

Dr. Tafoya: Hello, everyone. Welcome to the Education Buzz podcast. This is the very first podcast in Harvard Community Unit School District 50's attempt to engage the educational community. We are not simply trying to engage just Harvard, though, even though that's broadcast or whatever we are calling this thing, it is coming from Harvard. We are hoping that the greater audience for this will be educators all over in Illinois, across the country. A lot of my cohort people in my ASA Academy, I hope, will listen to this. I know today's guest has a national network that she's building from her conference she just got back from, and I'll ask her about that in a little bit, but this title, Education Buzz, so you kind of get the idea of it, is to me both those things. We're talking education, not just local issues that are important to us here in Harvard but also things that are going on nationally. So it would be interesting whether you live in Wyoming or Louisiana or whatever.

Dr. Tafoya: The other idea is the Buzz, it is very local to us, the hornet being our mascot. We like to work in those things so Education Buzz seems like an appropriate thing. Welcome to our very first effort to do this, and what we'll always do. This is Corey Tafoya. I'll introduce myself. I am the superintendent here in Harvard District 50, and this is my brainchild I guess. I am a big podcast fan and love driving and listening to other people's ideas and thoughts and engaging in that forum.

Dr. Tafoya: I want to thank Guy Clark, our director of community relations and communication because he has really done a good job with kind of figuring this out and very open to ideas of how we can engage our community, and so this is his. But today is all about our very first guest, and she is a local talent, a local girl, Dr. Vicki Larson, is our assistant superintendent in Harvard District 50. Vicki has a history in education locally. I think she knows nearly everyone in McHenry County on the education scene. Growing up in Crystal Lake and working in Woodstock, and down here in Harvard she kind of follows that Highway 14 pipeline just like I seem to have for my career, but Dr. Larson, welcome to the very first. Do you feel very special that you're the very first guest?

Dr. Larson: Oh, I feel special every day working with you, Dr. Tafoya.

Dr. Tafoya: Oh, good. Okay, well it always is hard to invite people on these because I know it raises everyone's anxiety. So thanks for being a good guinea pig. But today, the reason we invited Dr. Larson to join us, because one of the things I've been spending a lot of time thinking about is the idea of filling all of our open positions in our school district. In every school district, you have positions from superintendent to teacher to a library aide to lunchroom to recess. I don't think people really understand just the magnitude of what a school district does, and many communities like ours, Harvard has about 10,000 people, and we are one of the biggest employers in the entire city.

Dr. Tafoya: The health of the economy and the school district is often, many times, tied to the personnel, the quality people we're attracting. There's been a lot of publicity, in Illinois especially, about the teacher shortage, and that's our topic for the day, the teacher shortage. We're not even going to say the Illinois because I don't think it's exactly just an Illinois thing, but the reason Dr. Larson is such in a good position to talk about that is because she handles much of our HR responsibilities, and she is not just the assistant

superintendent of HR as she was accidentally introduced one time. She has a lot of academic responsibilities, but she's really dived headlong into our HR, and so we thought she would be the great, good first guest and that.

Dr. Tafoya: Vicki, why don't you just let everyone know a little bit more about you. Kind of give some idea of what your background is.

Dr. Larson: Well, you kind of gave a quick background, but I was born and raised in Crystal Lake, and so I attended Crystal Lake School District. My first teaching experience was in McHenry School District 15 where I taught and became an administrator, and ended up at a principal at an elementary school there. Then I moved my career to Woodstock District 200 where I spent 10 years as an administrator, and this is my second year in Harvard as the assistant superintendent. So very excited.

Dr. Tafoya: Now, it is very appropriate today because just a few minutes ago, we're talking about this educator, teacher shortage. It's probably not even just teacher shortage, it's educator in general because we know that the number of applicants for all positions really is much lower. Tell everyone in the audience what we're doing downstairs because it's kind of like a perfect day to be talking about this.

Dr. Larson: Yeah, literally just came upstairs from our job fair. We were hosting a on the site job fair, so this morning from 10:00-1:00 we had about 20 candidates come in and have on the spot interviews. They brought their resume. They spoke with some of our administrators, and we'll be following up pretty quickly with many of them in terms of the positions, and that range, like you said, it's not just teachers. We have custodians, subs, classroom aides, lunch recess aides, lots of positions to fill.

Dr. Tafoya: The fascinating part of that is that when you host an event like that, you never know who's going to show up, and we had a really surprisingly good turnout. I didn't know what to expect, really. Maybe you had an idea of what you expected. There were a lot of people down there.

Dr. Larson: I was just going to be excited if one person came. We were setting up, and we were, "How many people do you think? How many things should we have ready in terms of pens and computers to fill out the application and tables for interviewing?" I think that it really exceeded our expectations for the morning. We still have an evening session tonight, and then I anticipate that'll be higher than today.

Dr. Tafoya: And it's kind of one of those things in what you would definitely call a competitive area that whenever you share your ideas like this, there's the risk like, "Okay, then maybe someone steals our idea and takes ..." But we know in education that we beg, borrow, and steal everyone's ideas. It's not really that we're competitive, that we're trying to help teachers understand, "You don't have to be competitive. If you've got a really good lesson plan, share it because the kids are going to benefit," and we know that in our world when we have a good idea, sharing it makes sense because how many different ideas have we stolen basically from other people?

Dr. Larson: Yeah.

Dr. Tafoya: So we want to make sure that maybe this is a contribution in the educational field that are out there facing the same dilemmas we are. One of the things, Vicki, that I think everyone should understand is last year, in your first year here, my goal for you was like, "Let's really get a hold of this HR realm," because we didn't really have an administrator specifically really kind of in charge of that. I was doing a lot of that, and it was kind of bits and pieces of everyone. Why don't you just fill everyone in, like some of the things that we did last year in the district? And when I say we, it's mostly you is the [crosstalk 00:07:26].

Dr. Larson: The team.

Dr. Tafoya: The team, and there is a nice team that you've developed, but let me just talk about some of the things that were accomplished last year. Because I think if you looked at our organization, one of the things that probably made the most advancement last year was in the area of HR and really the profound growth help us to fill spots more so than we had the year before, and even with that we can't fill as many as we'd like to right away. What are some things that we did last year in the district that people might be curious to know?

Dr. Larson: I think kind of going back to that whole sharing thing first. Recently when I was at an ASPA conference with lots of HR professionals, we talk about that. We're all in a shortage with teachers and substitutes, and we're all sharing ideas, and it's okay to share because we're not-

Dr. Tafoya: Right.

Dr. Larson: We are in competition, but not always because of regions and areas. So it is beneficial to share out those ideas. But last year, when I kind of reflect on the beginning of last year when we started, we still had buildings with significant openings and trying to fill those and really kind of listening to the building leaders and asking why do we think that that was happening. One of the biggest things is we probably started hiring too late.

Dr. Larson: So our biggest goal that we did for this year was kind of creating that staffing needs plan early, and we had our first meeting like last week about that. When we had our job postings out in February, many school districts around us said, "Wow, you guys got those out really early."

Dr. Tafoya: Yeah, and we really have to, I think, stop for a moment and thank the board for that because we really didn't have to explain to the board why we were doing things so much because districts depend on the board for authorization of whatever staffing increases you did, and so that was new for the district, and I think principals looked at us a little crazy like, "That's really early. Do you realize," like for high schools, "you're going to have to ask kids to sign up for next year's classes in November and December? That's weird," but it's really necessary so that we can go out and attract the very best early in the process, you're right.

Dr. Larson: Yeah, because we had our first set of interviews for all levels the first week in March. And so with our job descriptions and openings getting out in February, hitting the college job fairs at the end of February, beginning of March, we were able to have a really good candidate pool to start interviewing and hiring. We went to our board meeting in March with a significant amount of recommendations to hire.

Dr. Tafoya: Yeah, and that has made such a difference. Because I think you mentioned to me earlier that some of the people we hired very early on in the process are some of the people having the most success.

Dr. Larson: Absolutely.

Dr. Tafoya: We know that that talent pool, over time you would get a little bit more worried about the candidates you hire later on in the process for whatever reason they're not hired. Maybe that's their circumstances, but maybe they just haven't been able to get other jobs. So we have been very early focused on this, and that remains so. That was a success.

Dr. Larson: I think one of the keys, I think in talking with administrators last year, are building leaders concerned about hiring too soon that there's this lag of, "Okay, we've hired this teacher in March, and they're really not starting in our district until August. So what are we going to do?" And so working together to kind of create like, "What can we do weekly for our new hire so they stay connected to us?" Is it sending them an email or sending them a note or getting them something for their building so they start to feel part of our community and our team, and they're ready to start the year in August.

Dr. Tafoya: That was a really fascinating thing to share with our principals too is once you hire someone, what's that ongoing recruiting? Even though they're board approved and they've signed a contract, how do you continue to recruit them? Actually, I learned that lesson. A little known fact about me is that I was a college soccer coach at Cornell College for three years in Mount Vernon, Iowa. Shout out to the Rams. It was really a great experience. I was the men's soccer coach there, and what I learned is that once someone put down their housing deposit, initially I thought it's done, and I just kind of moved on as the only coach. I was everything. So recruiter, head coach, bus driver, everything.

Dr. Tafoya: I just kind of stopped talking to some of them, and then I lost, I still remember his name, David [Manrique 00:11:48] if you're out there I still wish you would have gone to Cornell College because he was really into it, but then someone else just swooped in, and he found a better fit, and I didn't stay in touch with him. And so I think that's an important piece is how do you engage those people, and we did some cool things like as simple as t-shirts or getting them a login to the team drive of their grade level team or whatever, and I thought that was exciting to see that. Some of the new teachers said, "You know, I really felt tied to something," and that's what we're hoping to do.

Dr. Larson: And some I know specifically at Jefferson Elementary, they did like a Skype-in with a teacher, right, like, "We're having a team meeting. Do you want to Skype in with us so you can meet all of us?"

Dr. Tafoya: Right.

Dr. Larson: So I just think little ways of making people feel engaged and building that relationship because I think when we retain, we're recruiting, and then that retainment is now the number one thing. Once we've recruited them, how do we retain them? Research shows and people say it's all about that relationship that we're building with people.

Dr. Tafoya: Some of the things out there, people are talking about this and trying to identify this issue that we're talking about today. Is it a teacher shortage, or is it just that? We've seen, and we each I think personally know, educators that just got out of the business. I am thinking of one that is local, and she was a teacher for a while, and she just said, "The lack of support and some of parents issues I had, and the burnout of just dealing with situation ... I couldn't do it anymore," and she found a job related to education, and she's now totally out of the business. She was a really fine music teacher, and those are the compounding things.

Dr. Tafoya: There's a stat that I heard at a conference in Springfield, the state superintendent conference, and the state superintendent, Dr. Carmen Ayala, said, "Currently compared to just 2010," just nine years ago, "that there's 53% less candidates coming out of the Illinois university pipeline." And so when you think about people abandoning the profession, if you will, combined with less people, it's really alarming on why districts like ours are trying to be very creative with going after the candidates as aggressively as they can.

Dr. Larson: You have to wonder sometimes specific reasons why that's happening, and sometimes people say, "Is it because of how the public is viewing teachers and educators?" With higher standards for testing, teachers are often kind of beat up in the public eye for various reasons. You have to take a look at that and say, "Is that a profession that I want to go into where I'm constantly in the public eye and being ridiculed or criticized?"

Dr. Tafoya: Blamed for the TRS situation or whatever.

Dr. Larson: Right, yeah. And I think about that as being an educator my whole life and having two kids of my own and thinking, "Oh, do you guys want to be teachers?"

Dr. Larson: And they look at me and say, "Heck no. We see some of the things that can cause stress and burnout," or how people talk about teachers to others and just sometimes it's in a disrespectful way and really our profession isn't elevated at all times.

Dr. Tafoya: I guess that's something I really spend a lot of time thinking about is just the future of education is how do we continue to attract people. Because if you're at a Halloween party and you know in education you're outside of the business, just ask an educator, if

you have kids, and like you Vicki I have kids too, and it's a hard question to consider. Would you encourage them to go into education?

Dr. Larson: Right.

Dr. Tafoya: And my kids, like yours, seeing the things that I go through, not with any details, but they watch, and they know what your parents are doing and going through. They know what that job looks like, and sometimes it's not easy.

Dr. Larson: Right.

Dr. Tafoya: That's a concern is who is encouraging our educators who know the job encouraging their own kids to go into the profession. Sometimes the answer's no.

Dr. Larson: Yeah, depends on what day you catch me on.

Dr. Tafoya: Right, exactly. It's a good day. Let's try and figure out, when someone decides they're leaving our profession, is that a temporary thing? Is that just a one year, "I just need a year off," or do you think people are staying out of it altogether and they're done?

Dr. Larson: The people I've come across, they don't come back. I think some of it is they miss ... I am friends with a few people who have left the profession, and they say, "I really miss the kids and the teaching. Everything else around it, I don't miss." And so how do we help our current teachers with everything around it? We love the teaching and that autonomy of having the ability to engage students and see them grow, but some of the other things that weigh upon us, how do we help support our staff in that?

Dr. Tafoya: What can we as administrators do, not only on a macro, big level, but what can we do locally to support our staff so that they feel engaged and empowered to have a voice in their future? Because I think that's part of it is sometimes people feel like they don't have a voice in this, and one thing we know about the younger teachers we hire, millennials, that they want to have some voice in what's going on. They want to feel a part of a bigger cause. They want to feel they're a part of something noble, if you will.

Dr. Tafoya: Certainly we know in education we have that ability to really provide this noble calling of what we should be doing, and that's I guess what concerns me so much is that if that's slipping away, how are we going to attract people to this profession? Because if you look at some of the research of places like Finland where only the best of their university students get into the education department, and not surprisingly they're performing incredibly well on all of the testing that are done internationally. It's because they take that cream right off the top and put them into education. You can talk, is that salary, or what is it that [crosstalk 00:18:00].

Dr. Larson: They talk a lot about the autonomy, right?

Dr. Tafoya: Right.

Dr. Larson: That the teacher really has a lot of ownership over what's happening in the classroom. Really interest based learning and teaching, and I think that ... There are things that have to happen in schools, right? We know we don't really have control over standardized testing, but we can control how our teachers are valued, and their input, and how they're in control of things instead of doing things to them, how do we do things with them and have them more in the leadership role than they are?

Dr. Tafoya: Right, right. But there is no doubt that the education profession, and maybe I sound like an old guy, "get off my yard," but sometimes I think our jobs are harder than when I started. I mean, maybe because I'm in a different role. I started off as a classroom Spanish teacher, and maybe it was like this and it's been a constant, and I just haven't been in the position to notice, but it does seem like the job is harder, and as you look at the last year in the Illinois state legislature, how many different laws did they pass that affected education? It was like an ungodly amount.

Dr. Larson: Yeah, I mean 600 were signed.

Dr. Tafoya: Were signed, and 200-some maybe were related to educate.

Dr. Larson: Yeah.

Dr. Tafoya: So just the demands that are being put upon us and the way things are change. We heard our tech director talk this morning about all these technology, every time we have a contract with MAP or any of our testing, we have to divulge what's the data, and we have put that [inaudible 00:19:33]. Those are extra things. So it just feels like it's added on. I know we try and do that with our teachers is say, "What can we take off the plate?" But it's not always that easy.

Dr. Larson: Well, it's hard to define or decide what comes off, right? I always say we don't really have plates anymore, we have these platters that are kind of overflowing. Because it's really hard to take off things when either kids are really engaged in it, teachers really believe in it, and we put on all of these other things. It's really hard to just determine what is not necessary.

Dr. Tafoya: Now, like many districts our district is looking really closely at professional learning communities and PLCs. I really think that that work is really essential to teachers having that autonomy, and that voice, and that ability to kind of have some decision making flexibility and autonomy in their own world. Have you seen that in other places, or do you think that's part of ... What are other districts, maybe at your conference you were at, talking about ways to keep teachers feeling like they are in charge of their room, at least?

Dr. Larson: PLCs is huge. I think making sure that our teachers have that undivided time, and I think that's where a lot of school districts, and sometimes I think we do also, struggle in finding that time where people are interrupted. However, we can define that more so that teachers aren't pulled for this reason or that reason, or there's a kid issue, and we've got to addressed that. Because the minute our whole team's not there, we kind of

lose that purpose. That time is spent a lot about talking about the learning of students, and that's what we want to focus on.

Dr. Tafoya: Right. We've tried to be very intentional about not, every time we go to a conference, come back with eight new ideas and start something new because I think that's part of the burnout too is the reform fatigue that sets in on teachers. Like, "This too shall pass. Don't worry. We'll get a new superintendent, or we'll get a new principal, we'll get a new whatever, and we can ride this out." Rather than what PLCs inspires to be is something that's built by teachers for teachers and really allows them to kind of be encouraged to share that great lesson plan, not hide it and say, "Oo, I'm going to whip this out when I have an evaluation just because it's really good I know."

Dr. Larson: Yeah, and I think that, and I'm trying to think of the speaker in PLC land that said this, but PLC's a way of being, and it's not something that we do. Like, we really have to stay away from saying, "Oh, we're doing our PLC now." PLC is a way of being collaborative, being engaged with our colleagues, sharing, questioning, and developing. It's not something that we do.

Dr. Tafoya: The other thing that I think we should acknowledge, and we would do a pretty poor job in talking about this topic is we didn't raise the statewide issue of retirement because that seems to be something that comes up. We know that now, under the new TRS retirement tiers both tier one and tier two, that if you really look at what those differences are, it is pretty easy to do outside of our circles to blame the teachers themselves for the debt that is obvious in the TRS pipeline.

Dr. Tafoya: I keep saying they didn't create it, number one. Number two, they didn't create it over night so how can we do this? But if you look at some of the requirements of what a tier two teacher, and that means that you're retiring at a later age, more years of service, and that's intended obviously to keep more employees in the pipeline. I've heard people say that's a main reason I wouldn't encourage my kids. So if you heard that too, and that's significant. Am I off base on that?

Dr. Larson: No, I think that is a concern, especially ... Well, I just know a lot of retirement information in Illinois since we work here, but people saying they don't want to be teaching in Illinois is because of the retirement and their fear of forever working.

Dr. Tafoya: Yep, right.

Dr. Larson: Or, "When I do retire, is my retirement really going to be there for me?" And so I think those are-

Dr. Tafoya: That uncertainty.

Dr. Larson: Those are things that I think are consequences of why we have such short staffing issues.

Dr. Tafoya: Absolutely.

- Dr. Larson: Because people are concerned about the retirement.
- Dr. Tafoya: And even for administrators or future assistant superintendents and superintendent, if they were in tier two, the idea that their potential salary would be capped.
- Dr. Larson: Right.
- Dr. Tafoya: Or their potential earnings would be kept and not recognized. One thing we certainly know about our state is we are so vast in the different experiences. We have very rural areas. We have a fluent district, and those experiences are so different. [inaudible 00:24:24] the salaries are quite different, and their communities are quite different. So to have one rule to say, "We're all capped at this," is hard.
- Dr. Larson: Yeah. I think people feel unfair which is going to cause people to head to different districts just like you say, because of the vast salary difference in areas. Which can cause why some of rural districts are having more difficulty. A lot of people, when we looking at data, it's showing rural districts and our low poverty schools are really struggling to retain teachers.
- Dr. Tafoya: And one thing that makes it a little more challenging even for us here in Harvard is that we have a thriving and very successful dual language program. That is something we cherish. We are very, very proud of it. It's absolutely one of the reasons that people, I think, stay in our district and see, "Hey, I'm part of this dual language program." So that's a complication when you also have to find, for example, we've know that we've been short at our junior high with a dual language science position. Now we're short two teachers, even though we were looking to hire. That's cumbersome in so many ways for places like us that are trying to have unique programs. We still haven't found a building trades teacher. So if anyone's listening to this and knows someone that has a building trades background and a four year degree and-
- Dr. Larson: Or able to get the provisional license with 8,000 hours of experience.
- Dr. Tafoya: Come let us know. [inaudible 00:25:52] Dr. Larson, and she's easy to find on Twitter @drvicki ...
- Dr. Larson: @drvickilarson.
- Dr. Tafoya: @drvickilarson. Those are real issues that we're facing right now. How many open positions do we have in the district right now?
- Dr. Larson: We have 19 combined with certified and non-certified. Hopefully, though, after today's job fair, that's going to significantly lessen. And just really focusing on some create ways of reaching our December graduates in areas close to us.
- Dr. Tafoya: And that was one thing that I had heard at the Springfield conference, that there's some districts actively recruiting juniors in the education pipeline and at the university saying,

"We're offering you employment and contract," and they hadn't even started student teaching. They may be even, you know, six, twelve months away from student teaching, and they're already contracted. Which for education is really weird. I think we probably were in the same way finished our undergrad stuff, and then got your paper resume, sent away a whole bunch of them and hope something came back, and that world is just so far gone.

Dr. Tafoya: Let's give an example. When you were a principal first starting and you would have an open second grade monolingual position-

Dr. Larson: Hundreds of applicants. We would have to sit there ... I remember it. I would be like, "Okay, how do we even begin to look at this?" That was even prior to having such online systems where you could filter out. I mean, you were looking at hard copy applications and resumes. Now, we struggle to get five decent certified applicants.

Dr. Tafoya: I mean, from hundreds down to five. I mean, we did have some monolingual positions where we had candidates, but it's hard. That to me is one of those canary in the coalmine moments that like, "Wow, we've got a really serious problem." What you heard in New Orleans at your conferences, this is not just an Illinois thing. It's not just a Harvard thing.

Dr. Larson: Oh, [crosstalk 00:27:52].

Dr. Tafoya: Because sometimes I remind some of our teachers that are talking about some of the things that are difficult is we're really working on it, but don't think that's just going on with us. That's why it's good. I like to be active in some national organizations, and it just kind of gives you some reassurance it's just not us here, locally.

Dr. Larson: Yeah, it did make me feel better.

Dr. Tafoya: All right.

Dr. Larson: And even talking about there's a teacher shortage, there's also a substitute shortage across everywhere, and it was interesting to talk with administrators in other states that have different licensure requirements, and in other states a substitute, they don't need anything except a high school diploma, and they're still short.

Dr. Tafoya: Isn't that remarkable?

Dr. Larson: Yeah, and so with very limited experience needed, still struggling to fill those roles.

Dr. Tafoya: Do you think that, you know we're in a very strong economic period right now. They always say that when the economy is good that you have a shortage of subs, and when it's bad and people lose their jobs, they kind of come back. That might be the case, again, with this because we are in better times, but I think it transfers beyond that. That

was one thing ... You did a presentation at this national conference about what we did to find subs. It was a really big thing.

Dr. Tafoya: So anybody listening that wants to know about that, I think that would be something good to look into, and contact Dr. Larson because that, Operation Substitute as you called it, was really a huge success.

Dr. Larson: It was.

Dr. Tafoya: Now, with a few exceptions we're pretty well staffed. In that area, at least.

Dr. Larson: Yeah, absolutely. It goes back to what we talk about with sustaining our teachers and our employees in the district, it's about relationships and adding value to them as part of our community.

Dr. Tafoya: And we're trying to look into that too to do a better job explaining to our staff and create some documentation about why we stay in Harvard just so that people understand that we're a district that offers nice loan forgiveness for those students. So if you're an Illinois state student going to see Dr. Larson, is it October 28th?

Dr. Larson: What is next Tuesday?

Dr. Tafoya: 26th?

Dr. Larson: 20 ...

Dr. Tafoya: I think it's the 28th. Yeah, because it's just a few days before Halloween.

Dr. Larson: Yeah.

Dr. Tafoya: We'll be down on campus, Illinois State, trying to find people, and I guess that's part of this aggressive approach that we're trying to have is find people so they'll be there. Now, I heard one person ask me, and it was a person inside education, who wasn't worried about this at all. They said, "With personalized learning, we're not going to need as many teachers." I struggled with that idea because I think I understood what he was trying to say is that there's a big move in our industry to personalize learning, which is good, but that idea is that they are more independent, they kind of know what they want to do, and I actually tell people this story about my own daughter asking ... I asked her, "Would you rather have the things you had to learn in geometry and just you could research any YouTube video you want and learn about those things, or would you rather have a teacher?"

Dr. Tafoya: She said, "I prefer to have it with the YouTube videos." That was kind of weird to me, and I don't know what that means, but I've heard people say, "I don't think we're going to need as many teachers," but I guess I disagree with that idea because I think the idea of teaching, well it's especially learning, happens through the facilitation of a trained

teacher that can [inaudible 00:31:23]. I think maybe Celia's a little bit unique in that that she's pretty motivated and might find her way. I don't know if every kid is like that.

Dr. Larson: Yeah, I don't think every ... No. I think I'm on your side. I disagree with that because when I think about personalized learning, I actually think we need more staff because I think kids enjoy the video learning and things like that, but creating more of a flipped classroom atmosphere where they can do some of that building background knowledge, and then really the teacher facilitating their learning in a differentiated way, you need more people to facilitate individualized learning versus less. That's my view.

Dr. Larson: Otherwise, you are now, again, demoralizing our profession. That's saying, "Any yahoo on the web," not yahoo, but any ... You know.

Dr. Tafoya: Untrained, unlicensed, [crosstalk 00:32:21].

Dr. Larson: Yes, yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Tafoya: Just make a YouTube video and assume-

Dr. Larson: Like, read Wikipedia, and we're all good to go, right?

Dr. Tafoya: Right, exactly. I want to give a shoutout to my colleague Dr. Jen [Kelsall 00:32:30] who is working with others in the Illinois Personal Learning Network, and I'm really fascinated to follow their work. Some of the things that she is doing in her district with the choice given to students about how they attain things and finding a passion project and working on it for a whole semester is really fascinating. So I think we'll do that, but I do think that our role still exists in that. I think probably most especially at our younger grades where that care ...

Dr. Tafoya: I was with a group of superintendents on Monday and Tuesday, and we continued to talk about that. Jim Gay who is the superintendent in Glenbard said, "You know, I've just told my people we have to care about SEL before we talk about academics," and as you know high school are almost the last people to care first about kids, and then their content area, chemistry is why we're all here, right everyone? Or yeah, that's why what we have to focus on is the needs of our kids, and then the learning kind of comes as we facilitate that secondarily because it's a different world.

Dr. Larson: Yeah. Well, and I think we always have to keep focus that any type of technology or personalized learning is to enhance what the teacher is doing and the student's learning.

Dr. Tafoya: Sure.

Dr. Larson: Right, and it's not to replace either one of those things.

Dr. Tafoya: No, that's no doubt. What if this doesn't get fixed, our teacher shortage? What will happen? Because right now we know the effort that we are doing here locally just to

scramble and find people, but there was a study that was done in Illinois that talked about how many different, open jobs there were, and I think we in the Chicagoland area don't have this as much as some of our colleagues downstate do.

Dr. Tafoya: What if your kid doesn't have a first grade teacher and has a sub the entire year? What if you have, like we have at our junior high right now, where we have a sub dual language science teacher? Maybe they're getting a little bit of the language, but it's not the same as a full teacher. What's the consequence if year after year your child has a sub or it's an empty classroom? I mean, just play that out.

Dr. Larson: The natural consequence, right, if we have underqualified people in our classroom teaching students, the natural consequences are students aren't going to learn. Right? It was interesting, I read an article last night that said we need to stop calling it a teacher shortage because we just have to come up with a different way to approach the issue.

Dr. Tafoya: Right.

Dr. Larson: When often people say, "It's a teacher shortage. This is the problem," and that's the excuse that we're giving to people, we can't help it we're short on teachers. Well what are we going to do about it? And I think that is something, in Harvard, that we're really working on. Addressing the recruiting process, addressing how are we going to sustain-

Dr. Tafoya: No doubt.

Dr. Larson: ... and onboard and mentor, and really create those relationships in the district with teachers. I think we just have to continue to build on that and really elevate and lift up the profession and how much we value everyone in it.

Dr. Tafoya: So in LGMC fashion, that's our call to action I guess for the end of this podcast. Maybe that's a good way to end all of our podcasts is what's the call to action, is to elevate the profession by-

Dr. Larson: Absolutely.

Dr. Tafoya: ... each doing that. And one thing that I had to do a little for you, maybe it was for Leadership Greater McHenry, I had to do a profile, and one of those adjectives I chose about you is just optimistic and energized, and I think that's why, as you just described it, we are in charge of a lot of this, and sitting there playing the victim of this "teacher shortage" isn't going to solve anything locally.

Dr. Larson: Right.

Dr. Tafoya: I mean, we can have a voice nationally and with our state government about appreciating all that Illinois is doing. You know, some of the things they're doing to ease the licensure restrictions that we face that started some of this, perhaps, is appreciated, and we do think that that's something good, but I really want to just mention to

everyone listening that just your energy in this is making a big difference here, and if you know anyone that's interested in coming in our world, get a hold of us. We're not hard to find.

Dr. Larson: No, absolutely not.

Dr. Tafoya: Come work with us, Harvard rising, which I stole from my friend and my ESA cohort, but we do feel good about where we're going, and it all happens with getting great people, keeping them, train them, making them feel appreciated.

Dr. Larson: Yep, absolutely.

Dr. Tafoya: Well my original idea for this Education Buzz podcast was called A Face For Radio, which my dad always told me that I had, and so we decided to go with Education Buzz anyway, but this has been a good start to what I hope is something that ... we'll learn how to let you subscribe, or we'll push these out in some way, and just a good chance to talk about what's going on in education and letting people know how we're thinking in Harvard, and hope this builds network. You can always get a hold of Vicki @drvickilarson, and I'm @drcoreytafoya. We hope to engage with you and expand our professional learning networks.

Dr. Larson: Absolutely.

Dr. Tafoya: Which is important, and thanks for giving us a test run. Thanks to Guy Clark for making the technology side because neither of us know how in the world this works beyond just-

Dr. Larson: No. I'm just making sure I'm six inches from the microphone.

Dr. Tafoya: [inaudible 00:37:52]. You've done a great job of that, and thanks everyone for joining us, and we'll probably try and do these once a month. We look forward to talking at you next time. Thank you.

Dr. Larson: Okay, bye.