the learning is probably still less in there as well. Building those connections, building those relationships, breaking away from the mantra, which I really have to say I don't think our teachers have here. I'm so proud of us. Like, don't smile till Christmas. It's easier to be lenient than be strict. Yeah, like stop. Those were old nonsense things from a long time ago. Get rid of that. Instead, be kind. Be genuine. Be jovial. You're gonna get a couple knuckleheads in your class. Just deescalate it. You don't argue with them. You show them that you care and chances are it'll be what happened to me at Washington, which was kids started to not only like me more but like my class more and I saw something that I sometimes see in my own kids. Max and Ava. There's my shout out.

SHARON: Yay!

MILES: Which is, I'm sorry this is not much of shout out, it's gonna get dark for a minute, not dark, but sad. Like, I can tell like the disappointment they have when they disappoint me or how upset they get, and not disappointed, it doesn't happen a lot. I'm like a pushover because I love them so much. But what I'm saying is that my students when I would not get mad but be like, why did you do that in class today? Why did you say that to me or to that kid when you know that I don't stand for that in here? I treat you with respect so where did that come from? And the crestfallen look on their face I'm telling you and it's like, that's because and then staying like I think we're good. I think we're good, and I don't think you meant it. So if you could say sorry, I think we can move on, and they'll immediately say sorry, we fist bump, and we're back inside. Like that's the thing that gets them learning. That's the thing and yeah, it's complex. I'm not trying to say kids are easy 'cause they're not. I taught at schools that I could tell they were not, but I do think that if you can try to connect with them genuinely treat them with respect, fairness, and kindness - a lot of times

SHARON: Kindness. That was my "This I believe."

MILES: That was your thing. That was your this I believe, that's right. Yeah.

SHARON: Episode 1.

MILES: That was episode 1.

SHARON: Yeah. You have to listen to that one. No, I completely hear. I agree with you. It's kind of my parenting style too.

MILES: We are aligned on that one.

SHARON: Right, right.

MILES: Sorry kids. Or you're welcome kids.

SHARON: Yeah, yeah. You're welcome. So now we're gonna do something fun. So we went through the question parts that you know our standard questions but now we're going to go back to something we ask each of our guests. You asked me as well. So we're gonna give you a choice of questions

MILES: of the four questions.

SHARON: Yeah, you have four questions, and you can choose one. So I'm going to read them here. So you can choose 1. Tell us the funniest story about yourself as a high school student. So give some examples - that could be like a senior prank like what Martin Altieri did.

MILES: That was a good one.

SHARON: Yes. You could tell us the most embarrassing thing that happened to you in school. You could talk to us about the meanest teacher you had and why- which is what I did. Miss Pfanenstiel.

MILES: Oh yeah. I was going to ask what her name is.

SHARON. Pfanenstiel.

MILES: If she's listening, she's probably listening to this crying.

SHARON: Yeah, no. I doubt it. She was she was quite old, and I was in first grade and I'm not a spring chicken. I won't say exactly. OK. So lastly what was the most important trouble you got into as a high school student. I'm sorry.

MILES: We got dark there.

SHARON: Yeah, we did. We did. I'm sorry. I'm hoping just yeah.

MILES: Sorry Miss Pfanenstiel if you're still alive.

SHARON: She's not.

MILES: I like how you are so sure. You don't know.

SHARON: She'd be like 120. OK. OK. so OK. So choose. And then the last one was trouble you got what was the most trouble you got into.

MILES: OK. You know what? I'm gonna, I'm going to, I'm gonna go with, and I think it's because it's perfect to talk about here, I'm gonna link it to what we were just talking about with relationships. It's amazing how we forget. I'm sorry we don't forget and we remember even more sometimes than our best teachers are mean teachers.

SHARON: Yep.

MILES: And I got one.

SHARON: OK, you got one too.

MILES: I'm gonna go with the mean teacher. Second grade. Little 8 year old Miles. We actually were living overseas at the time. My dad got a job over there and we moved over there and were living in Saudi Arabia, and there was a family tragedy, and we had to come back. And so we came back to the East Coast, and we were living there for a while, and you've got to go to school, and so they enrolled me in school, and I feel like I mean it was a long time ago, obviously. So I wanna say it was like winter-ish, maybe like February/ March, and I'm in school, and they put me with a lady. Mrs. Henderson.

SHARON: Oh. I can tell by the look on your face.

MILES: Yeah. I like how you seem like you're upset with just the name, but like, yes.

SHARON: But like your face!

MILES: Yes yes yes. I'm actually about to start crying.

SHARON: The pain.

MILES: I know. I'm about to start crying 'cause I'm reliving the memories. She was, she was so mean. I still remember one time- I said good morning, Mrs Henderson. She said, "what's good about it." I was like, what the heck was that? Who says that to an 8 year old, and I still remember going to another teacher. This was back like early 90s where they had like that really big like open concept thing in schools, if you remember. And I like walked up to a teacher, another teacher in another class. She just seemed really nice. I would like tugged on her skirt and I was like can you be my teacher, just like literally. And she was like, "Oh no! Let me walk you back." I'm like, "no please. don't. No no no! And she like walked back and I still remember Mrs. Henderson was like. "Oh, where did you go off too?" and then it like turned. She's a liar. She's just - so anyway. She was so mean to me. I don't know if it was because I was new. I don't

know if she- I don't know. She just didn't like me. And, for the record, I know people who are probably listening are like, "well, if you act like you act now, you're probably all over the place. Just so you know, I was actually a very good student about this stuff. I sat there. I did what I needed to do, but yeah, Mrs. Henderson. I almost –

SHARON: She did not build that relationship with you.

MILES: No. and you know what? Maybe I should thank her though because that's why number one I think I'm a nice kind person.

SHARON: OK.

MILES: I believe in building relationships and not treating anybody badly.

SHARON: You learned how not to be!

MILES: Yes, she was a good non-example. Exactly, and maybe that's why I'm in public education.

SHARON: OK.

MILES: Because I mean nothing hurts me more than the idea. yeah putting a positive spin on this.

SHARON: Yeah.

MILES: She still was terrible though, and even if it was like she still owes me like therapy for something. I need backpay to go see somebody about it.

SHARON: That's great.

MILES: Yep, that was that was Ms. Henderson. Worst teacher ever. 2nd grade.

SHARON: I don't like ending it on a negative note, but I do feel like you put a positive spin so we're gonna - I think that's gonna wrap up this fifth episode.

MILES: I can't believe it.

SHARON: You did a great job.

MILES: Thank you. I don't know if I'm as good as you and Martin and Dr Penrose.

SHARON: Yes.

MILES: Top three. But you know why do you think?

SHARON: What?

MILES: I think Becky Jones has got some work. She better be ready. She's on deck.

SHARON: Next episode. Two weeks from now. So that's it. So as always, for more updates and stories on Lansing USD 469 you can visit us at www.usd469.net and if you haven't already download the free Lansing USD 469 mobile app on Apple and Android. The app allows you to be the first to know about all the fantastic things happening in our district.

MILES: Such as snow days.

SHARON: Such as being the first to know about snow days, and they're coming. They're coming.

MILES: It's gonna be a little chilly tonight, I heard.

SHARON: I know. I don't think it's snow, but it could happen.

MILES: If you like our content and want to stay up to date on our latest episodes, please follow us wherever you're listening to us, and leave a review to help others find us and learn more about our great amazing district.

SHARON: We are streaming on - Are you ready? I gotta list here. I added more to it. We're on Apple Podcast, Spotify, Google Podcast, Amazon Music, YouTube, SoundCloud, IHeartRadio, Stitcher, and Castbox.

MILES: I didn't even know Castbox existed.

SHARON: It's a thing, and we're on it.

MILES: Are you just putting things on here.

SHARON: I am not. I promise. Look it up. You're welcome, Castbox.

MILES: Castbox, they're like, "grrr. The nerve of that guy. Get the lawyers ready. I'm small time, buddy. Don't waste your money. Tf you would like to be a guest on the podcast or provide a topic for upcoming podcasts, please send an e-mail to sharon.burns@usd469.net. By the way, I think I didn't mess up anything with emails.

SHARON: It is a miracle.

MILES: Website.

SHARON: It is a mirable. I'm proud of you.

MILES: I don't know if you call it a miracle. That's a little bold. That's a little bit much to calling it a mirable.

SHARON: OK, that is a wrap on episode number 5.

MILES: Five. Thanks for listening. Bye, everybody!

SHARON: Bye.