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00:00 Hi, everybody. Welcome back to our returning listeners. And welcome if this is your first time listening. We're so happy to have you here with us today. Thank you for joining us for the first episode of season two of The Lion Pride Cast, a podcast created by the Lansing Unified School District 469 located in Lansing, Kansas. Sharon, can you believe it? We are at season two. I know. Do you remember what I said early on of last year of season one? That we would never make it. Yeah, I was like, I think it was like season episodes too much.

00:30 Yeah. Oh, yeah. No, that happened. I was, but it was episode three. And I was like, I can't believe we got here. 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 host. I am Miles Azzeh, Director of Teaching and Learning in Lansing, USD 469. And I am Sharon Burns, the Director of Communications and Marketing. So first, I just want to start by saying it's been an incredibly busy start to the school year. Not that I'm making excuses. Sounds like you're making an excuse.

01:00 As to why this podcast is starting later than we had hoped. It is a little bit later. Over a month later. Okay, don't rub it in, but yeah, it has been a month later. We have had a lot going on this year. We have. And that's kind of how I feel like how this episode is going to go. We're going to talk about all the cool things that's happening. And and but yes, yes. So to our listeners, moms. I'm sure there's tons of tons of them sitting at the edge of their seats waiting. Yes. When is that Lion Pride cast?

01:28 In my opinion, it's yes, it's our moms and Mike Schmoker. I just want to say I'm sorry. Sorry. Mike, please forgive me. Yes. So this episode is going to be a quick reflection on the start of the school year. So we have because we're now over a month in and then we're going to focus on the future. Can you do me a favor? Is it possible we get through this episode without you rubbing that in over and over again? I get it. We've had a lot going on, lots of meetings, lots of newness, so just relax.

01:59 It's never been me looking at Miles saying, so are we going to work on a podcast today? I mean, I never procrastinate, so I don't know what you're talking about. OK. Before we get started, we want to take a moment to thank Lansing Educational Foundation. So if you don't know who Lansing Educational Foundation is, or LEF, if you hear that acronym, they are a fantastic nonprofit who works for the works on behalf of the school district to earn funds and provides grants to the district.

02:28 So we are so very grateful because we got a grant this year. Yes, we did. Yes. Thank you so much. Yes. We're actually using all the equipment. Exactly. So we have new cables. We are going to be able to get a transcript of the podcast now. And we have a Scarlet device, so we don't have to bug Blake Vignery, who has been wonderful at helping us with the audio. We have been bugging him for his equipment. So now he actually helped write the grant too. So now we have two Scarlett devices. Yep, and he can use this one anytime he wants.

02:58 So thank you, LEF. Thank you, thank you, thank you. And if you don't already know, they have a main event 5K coming up in November. And so register for that. You can do that on the website. So I just did a piece on the website about that. And there's got

a couple other things that they do, right? Oh, yeah. They have several events. So they'll have the District Art Showcase in the spring. And they also do the annual breakfast, the honors breakfast, which will be in May. So the things that'll be coming up. So watch the website for that. Yeah, they actually gave out a total of 37, 000, more than 37,000, 37,000.

- 03:29 We have the number here. \$37,306.35 in grants this year. I like to think that I played a role in that. Oh, here we go. Because I was on the board. Well, I wasn't on the board. I was in the, what would you call it like selection committee or the review committee grant committee. They were so nice to ask somebody to go and that person couldn't go and the next three people couldn't go. So I showed up. And then Miles was at the meeting and was texting several people letting them know that was including me that all the grants were getting passed because of him. But something tells me it wasn't all him.
- 04:00 I mean, sure, whatever makes everybody feel better. I'm just kidding. No, no, thank you. We had really good conversations about it. And I gotta tell you, a lot of the grant requests were spot on of what I think the LEFS purpose is when it comes to providing and helping and supporting teachers. And yeah, I'm really happy to be a part of that. Seriously, LEF is fantastic. We did Pride Patrol last week and it was nice to be around so many of them. Yeah. It was a great time. Yes. So jumping right in last spring, we knew a lot of changes were going to take place at the school year.
- 04:30 Some of those were going to be sad and they were. We had to say goodbye to Superintendent Dan Wessel, who the two of us, Miles and I worked very closely with and we're, you know, he we considered him a friend. So it was hard to have that change. Really hard. But it was also exciting with the beginning of our strategic plan, the five year strategic plan, which we're going to talk about a little bit more later. And we had a new superintendent coming in, Marty Cobza, who hopefully if you listened to last season, you got to know him and sees what episode was that?
- 04:59 18, 19? Yeah, yeah. So if you haven't part one and part two. But it's nice to have somebody with a lot of experience coming in. He's had how many years of experience as a superintendent, 26, something like that. I hope I'm not exaggerating. I think you might be exaggerating a tiny bit, but he might know I might be way off. I want to say he's around like 22 to 26 sounds good. Yeah. He's in his 15 57th year of being a superintendent. Yeah, he's yeah, he was actually the first superintendent in America.
- 05:29 So we're in good hands because he actually wrote the book. He actually coined the title Superintendent. Super Marty goes up. Superintendent. Yeah, yeah. No, but he's been great coming in. He has fresh ideas. But it was nerve wracking, you know, having a new leader coming in. Not for me, but yeah. Of course not. Nothing rattles Miles, Asa. A lot rattles, Miles Azzeh, so don't you talking about. Okay. We also took the summer to focus on personal growth.
- 05:56 So we attended USA Kansas to kick off the summer from May 31st to June 2nd. That was Miles, of course, and I and Ascendra Donald, our Director of Student Services. And we had Marty Cobza, our new superintendent attend that as well. So that was in Wichita, and that conference, we had a lot of professional development opportunities, which was great for me because that was actually my first conference as a communications director to get to go to and learn. And it was really eye-opening, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.
- 06:27 And not only did I have those sessions where I learned a lot, but I also had an opportunity to network with other leaders across the state of Kansas. It was amazing. Well, I'm going to give a shout out really quick to Bart Swartz on that one. We've done that a few times. And we'll probably talk about Bart some more executive director of

Greenbush, because he helped to make sure to help with that networking during the time. And he had set up some things. If you don't mind if I go back real quick. Earlier, you talked about being rattled. Of course. Yeah, I wasn't rattled. And and it wasn't that I wasn't rattled because of Marty Marty's awesome.

- 06:58 It's just that if for listeners who listened to last season, he hadn't seen Back to the Future. And that's kind of a big deal to me and my family and the world. So I'm sorry. But I will tell you, even though I have to tell you, you know, I was skeptical. Marty, I was skeptical. And you've proven me wrong. I still think you need to watch Back to the Future, but you proved me wrong. We're going to make that happen. And in case anybody's like, why is that a big deal? His name's Marty. Marty McFly. Hello, hello.
- 07:29 I also had the opportunity, opportunity to attend the nspra Conference this summer in St. Louis. So nspra is the National School Public Relations Association because I can tell Miles is looking at me like, what are you talking about? I was able to attend that. So while you were gone for a while? So my department, it's a one-person department. So it can be kind of isolating at times. And that was a really nice conference to go to because I was with people who do what I do, which I don't have that in my own district on a day-to-day basis.
- 07:57 It's hard for you. It's tough. It's a struggle. Yeah. Well, as your director, I do my best to try to make sure that you're in line. No, it was a great summer, is what I'm saying. So professional. So you feel like you learned a lot this summer. Yes, yes. How about you? Well, kick it off, like lob it up for you. Back to me, huh? Yes. All right, so yes. So first and foremost, I definitely enjoyed going to my first USA, Kansas, learned quite a bit, got to network and got to see people I haven't seen in a while, which was wonderful.
- 08:29 I'm also working on my doctorate. I started it this summer. It's been great. And I've been on top of it. And it's been wonderful. And I'm learning quite a bit. Actually, it's really funny because Dr. Shelley Martin. Oh my God, I hope I didn't get my professor's name wrong, but I'm pretty sure it's Dr. Shelley Martin. She is also not only my professor, it's not Sheila Martin. Now you're making me double. It's Shelly Martin. Any Sherry Martin. Oh, gosh, I'll figure it out. Anyway, whoever it is, Dr. Martin Pitt State is also part of a leadership team at Green Bush and exec team.
- 09:00 And that might not mean a lot to a lot of people. And even for me, at one point, it wouldn't mean a lot except I am also part of the Green Bush exec team. And someone else I know is too. Hmm? Go ahead, this is your chance. It's not my section the entire time. I feel like we're patting ourselves on the back. I'm not, I'm not, I'm not. So last year, I was fortunate enough to go through Leadership to Academy through Green Bush, which is the district training.
- 09:25 And Bart Schwartz, the director, actually with the work that we did with strategic plan and just getting closer to him and the hard work that we've done together and then getting to see him at USA Kansas offered us both eventually for you the opportunity to be part of the Green Bush exec team. And I really appreciate that. So thank you very much, Bart. And that has been great for me. And then really honestly, I've just been super busy doing all these really cool things for our district, because there's been some really cool new things and some new movement.
- 09:56 Even though it's the beginning of the year, I'm great. And we're late because of it. But it's because honestly, we've been up to new things. Mainly because you and I share and have a nickname. I know. What is it? Dynamic duo. Okay, you whispered it like you didn't want anyone to hear, but I'll say it. The dynamic duo, because we take care of stuff, we we come up with stuff. And so I think it's a good time that we talk about our dynamic duo stuff. What kind of stuff have we come up with?

- 10:23 So this past, it was actually in the springtime, we had a brainstorming session, which started as just a few items of us throwing ideas around. Miles is very good at creatively coming up with big ideas, and I'm very good at making those big ideas a reality. Yeah, because I don't follow through with almost and that's not true. I follow through with those big, big, big ideas, I definitely don't follow through as well as I should. So I like to think I'm a visionary. And well, you're you're a visionary, half these things are yours, the podcast is yours.
- 10:53 However, creation, you are very good at. Yeah, so we had a few items that we came up with as ideas that we started brainstorming and those few items grew into a list that filled my entire back whiteboard. And if anybody's been in my office, I have a huge whiteboard. And it is now filled with ideas and action. And it is huge. Like if anybody can come, we might make it our picture this time or something. We'll put it on there, but it is not a small whiteboard, folks. It's a large whiteboard and it is full.
- 11:23 Yeah. And much like our district strategic plan, we had large goal areas that we started with recruitment and retention, internal and external communication. I'm looking at my board right now. Marketing, teaching and learning, and podcast. And what was the last one? Growth mindset. Growth mindset. Yeah. So we start with these big ideas and then we have little action items underneath to make each of those big ideas successful and you know make things happen for the district in a good positive direction, which they always are going, but you know it's nice to have fresh ideas.
- 11:55 So we also have they're color coded. So it's blue and blue and pink. Yes. So blue are all things that are I have to double check new. Double check. So blue, anything on the blue on the board that's blue are things that we like brainstorm thought it would be exciting that we could do. And then pink are things that we are already enacting. But it's really interesting. And we're going to revamp. Yeah, or revamp. Yeah. And if you also come and look and we really shouldn't make those blue check marks maybe.
- 12:22 But we have a bunch of check marks and the check marks are all next to a lot of the blues to make sure that we're, we're actually doing them. You know, like, hey, we said we wanted to do this. Let's make it happen. Because the pinks were already happening. So that's kind of our way of like tracking and making sure that like, yeah, we have these cool big ideas, but they can't stay in this office. They have to go out there. And we'll talk more about some of those maybe a little bit later. Yeah. So let me ask you a question. When we look at this board, what are some of your favorites? You can talk about things that we already have in place.
- 12:53 Or like I said, the check marks are right there for us. Right. What are some things that we set up and are accomplishing? Or I'll talk about the things that we've already accomplished. So the first thing right off the bat is we had Superintendent Kobes coming in who has never lived in Lansing before. So having him, you know he's obviously going to be a big part of our community, being the leader of the school district. And the school district is a very important part of the Lansing community, which is a wonderful thing. It was important for us to have a meet and greet with him so the community could get to know him like we have been able to.
- 13:24 He makes himself incredibly accessible to staff, but we wanted the opportunity to have our community to meet him as well. So we worked with Lindsey Conklin at 10 and 2. Thank you, Lindsay. I got to give her a shout out because she is fantastic, not only at making coffee, but also it just bringing the community together. 10 and 2 is just a wonderful place. And we had a meet and greet for Superintendent Cobe said there and it had a great turnout. And that was a wonderful, wonderful experience. So

thank you for those who were able to come and get to know Superintendent codes there.

- 13:55 That was really good. You know, Marty is new. So like everything's new with him was so funny when he started. It's so funny. We started because Sharon and I, we worked together. We have our boards and we were always I'm always coming in here and asking her questions and we brainstorm things. And it was just so funny. That first week was like having like, I don't want to be like a new puppy or like a new child like a toddler. And we were like so like, we're like, I don't even know what it would be like a couple of parents or something like, Oh, look, look, look, we like peek out his door.
- 14:27 He's using the copy machine. We like go over like, you know, like, tentatively, like pretend we're going to the bathroom. Hey, hey, Marty, everything going okay with the copy machine. And be like, yeah, I'm just making some copies. I'm like, you, yeah, you are. Yeah, you are. He's making copies. He did it. He did it. What's up? We went to lunch. We're like, look at him. Look at him. He's going to lunch. Marty, where are you going to lunch at? I'm going to go to La Careta. Like, look at him. He's going to La Careta. That's adorable. Shout out to La Careta. Shout out to La Careta. Oh, that's too funny.
- 14:57 No, no, I thought that first week was really funny with all that. Yeah. What else? OK, so another thing that we have been able to implement this year based on our board and ideas is our room recording. Well, this was a great idea. Yeah. So it's a segment and Superintendent Cope's weekly newsletter to staff. So we ask our staff to tell us any rumors they have heard if they're worried about something coming up that people have been whispering about in those buildings or, you know, they've heard on social media or wherever.
- 15:24 And we'll just address them because as anybody who knows me knows, I am all about transparency. So just ask. Just ask me if you hear something. I'll tell you if it's true or if I can. Of course, there's some things we can't address if it's. Well, there's some things like recently there was one was like Miles, the best dressed staff member at Lansing. And I was just like, you know, Marty. I mean, I was like, Marty, even if I am, like that's, I probably am, but you can't, you can address that. Marty, let that one go. Yeah, so we're hoping at some point to open that up to the community to where if the community hears it.
- 15:56 And of course, anybody knows we can't always address things that have to do personally with specific staff members or stuff, but we will address anything that we can in that, and then we can either do that as a video format or type it up to our staff in the weekly newsletter. So yeah, it's part of Marty's Minute is what we call that. What about those employee spotlights you brought up to me earlier? Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. That was a really good idea, by the way. So yeah, we've started employee spotlights, which do go out on the website, as well as in our staff newsletter.
- 16:28 These are different, by the way, than my academic spotlights, where I come in and highlight like a teaching and learning. I pick an employee and try to do classified, certified, kind of mix them up in different departments. And just a chance to get for our community and our staff to get to know other staff members. So it's a fun way. We just have them answer the same questions every time and put that in the weekly newsletter. So yeah, I love it. I love it. I get excited to see him come back. I send an email to about five or six people every couple weeks, and just whoever responds first, I just put them in chronological order.
- 17:01 Chronological order. There are so many people that are doing some great things here. And we just, it's just the nature of having, you know, we have five buildings background and stuff. So yeah, I love his great idea. Yeah, so now you tell us your

favorite new things. All right, so I have a few favorite new things. One would be we started the Greenbush mentoring program this year. So Kathy Bauman, shout out to her has been working hard to do our mentoring in the past with KNEA. And I think it was a good program, but sometimes it could be a little tedious.

17:28 And it just wasn't, I think in my opinion, and when I listen and talk to people reaching its full potential or at least fulfilling what we needed. So instead this year we switched, we pivoted to Green Bush, which we are a member of the SIS team and they're incredible in the work that they do over there. And so we have their mentoring program. It also helped during that we had a kickoff earlier this year. And we I kind of changed up what new staff orientation looked like I kind of wanted to make it.

17:56 Yeah, I wanted to make it a little bit more authentic and genuine, if that makes any sense. Like I'll harken back to when I was in the classroom still in the classroom, but like really letting people get to know each other. So we used to just walk in those 3540 new people and we'd all sit anywhere you wanted and all admin was all over the room and all that. And instead, this time I broke us up by building. I broke us up by building an admin. I asked them to come and they sat with their building. We did a really cool engagement like get to know you activity. And I thought that that was really good.

18:25 And I'm really happy that our admin were able to come out. I know it's hard for them to do that. And then I really want I've really bought into this whole idea with the teacher, you know, there's a teacher shortage right now. And while I'm proud of us that we've recruited some amazing teachers, Gabby, Emily, all the rest. I want to make sure we don't forget about retention. Right. So we've got them here. And we want him to be happier. Exactly. So we kind of revamp some stuff. We put it on the board. And I'm really happy that we made it happen.

18:51 And actually, we heard about this from another district about having a happy hour at the end of the new teacher day and new staff days isn't just teachers for them to network. Exactly. So shout out to LEF for providing the funds for it. We went to 10 and two. And we had a happy hour. And all new staff came and shouted again to Lindsey Conklin, because she was amazing. Being there and setting it up for us, your wonderful Lindsey. And I just think it was really good. So many of the admin came and so many of the teachers were there and Marty was there. And we had some really good conversations.

19:20 You know, just to give an example, one of the new teachers that talked about projectors about having a like a document camera in the class. And that they really wanted that. Like yeah Let's call it document camera. Okay, fine. You can call it scanner. It's not that. But anyway, yeah, so they wanted a document camera, not a scanner. And you know what? Me and Marty and Jenny Nicholson, we made it happen. And Caroline Reynolds too. And we've got him now in K5. And so that happened that day. So now shifting gears from things that we've already put into action.

19:50 I want to talk now about the upcoming season and what we're going to be covering. This is exciting. Yeah, looking forward. I mentioned briefly above about our district embarking on the first year of a five-year strategic plan. So we decided it would be important to give an update on our strategic plan every episode because it is a huge deal, right? It is huge. We want our public to stay abreast of how that's coming along. So hopefully our staff has all seen the strategic plan, but if you are a community member who hasn't, please take a moment to view it on our website.

- 20:21 So it's super easy to see. Go ahead, beep, beep, beep, www dot usd 469.net. When you're on the website, if you click the menu button in the upper left-hand corner, there's a dropdown that'll come down. It is literally the first thing. So if you click on that, you can see our strategic plan. I love that it's the first thing. Yeah, and I encourage everybody to look at it. And there really is a ton of information. Oh, yeah. Which is okay. They're supposed to be because we can't.
- 20:51 You know, I preach all the time like we make this really too hard and less is more. But with the strategic plan, there are so many things that need to happen for a district to like, do well, and to think strategically about how to improve. So I'm glad that it's that there is a lot on there. But because there was so much, at the end of last year, we came up with you did a what? A tracking document, a tracking spreadsheet. So each building and department can input dates of when they're meeting and what they're working on and their improvements and really just even just updates.
- 21:22 And what I really love about it is, and this kind of reminds me, I'm sorry, I'm always talking about this, but it reminds me of our GVC a little bit that I talk about, we can't just do something like this and put it on a shelf. I feel like we're doing the same thing, making sure we're not doing that with a strategic plan. So we go over this document all the time in our admin meetings, our DLT meetings, heck, even we've asked our administrators and they're doing it, they're putting it on their BLT right agendas. And this way, we're able to really keep up with any updates, think about all the time about all the things that we're doing to improve.
- 21:55 But really, when it comes down to it, just not forget, forget. And even Superintendent Cops last month gave one an update in the September meeting. And we're going to have another one in January. So anybody listened to the board meeting probably heard it in September, but we'll have a little bit deeper of one in January. And we're going to continue doing that. I think that we need to make sure just like the GVC, we can't just put it on a shelf. Right, right. And that spreadsheet is broken up by tabs on the bottom with all the responsible parties. So I have a tab for myself.
- 22:24 We have one for each of the buildings, like you said. So it's nice. We can each be responsible. We have areas that we are working on individually, and it's good for everybody else to see that. So that document is shared with all the different groups. And then we will share it with the community in January with where we are. It's exciting. It really is. It really is. Yeah, it really, really is. And once again, I think that that work that we did with Greenbush. Yeah, and in addition to giving updates on our strategic plan, we're excited for our guests this season, right? Oh man, I can't wait.
- 22:54 Last year's guests were amazing. Yeah, last year we made it a focus to have our new administrators on it. So we had Alan Penrose, Martin. All the principals. Yeah, it was really exciting. Yeah, we did. So this year we're going to do the same thing with our new admin. This time it's more focused on assistant principals because we don't have any head except for Becca, who's sort of stepped into a new role. So Becca Dalton is now the principal of our Early Childhood Center. She was originally our early, or I'm sorry, our elementary special education coordinator.
- 23:24 So she has filled in the role to take over the entire early childhood center, and she is amazing. So we're going to have her on as a guest, and we're also going to have some assistant principals. Kerry Wixon at the middle school, Tyler Hays at the elementary school, and then Mehelle Settles, who has been assistant admin at our intermediate school one year, but she's also taken over as our Title IX coordinator. So we're excited to have her on as well. And I haven't actually talked to her about this, but I'm sure she's going to be open too. Well, it better because it's on the podcast. Yeah, exactly. You're on the list. Yeah, you're on the list, Mechelle.

- 23:54 Yeah, in addition to the administrators were, I'm excited this year about trying to get, and we really wanted to make sure administrators were on there ' cause I thought it was important for staff and students and community members to know about the leaders in our building. This year, however, I think we're also gonna make a concerted effort to get more teachers and students on our podcast. We had some students last year, oh my gosh, remember the second graders? Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh my god, that was awesome. Aubrey and Hunter. Yeah, I see him all the time. I saw him. Oh my gosh, I saw Aubrey the other day. I saw them both at the homecoming extravaganza. That's awesome.
- 24:23 Yeah I'm an LES line. I saw Aubrey. Near and dear to my heart. You know I have a student at the high school, Austin Strehlow, who has been chomping at the bit to be on the podcast. And like has ideas. And I was just like, this is the greatest conversation ever. So we plan on having Austin on as well. So now Austin, you have to come on, like Michelle Settles. You are now forced. Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think that's really what it comes down to is that this year is going to be one of the years for us just to keep showing off all the great things we're doing.
- 24:53 You know, we're seeing some great things with test scores. And our ACT scores just went up almost a point and a half that off at the next board meeting. I just want everybody to know that we're a pretty amazing district and I want people to remember that. And I think that's that, you know, you and I talk all the time about being positive and having a smile on our face. And I know that rubs some people the wrong way, but it's genuine. Yeah, no, it is. And we're gonna keep showing up. I love living in the Lansing School District. Yep. You know, is our school. And I love working here. Yeah, I do too. So I think that's a great way to wrap it up.
- 25:23 I agree. Wrap it up. Yeah. Yes, I think it's a great way to wrap up the episode. As always, for more updates and stories on Lansing USD 469, you can visit us at www.usd469.net. And if you don't already have it, please, please, please download the freelancing USD 469 app on Apple and Android. The app allows you to be the first to know about all of the fantastic things happening in our district. If you like our content and want to stay up to date on the latest episodes, please follow us wherever you are listening to us and leave us a review to help others find us and learn more about our great district.
- 25:56 Yes, we are available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Amazon Music, YouTube, SoundCloud, iHeartRadio, Cast Box, Stitcher, and Pocket Cast. Can I be honest? I was expecting you to have a new one on there. I'm sorry. It'll happen by next year. Yep, I don't know about that. I'm going to hold you in the evaluation. And if you have a suggestion for a future topic for us to discuss, please send us an e-mail at sharon.burns@USD469.net. And you know what? That is a wrap on the first episode of number two.
- 26:27 We made it season two, the first episode. Now, I just want everyone to know to this this I feel like the theme of this episode was like new, you know, like new things. Yes. And the cool new things that we're up to. So we want to share one more new thing in the spirit of, I guess, sparked a flame or newness. And what it is is a reality at convocation. We actually recorded our staff. Oh yeah, we did saying something and they are going to end every episode with me. Yes, we are. So here it goes.
- 27:01 Woo! Woo! End of this episode. Yeah, thanks for listening. Bye, everybody. Bye, everyone.