

Corey Tafoya:

Welcome back everyone to Education Buzz, our Harvard District 50 podcast series. We are normally only doing these once a month, but we had one just a bit ago with Mr. Hobbs, the high school principal. We had to postpone one in April where we were going to talk just about general education issues with Lisa Westman, who's been a partner of district 50 and a friend for a while. It's been sad that it had to be canceled due to the circumstances. But Lisa, thanks for being a part of our podcast.

Lisa Westman:

Thanks for having me, Corey. I'm glad that we could finally get this going today with all of our technology.

Corey Tafoya:

I know. Sorry that we had to wait a little bit.

Lisa Westman:

All good.

Corey Tafoya:

But it's given us a new set of circumstances to talk about, actually.

Lisa Westman:

For sure.

Corey Tafoya:

Lisa, let's see, we've known each other for maybe five years, or I don't know how long. But we've had a chance to work together. For the people that listen, this is kind of a combination of Harvard news as well as things that if you didn't know where Harvard was, you could still listen to it in Ohio and still find something. What we're hoping to talk about today is you have your own business and you work with Harvard, obviously, but you work all over. Maybe just tell people initially how your consulting works, and maybe some of the work you've done with Harvard, and kind of fill people in on your background a little bit.

Lisa Westman:

Sure. This is my third full school year working as an educational consultant. I'm also an author and speaker, and prior to going out on my own, I was a sixth, seventh, and eighth grade ELA, social studies, and gifted teacher, then a differentiation instructional coach in Skokie, Illinois, which is about maybe 80 miles or 70 miles from Harvard. So both outside of Chicago.

Lisa Westman:

When I was an instructional coach, I started writing some blogs for Ed Week. Then from those blogs, I started to do a little bit of consulting. Corey, you were one of my first clients, I think about five years ago or so in a different district.

Corey Tafoya:

Yep, yep, right.

Lisa Westman:

Then went out on my own, and I consult with school districts mainly on instructional practices, differentiation, social/emotional, plus academics. Then also instructional coaching. I have worked with Harvard for about three years now, with, I think, every staff member. And you guys are a [inaudible 00:02:32] district, so K12. We started with the high school math and science departments, went through the different departments in the high school, then most recently have been working with all of your grade levels and teachers on formative assessment, differentiation, and instructionally-related practices.

Corey Tafoya:

That's, I think, one of the things that makes you and the service we have with you in Harvard remarkable. Because just the things you listed that you've been able to help us with in terms of helping our instructional coaches get started, right, differentiated instruction, assessment. There's just so many things. But that's been, I guess, part of the excitement in how our staff sees you as one of the team. You have moved through the consultant stage and now just kind of one of the family, almost, right?

Lisa Westman:

Yes, it feels like that. I feel like the coaching team are my children, then all the teachers are like the cousins. We're all related.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah.

Lisa Westman:

Your coaching team and I, we had planned next Tuesday actually a long time ago as our last day to get together for the school year, Taco Tuesday. And we're still going to have a virtual Taco Tuesday. So, yes, definitely like family.

Corey Tafoya:

It's like a super Taco Tuesday, because it's also occurring on the Cinco de Mayo.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah, that's right.

Corey Tafoya:

Did you realize?

Lisa Westman:

No, I didn't. I didn't.

Corey Tafoya:

This, in my world, where I care about both of those things heavily, it's like a super eclipse.

Lisa Westman:

Yes.

Corey Tafoya:

Blood moon or whatever, it's like all these things I love coming together. So I hope we can all ...

Lisa Westman:

Yes.

Corey Tafoya:

That is also our teacher appreciation day. If you put all those things together, it's going to be a hopefully magical day for everyone.

Lisa Westman:

It's like the trifecta.

Corey Tafoya:

That's right.

Lisa Westman:

And great alliteration, Taco Tuesday, Trifecta, Teacher Appreciation, all that.

Corey Tafoya:

TT. There's a lot to that.

Lisa Westman:

A lot going on.

Corey Tafoya:

So that is fun. Maybe talk a little bit about how in your role, as you've become, seeing different districts, when you started out, you just kind of had some one offs to some place, that was able to work into your schedule sometimes over the summer. But then when you broke into this, I mean, just for people listening, how? It takes some bravery to do that. I have a friend, my college roommate, Rod, his wife is about ready to do that in Iowa. Maybe I'll send her this, and maybe you could give them some tips on how does one have the bravery to just break apart and say, "I think I could do this full time." How does that even happen?

Lisa Westman:

You know, it's funny. I don't know if you recall, Corey, but you were one of the people I called as my advisors when I was considering this, three summers ago.

Corey Tafoya:

And you still made it somehow, wow.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah. We had sushi and we discussed all the pro's and con's.

Corey Tafoya:

Yep, I remember.

Lisa Westman:

You gave me advice at that point, you know, you're never going to know the exact right time. But take the leap, see where it goes. If it doesn't work out, you can always go back. At that point, I was kind of at this crossroads. I had been fortunate enough that the district I was working for had given me a certain number of days that I could consult. With writing the blog, and word of mouth, I, at a certain point, had more days than I could take for my district and still be doing the best job I could for my clients and the district.

Corey Tafoya:

Yep, yep.

Lisa Westman:

So I didn't have as many, so I was at this point of, do I take the leap? So I did. Then I was fortunate enough to just grow it from there. I think part of it is, I really love what I do. A lot of it doesn't feel like a job, it just feels more like a passion. I feel very fortunate to have that.

Corey Tafoya:

I think you said it well to me that one time, that just the courage to get going, it was a little overwhelming to realize that wow, there is this need. One of the things that makes us and Harvard, feel so lucky to work, is it feels like that when you're there with us, that you're not working, you're there helping and you're a part of this. It's not some person that comes in and they know that you're going to leave after the day and could care less. You're very sincere about that care for us. I think that's what makes it feel a little different than maybe someone that's just a one-off.

Lisa Westman:

Well thank you, and I hope so. On my end, it's super exciting to see the transformation over the years, just to see where we were when we started and then to just hear some of the things that teachers and principals and just even, we interviewed some students at points, just seeing everything, the fruits of our labors come together, it's really rewarding. So thank you for the continued opportunity.

Corey Tafoya:

Well it's fun, too, because initially it's kind of like, okay, we'll see where it goes. Then sometimes, when I text, you're like, hey, I need a couple minutes to talk some plans over. You say, well sorry, I'm in the Pacific Time Zone or I'm, whatever. So it's really exciting to celebrate this with you. A cool celebration.

Lisa Westman:

Thank you.

Corey Tafoya:

One of the things that I'm hoping to catch your vantage point on is now that we're ... Everything's been dumped on us here, in terms of education. How have the contexts from all of your different clients around the nation changed? What things are they coming to you for advice on? What are some of the things that are now priorities for them that maybe haven't been in the past?

Lisa Westman:

It's really interesting, because it's been, what? Six weeks since this all really started. In the past six weeks, the focus has changed so much. In the beginning, the focus was feed our children, figure out how we're going to give devices or enable students with wifi, and just the logistical pieces were a huge focus. Then it switched to, okay, what mediums are we going to use? That, I thought, we were going to stay there for a long time.

Lisa Westman:

But really, what the focus has been with my clients primarily right now, is really instruction and assessment. How do we keep our students engaged? Which has always been a question. But it's even more tricky, there's more considerations with digital learning environment and remote learning environment. Then, with the, at least in Illinois and many states, the order that schools are closed for the remainder of the year, a huge focus now is on assessment and not standardized assessments, but the day to day format of assessments. How can we ensure that our students are learning and growing?

Lisa Westman:

These are the things that we always want to focus on, but really what I see is everything with remote learning, it's just magnifying all of the practices that were happening in classrooms and we just had them right in front of us, and you can't run from them. A lot of the things that we can do to just smooth things over do not work with remote learning. I think there's a lot of opportunity for everyone, every stakeholder in education, parents, students, teachers, and administrators to really learn a lot.

Corey Tafoya:

Every now and then you say something that is something that I have to write down. You just said something that I thought was incredible.

Lisa Westman:

Thanks, Corey.

Corey Tafoya:

It's magnifying those issues that we've cared about for so long. One of those that you've worked with us a lot, are just the issues of assessment. I think now that I can't see you, I'm not next to you, I can't walk through the rows and see what you're writing to kind of analyze your thoughts. One of the things that we do a lot with AVID is just, you don't know what they know until you see them write it out. If I can't do that, what's the way if I don't have that proximity in order to do that?

Corey Tafoya:

It really has magnified these issues and makes need to do that. Are people asking you things like, what are the assessment techniques that I've had in my bag? But the ones that I know are going to work when

I'm sitting here at my kitchen table, talking to a kid in his house, on the couch? Is that kind of where the questions lie now?

Lisa Westman:

Yeah. It's interesting, it's like, formative assessment is really such a huge, huge piece. I think it's really misunderstood by a lot of people. I think ultimately, a lot of teachers think that formative assessment is still something formal. And it can be, right? You can have something that you write or a quiz or whatever. But there's two types of formative assessment. There's a formative assessment that shows us where the students are at, so we know what additional practice they need.

Lisa Westman:

But there's also the formative assessment that's in the moment, do I keep going? Or do I stop? Do I check for understanding of the entire class? In a traditional classroom, you can get a lot of students mad, and you can read their body language. But in a remote learning classroom, it's a lot trickier. We need visuals, like some of the thumbs up, thumbs down. I have a whole series of things, and I'll be sharing these with your staff in a week and a half, there's a lot of different visual symbols that we can use in a remote learning environment that will really work well in a classroom.

Lisa Westman:

I think we have teachers' undivided attention in just this ... All of a sudden it's, I need to know this, I don't know it. I do believe a lot of teachers will say, I just can tell when my students know something or not. A lot of times, that's true. But that's all changed now. Now we have students who can't get on the Zoom or the Google Meet or whatever you're using in the same way. So just differentiating the product or the assessments we're using with students, there's a new emphasis on that.

Corey Tafoya:

Well and as we know, teachers have hearts 10 sizes bigger than most other people.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah.

Corey Tafoya:

They are dying to know if they're connecting, and if what they're trying to express, and these skills they're trying to make sure kids have, is it working? I like your word, "Magnifying." There. Just their need to know, is this working? Just that whole piece of assessment. Then we should also move into differentiation, because that's a big part of this, too. Because kids' needs in these situations now, their learning needs, their social/emotional needs, it's all over the map. How you do that and check in is going to be really critical, I think, to understand. And how you differentiate between what they academically understand, as well as try to have some sense remotely of where they're at emotionally. That's going to be a real challenge for all of us, isn't it?

Lisa Westman:

I think so. I think that we have to, again, I feel like we keep coming back to this, vulnerability piece. I think for teachers, we're forced to be vulnerable right now, because this is new for everybody. Just asking students, how are you feeling? Maybe they don't want to say it. They could write it, they could

draw a smiley face or a frowny face or whatever it's going to be. But even creating some of your small groups based on the social/emotional position of students.

Lisa Westman:

I did this demonstration with a group of students, and a couple of students wrote, "lonely," or, "bored." So maybe, okay, instead of putting all of my students in a small group who need to practice addition, I'm making this up, my students who are lonely, I'm going to have a group of students who need more connection. Small group instruction using Zoom or whatever, again, medium you're going to us, takes on a whole new life in this realm.

Lisa Westman:

Because we can have a small group with us, and we don't have to manage the other groups in our classroom, which is the most difficult part in a traditional classroom. But the other thing that I think there's still a lot of misconceptions about things, so a lot of people, teachers, think if I have small group instruction, I need to have every student in a small group for 20 minutes or whatever. But one of the ways that we differentiate is by giving students what they need.

Lisa Westman:

Every student doesn't need the same number of minutes in a small group. So it's quality over quantity. We can give up some of that guilt of oh my gosh, I didn't see all of these students. But create some really personalized learning experiences for the students in our classrooms based first on their social/emotional needs, and then differentiating for those academic needs. Having those mixed ability groups.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah. And you mentioned earlier that you're an author, in your book, I remember there were some sections talking about that. As you're now maybe looking back at some of the things you've written, and we're lucky enough to have copies of your book all around, are there certain sections of that book that might lend itself to thinking of a remote learning experience or are there parts that you say, "I maybe need to emphasize that a little bit more in this context?" Or the things that you're finding are solutions, that when you're saying them to your clients, now they're like, that's what we need. We've got to say this.

Corey Tafoya:

Because we actually will have some webinars that we scheduled in the district for the next following Mondays, and you'll be with us on the 11th to do that. But are there some refrains that people are really hanging on to and catching that you're like, yes, that's what we need right now?

Lisa Westman:

That's a very good question. Actually, I have an article coming out in a week or two, sometime in May, with ASCD, specifically on differentiating in a remote learning environment.

Corey Tafoya:

Good.

Lisa Westman:

When my editor called and said, "Will you write this?" It was like, day two of the school closures. And I was like, I don't know, you know?

Corey Tafoya:

Right, right.

Lisa Westman:

So I was like, well, I'd better figure this out. Your question makes me think of, I went back to my own book. What would work here? That's when I realized, it doesn't matter. Learning is learning, instruction is instruction. We need to focus on what we know works. The most important thing in this section in the book that I would say is one of the most important, too, I wish I had written more, in hindsight, is feedback. That formative assessment piece, we have to have. But not just knowing where the students are at, but the feedback we give them.

Lisa Westman:

De-emphasis, if that's even a word, on grading. We're not at all concerned with grading. But the feedback. So the type of feedback that we give students needs to be appropriate to where they're at in their learning cycle, or learning process. But also, the quality of feedback and the timeliness. In one section, I list the seven criteria for effective feedback. Which, I can't emphasize enough. For those people who aren't going to read the book, you can Google the criteria for effective feedback.

Lisa Westman:

But the most important thing I would say is to remember that there are levels of feedback and all students don't need the same type of feedback. Again, it's the quality over the quantity.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah, well somewhere, Carl Hobbes is smiling so big right now.

Lisa Westman:

Yay.

Corey Tafoya:

Because he has been really talking about that with his staff. That in this time, especially if that is the guidance, we're really not supposed to do as much new learning, as much as kind of just refreshing things, because we're uncertain what kids' access to things, and equity issue of if I don't have wifi or a computer, or I now have to get a job, because my parents lost theirs, there's a whole series of issues that we're really looking at, and that lens of how can we provide them feedback on the work we are getting?

Corey Tafoya:

The question that maybe is a thing for us to consider now is that feedback emphasis, how can we combine that while we're also now thinking about what new instruction might look like, and new material in the fall? People always, when grading comes in, it gets to be ... We somehow lose our focus, and losing that focus on quality feedback. That's going to be a really curious thing, I think, too, is how do

we move into graded things? I know you do things with standard-based grading, it almost leads us into that, doesn't it?

Lisa Westman:

Yeah. It's the best argument for a standards-based grading, for lack of a better term, that I could ever imagine. I think some of the foundational pieces of standards-based grading are having, in your district, you call them essential standards. Some people call them prioritized standards, critical standards. There's a million different names, it all basically means the same thing. But after you have those standards, the terms I use are you have your learning intentions, those are your learning targets. But you also have your success criteria.

Lisa Westman:

So those success criteria are the things that we, both teachers and students, are looking for to know that those standards have been met. So that's when we say, when you're approaching, it's, you've met four of the five criteria. When you're proficient or you're mastered it, you've met all five of any given criteria.

Lisa Westman:

So to really be intentional with your planning prior to going into the classroom, which is ... I'll be frank, I do not want to have remote learning in the fall. I desperately miss going into buildings and seeing people, and Zoom is not the same, and I'm so tired of looking at myself on the screen. But if we have to have it, what I hope we can do over the summer for those districts that are not in a place, and I know Harvard, this'll be your second summer doing this work. But really having that curriculum and instructional piece planned out.

Lisa Westman:

So knowing in advance, it doesn't matter who your students are, these are essential standards, prioritized standards, for each grade level, content area. And these, most important things, are our success criteria. So we give students feedback on those success criteria. All the same, we are still monitoring keeping track of the students progress. But what we're seeing is very specific. You, in order to show mastery of, I'll use a first grade math standard, addition and subtraction. You still need to be able to subtract, show me that you can subtract on a more regular basis. Instead of, C, which doesn't really give anybody any information.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah, exactly. Well and I think that is a good segue to what we're trying to do in the month of May. Trying to, first of all, establish what's our district philosophy on how remote learning might be for one week, then we have a week together. Then there's a flare-up, then we're apart. How do we know, solidly, and thank goodness that our committee with Sara Weaver and Mary Cook really are solidifying our curriculum. And it's not done yet, but I think that was a blessing, to be a [crosstalk 00:21:53] on that.

Lisa Westman:

Huge. I mean, I just need to give a shout out to Harvard. This is coming from not the family place, but this is coming from just I wish everyone could see not only the work that everyone has done so far, but the foresight, the insight that you have and Mary and Sara, and everybody who's working, so that when the fall comes, if there is a need for remote learning, your program is going to be up and running.

Lisa Westman:

So the PD that you're doing now the time that teachers have to work on these essential standards and planning, instruction, is all with the idea that we may need to use this for remote learning, but if we don't, it's still going to work in our classrooms.

Corey Tafoya:

It's still good instruction.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah, and the students will be the beneficiaries of that. But I think that, several of my clients that are in the place where you're at, give or take, a year with prioritizing standards and all of that, so many people have said, "Thank goodness that we did that work." I don't know where we would be if we didn't have our standards prioritized. Because now we're like, this is what we've already determined, this is what our focus is. We know what it is that we want students to learn and what that looks like.

Lisa Westman:

A lot of that guesswork was taken out. Whereas some districts that didn't have that work done, not only are they scrambling to figure out how to make this all work now. But now, you have in larger districts, 20, 30, 40 third grade teachers that are all like, "What are we teaching?" It's a lot messier.

Corey Tafoya:

It's going to be really complicated. I think that's the idea. They will be eventually made public, these little webinars that we're going to do where we'll talk just kind of district philosophy. How do we understand what we're all doing in our district? Then the second part that you'll do with Mary and Sara, we'll ask you, one of our instructional coaches, what are those instructional practices and assessment things that we know that we're going to have to really hone in on and be better? Then finally, what are the resources that will allow us to do these things?

Lisa Westman:

Exactly.

Corey Tafoya:

Because it will be different. Those will be made available, and if anyone's listening, want to kind of find those, they'll eventually be on our website. But the interesting thing about that practice is, we're kind of going to do a small sample size of that. Because being that kids are missing massive amounts of instruction in April and May, we're going to try to distill that all down into this little three week ... We're calling them our SOAR sections. Where kids can sign up and really just get a really focused look at those things that they missed.

Corey Tafoya:

This will be that opportunity to say, okay, these are the things that we care most about, these are our essentials. Then the teachers are going to have a chance to figure out how new instruction occurs over [crosstalk 00:24:44].

Lisa Westman:

Absolutely.

Corey Tafoya:

And I'm really interested, and that's why providing these webinars for our staff will help them hopefully feel a lot more confident that they've got more tricks up their sleeve.

Lisa Westman:

Well, the SOAR program that you are hosting and offering, I can't wait to see how many students take advantage of that and sign up for it. Not only will it help close some of those gaps, or identify where the needs are. But to help keep the students connected, because that is still my biggest concern, we already had the last couple months of school where there's just a natural disconnect, and everyone is working as hard as they can to make sure that there's a sense of belonging, that's my thing that I've been talking about. What self esteem is directly a derivative of is belonging to an organization, a place, a family, whatever that is.

Lisa Westman:

There are so many students who don't feel that they belong at home, and maybe felt like they belonged at school or maybe didn't sometimes. But now, there's this removed environment. So to have that sort of program, even to offer the students an additional opportunity to belong to something, will help keep them engaged in the learning process and just keep their self esteem intact. Or at least hopefully help do that.

Corey Tafoya:

That reminds me, the day that we got out of school, March 13th, I was at Jefferson as the bells were ringing, and kids were trying to gather all of their belongings, knowing that they're not coming back for a little bit of time. I can just remember probably 10% of the kids literally had tears.

Lisa Westman:

I know.

Corey Tafoya:

Because they don't know what's going on.

Lisa Westman:

I know.

Corey Tafoya:

They're hugging their teachers, they know their bus is about ready to leave them. But they don't want to let go of that teacher because that's their safe space where they know they've got great food.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah.

Corey Tafoya:

Well good food, let's say.

Lisa Westman:

It's pretty good, yeah.

Corey Tafoya:

It's still a school lunch, right? But they know they're safe, and they know there's someone caring for them, and there's a sense of love in a way that kids need.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah.

Corey Tafoya:

That's something, in that absence, we're going to have to figure out how kids get that. Actually, that is a good segue. I shared with you, and with some of our staff, this really interesting article. It was called After the Pandemic, Our Children Deserve an Educational Revolution by Michael J. Heinz.

Lisa Westman:

Yes.

Corey Tafoya:

It was sent to me by a friend, and not only does apparently the guy on the article, if you Google it, quite handsome, which I've been told by our staff, "Whoa, he must be a looker."

Lisa Westman:

Yeah, he looks a little bit like Rhett Butler from Gone With the Wind.

Corey Tafoya:

There you go. So not only is it good, just because you get to take a gander at him. But one of the things that he talks about is he lists these things that in that revolution, should be prioritized. That was his very first thing, is really emphasize the well being of our children. That's something that if you we get the intermittent times, we're really going to have to figure out, how do we care for them while these short little bursts we've been feeling?

Lisa Westman:

Yes. I know that our audience can only hear us right now, but you and I can see each other. If you can see, I'm holding up the article. I have little stars and underline that exact same part. I think, so here's the interesting thing. I'm writing my second book, which is on the intersection between empathy and instruction. Again, I started writing this book before this all happened and now I'm like, gosh, I really need to think about some of these other pieces. One of the things that I've been thinking about a lot, with the help of my editor, is that we need to take care, or try to take care, of the social and emotional needs of students as well as taking care of the social/emotional well being of teachers, administrators, everybody.

Lisa Westman:

Sometimes, we just assume that teachers know how to do that. And we don't, for a variety of reasons. I think just modeling it first, and showing teachers what this can look like, and allowing them to empathize with students. In order to empathize, you need to connect with a feeling within yourself. Sometimes, it's difficult for us to feel what we see students might feel, because it's painful for us to connect with that.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah.

Lisa Westman:

So really supporting everybody, and just allowing ... There's a book, a really, really great book called Permission To Feel, by Marc Brackett. He's out of Yale. He talks about what we do is, we try to make people get rid of uncomfortable emotions, because they make us uncomfortable. We need to just let people feel that. I think, if we can start there, and there's a mood meter, you can download it for free. You can incorporate that into your class if you want, with your students, you can make your own version of it in a live format.

Lisa Westman:

But I think really, we're not trying to change students' emotions, we're trying to let them feel and not judge them for it.

Corey Tafoya:

But also, how are teachers going to be able to do that for themselves?

Lisa Westman:

Right.

Corey Tafoya:

Because they're going through this, I guess, grieving of not being able to see their kids to the finish line of this year. I can remember that, as a Spanish teacher, just one of my biggest sense of pride was, when I can get my Spanish one students at the end of the year, and I knew that at the end of the year, when we're having these very simple conversations, that that's because I was their teacher. I mean, Spanish, they were starting from scratch. It's hard, if you've never been a teacher, that's impossible to describe the satisfaction that you derived from that.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah.

Corey Tafoya:

I also think that caring for our staff in that same respect is critical.

Lisa Westman:

Absolutely.

Corey Tafoya:

Because they're going through a lot of emotions.

Lisa Westman:

Absolutely. You know, I keep thinking about certain groups of students, like seniors who they're not going to have prom.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah.

Lisa Westman:

Or I'm hopeful that we'll figure out ways to have these milestones, but I think not having that firm sense of closure for teachers, for students, for everybody, is super difficult. I don't know the answer to how we make it better. I think what we say is like, yeah, this sucks. Maybe there's a better term for it than that.

Corey Tafoya:

No, yeah, it does.

Lisa Westman:

But we recognize that, and we're going to try and make it right when we can. I'm sorry that it's not right right now, but we're not forgetting about it. At least for me, that's what I hope.

Corey Tafoya:

I agree. And I would just recommend that everyone do find that article. It's very easy, and there's a lot of really good things that, some of them we've talked about already. Just assessment, how you think about that in a much different way. And give kids some physical activity, just to do this. This is so fascinating to watch my son's online PE class and what they're supposed to do. But that's something, he is kind of intermittent. He'll go shoot baskets for a little while, then come back and learn. I just asked him about that the other day. He goes, "If I can just get up and move a little bit, boy that makes it so much easier for me."

Corey Tafoya:

So I think we're going to learn so many things through this. While, as you said, it sucks, and it's horrible, and there's so much that we're going to have to recover from. I think they're just putting a laundry list of things, we're learning as well. Hopefully, we can be in the moment enough to capture some of those things that we are learning that we can maintain.

Lisa Westman:

I really, really hope that's the case. I see more examples of that than not.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah.

Lisa Westman:

Every once in a while I hear something, that I just try and keep quiet and whatever. But I hear things like, well, if students don't do that, they're going to have to make it up over the summer without teachers. Then they can turn it in at the beginning of the year. I'm like, these are the things we want to try and avoid.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah. Right.

Lisa Westman:

They really weren't the best practices to begin with, and it's like, I really respect the work that teachers do, and I think that there is nothing that can take the place of a live teacher in a classroom, that community. Let's respect that, and let's not diminish that role. We can't give packets of information, we can't give laundry lists of things for students to do without that instruction and that feedback.

Lisa Westman:

If we can, I think it diminishes the integrity of the role of a teacher. So for no other reason, we're better than that, you know?

Corey Tafoya:

Yes. Well amen to that, because I think that technology has a role, and you have a unique vantage point on that, with your husband being heavily involved with educational instruction, that's part of what compliments the teacher, and allows us to integrate those two things. But it doesn't certainly replace. I've heard forever, they're only installing these things, like we used Edmentum, to replace teachers. If anything is obvious over this it's that we can't, and we never will be able to that.

Lisa Westman:

No.

Corey Tafoya:

Because that role is essential, and this COVID-19 is certainly not a massive conspiracy to get rid of teachers. I think if anything, it's going to have the opposite effect that that role and that appreciation in the dignity for teachers which, let's be honest, over the last 10 years has kind of taken some public hits backwards.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah.

Corey Tafoya:

Because it comes kind of du jour, I'd say. Teachers, you get the summer off, and just take shots. I don't think that's fair, because the reaction from some of my friends from the gym, trying to teach their own kids, is like, oh my God, Corey, I had no idea how hard this is. It's terrible.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah. It's hard, and I think what parents also realize is how much happened at school. How many roles school, or holes schools filled for their kids.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah.

Lisa Westman:

We know about the extracurriculars, and we know about, just the socialization piece. And I'll give a shout out to a teacher friend of mine, he teaches middle school in Park Ridge, Mike Taglia, he teaches ELA and broadcasting. I think he's like all of us, really misses being in the classroom with his students. But every week, he produces this video that almost replicates what you would've missed at school.

Corey Tafoya:

Wow.

Lisa Westman:

The reason, I know a lot of people do this. But something that really got to me when I was watching it for the first week was, he is still listing the birthdays of all the kids, and he found each of their pictures, they're all getting a shout out. Then there's each teacher, they're still doing the student of the week.

Corey Tafoya:

Right.

Lisa Westman:

And all those. Because those consistency pieces, it's so much more. We can say, "How are you?" We can give the instruction. But all of those, those morning announcements, we forget, I think, about a lot of those pieces that you were saying, the students, at least 10% crying on the last day of school.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah.

Lisa Westman:

It's like, because that is just the schedule. It's almost impossible. As a parent, and I am also an educator, it is a struggle a lot of days.

Corey Tafoya:

For sure.

Lisa Westman:

To get everything going.

Corey Tafoya:

Yep.

Lisa Westman:

So yeah, I would say, personally, I feel bad for not being able to provide my own children with some of those structures that they got in school.

Corey Tafoya:

I think it's given us, as educators, a sense of empathy to the role of parents, too, and some of the things that they really don't understand about our business.

Lisa Westman:

For sure.

Corey Tafoya:

And when we have to explain things to a greater level than we've ever had to explain it. Boy, it's made us realize there are some gaps that I just assume everyone had.

Lisa Westman:

Right, yeah.

Corey Tafoya:

Whether it be language, or technology, there's barriers that maybe we haven't seen. So how is the six weeks of parent/teacher role going on? Are you well paid?

Lisa Westman:

Oh no.

Corey Tafoya:

Are you having been disciplined by your principal yet for any infractions?

Lisa Westman:

I have been disciplined by my students.

Corey Tafoya:

I think we all have.

Lisa Westman:

You don't know what you're doing, da, da, da. Okay. All right.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah, exactly.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah, no, I think I have a funny joke in my webinar, so I won't tell you it now, since you'll see it in like a week. But no, it's not at all what I envisioned it to be.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah. Yeah.

Lisa Westman:

At all, no.

Corey Tafoya:

Hard to be a prophet in your own land, they say. That's true.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah, yeah, it is. Yeah, it's humbling, for sure.

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah, well, you just are so much, that we're figuring out. I mean, I watched a thing today. The amount of creativity going on is just so staggering, and the things people are doing to cope or to be creative, I've spent half an hour watching this guy rap Dr. Seuss books to Dr. Dre beats and it just captivated me. Then last night, I was watching people that had given their dogs bad hair cuts. These poor dogs are looking at the camera like seriously? This is what you're doing? You haven't tried to give your dogs or your kids a haircut yet, have you?

Lisa Westman:

No, but I'm going to try and color my own hair tomorrow.

Corey Tafoya:

Oh.

Lisa Westman:

I know that sounds really high maintenance, but I am really anxious. And I had dreams, like fantasy dreams, all last night about getting a manicure and pedicure. Which I also have been dreaming ... I sound really high maintenance right now, Corey, and I'm not. But maybe I am a little. It's just, it's all of those things that I think we've taken for granted.

Corey Tafoya:

Sure.

Lisa Westman:

I actually made the joke, because I was watching the news earlier with my kids. They said, "May 1st, some businesses are re-opening. And dog groomers are one of them." I was like, do you think I could make an appointment for you guys?

Corey Tafoya:

Yeah.

Lisa Westman:

Yeah.

Corey Tafoya:

It's true. Well, Lisa, it's always awesome to catch up with you.

Lisa Westman:

Always.

Corey Tafoya:

We can't highly enough recommend to check into your work and your book and also the things that you write. People can find you very easily, and I can't recommend highly enough to my superintendent friends or curriculum director friends that are listening, to just talk to you sometime and see how some of the things that you're doing. Because one of the things that makes it great is you're so adaptable, and you first try to understand what the district needs, not just this is what I do, take it or leave it. You try it and say, "I can help you on that." Or maybe, "No, that's not my thing."

Corey Tafoya:

So we wish you all the good luck.

Lisa Westman:

Thank you.

Corey Tafoya:

In kind of making this business endeavor kind of work in new times, and your partnership, and the way you keep helping us is so appreciated.

Lisa Westman:

Well, thank you. I appreciate it. And I can't wait for all of your work to be out there for other districts to see. Because if I could shout it from the rooftops. But again, that insight that you have and the planning. We talk about leaders being instructional leaders, superintendents. But you walk the walk and talk the talk, and always have. So it is an honor, for me to partner with you. So thank you.

Corey Tafoya:

Absolutely. Well thank you for joining us on our little endeavor here, our Education Buzz. So everyone, thanks for joining us. You can always reach us through our website, and Lisa's on Twitter, you can find her easily enough, too. Thanks everyone, and we'll talk to you next time, soon.