



## Glean Education's Ed Leaders in Literacy Podcast Episode #15 - Alana Mangham (Center fo Development and Learning)

Alana Mangham: Soon as you give teachers something that's tangible, they feel a relief. And I just am such a big proponent for our educators, our classroom teachers, now more than ever, making sure that they feel successful and not leaving a meeting with more work to do. And I think that's a big part in making any shift. And hopefully it's the right shift in going towards the science of reading. And with that 50 plus years of research of getting results for students that it can work and it can start right away, doesn't have to wait till next year. But really training your teachers is the key.

Speaker 2: The results they've been immediate and we had one of the biggest shifts in the state.

Speaker 3: It's almost magical when it all comes together. And I think to myself, this is what education is about.

Speaker 4: There were inequities everywhere. My students in south Texas ultimately taught me more than I taught them.

Speaker 5: Over 40% of our students were leaving third grade with less than proficient reading skills. And that was just something we had to stop.

Speaker 6: The bottom line is that we can prevent reading failure. We can change the trajectory of these students' lives. And I just want to shout from rooftops, it can be done.

Speaker 7: From Glean Education this is Ed Leaders in Literacy, a podcast series that features educators and administrators who have made hard decisions about instruction, curriculum, intervention, and school systems to close the achievement gap and build equity by improving literacy.

Speaker 7: First, a word from our sponsors.

Speaker 8: Go ahead and state your name and title and what you enjoy about working here.

Speaker 9: My name's Andrew Follet. I'm the Chief Executive Officer. I have four young and kids at home and they're learning to read. So when I think about the doors that reading has opened for me, obviously I want that same thing for my kids. And that's what excites me about working here about being able to provide a curriculum that gives all



kids the opportunity to learn those vital skills and be able to learn to read.

Speaker 7: Heggerty's Daily Phonemic Awareness Curriculum is used by over 450 school district nationwide. Learn how you can get started@heggerty.org. That's H-E-G-G-E-R-T-Y dot O-R-G.

Jessica Hamman: Today, we're speaking with Alana Mangham the Literacy and Learning Specialist for The Center for Development and Learning, a member of Louisiana's Early Literacy Commission, and the reading league Louisiana's chapters vice president.

Jessica Hamman: She's taught in both New York City and Louisiana as a classroom teacher and spent seven years at the district level in Rapides Parish, as the K through five English Language Arts Curriculum Specialist, supporting schools and educators in urban and rural areas. Her work with Rapides Parish and the success of the K to three literacy plan gained national attention and was documented on the EAB report Narrowing the Third-Grade Reading Gap. Alana has been in Education Week alongside Dr. Louisa Moats sharing best practices and successes from Rapides Parish. Alana has also authored an in-person and virtual professional development called Growing Reading Brains that empowers educators to understand the components of the science of reading. Alana is excited to share her passion for early childhood literacy, with evidence based reading practices and the marriage of facts, science research, and her field experiences.



Jessica Hamman: In addition to her wealth of knowledge, Alana has a no nonsense approach to her work. She's not afraid speak to the science and the data because Alana is fighting for what's in student's best interests. Alana, is such a pleasure to have you here today.

Alana Mangham: Well, I appreciate, Jessica, you inviting me and I'm excited to be here.

Jessica Hamman: So tell me a little bit about your background and how you got interested in education in the first place.

Alana Mangham: Well, I think it's all teachers when we were little and we had our classroom and our grade books playing school. And, in fact, when I first left home, I moved to New York City all alone. And I wasn't sure if I wanted to go into education, even though I spent years obsessing over being a teacher and what I would do and teach in my classroom. Actually started to go into marketing and television. And then halfway through, I said, this is just not what I want, this is not my passion and switch back to education. I started teaching in Brooklyn in 2007. I remember only having one class in college about phonics in both my graduate and undergraduate courses. And when I got to my first classroom in first grade, I had the honor of teaching, amazing students. The school I taught at P.S 52 in Brooklyn, we were a balanced literacy school.



Alana Mangham: And we actually had trainings at Teachers College, Columbia University with Lucy Calkins staffers. And they would even come to our school for professional development. So I spent many long subway rides heading up to Teachers College, Columbia and spending all day in PD sessions, sucking in all that knowledge.

Alana Mangham: And coming back to my classroom as a first year teacher and teaching everything that I was just taught with fidelity. Making the anchor charts and everything you can imagine. It was everything I ate, breathed, bled was all the knowledge. And I loved it. I did see students succeed and they grew in levels of reading, but these were always my brighter students. My students who struggled, it took tooth and nail to move them. And looking back, it was very hard to consistently move them if they moved at all. So seven, eight years later, I decided to move back down to the south where I'm from, started teaching again, first grade students for three years at a low socioeconomic school, and continued with the training that I have had. Again with a different environment, different curriculum.

Alana Mangham: Bottom line, didn't matter if I was in New York City or if I was in Louisiana, the reading issues were the same. Three years teaching again in first grade, I was able to move to the district level as the ELA curriculum specialist. Once you get into that role and everything becomes very global at a district level, working with all schools. And at that point, we're looking at 52 schools total. So several schools to work with, majority of those were elementary schools building the rapport with teachers and then getting their feedback of there's not enough phonics. There's not enough phonics. We're not teaching our kids to read. And then going



through several trainings and data team process trainings and digging in data. And bottom line is we were trying to get to the root cause of what exactly are we missing here?

Alana Mangham: I had a former boss assistant superintendent at the time, Dr. Jofreon said, "Hey, have you heard of Plain Talk Literacy Conference?" And I had not. And he said, "I'm going to send you." Well, Plain Talk Literacy Conference is all about the science of reading. And let me tell you, when I left there, I ended up having to leave in New Orleans and going to find a Walgreen to buy more notebooks because I kept writing and soaking in this knowledge. And really when you say mind blown, every top education researcher, author is there in person and the messages are all very cohesive and consistent and build upon each other.

Alana Mangham: So after that training, going back, delivering piece by piece, but still not getting a full depth of understanding, we moved into, a few years later, into creating a K to three literacy plan. Very simple, but extremely powerful. We had a universal screener. I had changed the pupil progression and asked for a separate reading foundations block. So teachers could focus on just teaching reading. We had a summer literacy camp and all of these, biggest and most important, is we trained our teachers in the science of reading. And all of these components, we started seeing the growth in our students.

Alana Mangham: Meanwhile, we didn't change the curriculum. So EAB reached out and I was very fortunate enough to be a part of the case study, showcasing Rapides Parish, and the growth that we had throughout



our teachers hard work. And I call it the literacy fairytale now, is after I've lived both sides of the reading wars and attended Plain Talk Literacy Conference for so many years, I am now the Literacy Specialist for The Center for Development and Learning.

Alana Mangham: So my dream conference now is my dream job where I get to promote the science of reading and empower educators. One of the biggest things I think we have to remember when we're doing that shift mindset and making these literacy choices. And we have to remember in keeping our field hat on and keeping that hat on as a teacher and realizing the more we put on them, there's something that has to come off the plate. And I know we say we do that, but are we really attending to the teachers mental health and what they can physically get done in a day.

Alana Mangham: And bottom line is through these shifts and looking at a lens of your school or your district with the science of reading is imagine it as just these little Trojan horses that are coming into attack, and these little things will start making an impact, but we have to start small and figure out where the most impact would be, of course, looking at data in curriculum and standards with whether it's common core or Texas or Louisiana standards. We have a lot to do as educators to fulfill by the end of the year, but we have to really narrow down what is the most important.

Jessica Hamman: Well, and was the data really important element in convincing you that what you had been using before may not have been the perfect solution? Did that help guide your mindset change?



Alana Mangham: The data it definitely helped. We didn't take a full data dig until year three, where we really kind of spanned out all grade levels. Because at that point we were able to triangulate the data to our state assessment. So yes, every year with our grade level, our school level, we dug into the data. But when we saw the big picture after three years, it was astonishing to be quite honest. So-

Jessica Hamman: And what did you find?

Alana Mangham: Just looking, and third grade alone, now every grade level showed increase, third grade because we know that is that crucial age level, that crucial grade for reading success, our first year of implementation in 2016, third graders were 18% proficient, which is really it's upsetting. It's upsetting. These are somebody's babies. 2017 they went to 48% proficient and then the following year, they were at 68% proficient.

Jessica Hamman: So let's just pause right here on those numbers. Because that is so remarkable and important to pause and think about that. So the first year they were at 18% proficient, next year of implementation you even sometimes hear like an implementation dip where they'll go lower than the year prior, but no, they went up 30 percentage points and the following year, they went up another 20 percentage points to make your third grade readers proficient at a rate of 68%. So those numbers alone tell us that with the right approach, which seems multi-tiered, in this case, you had deep embedded, job





embedded training, you had curriculum revision, curriculum, what would you say, new curriculum adoption?

Alana Mangham: Well, and we had some supplemental pieces that we added in, but we actually did not do a full curriculum change. So we actually left what they had, but we just really honestly what I got down to and talking with teachers and visiting with teachers and I was in the schools all the time. So they really knew me and they felt comfortable saying, this is what I'm really doing. This is what's happening. And taking that information I realized, well, you know what, in school A half of the teachers are only spending five minutes on phonics. And maybe they're getting to phonological awareness. But in school A the other teachers are spending an hour a day, school B, we're not seeing it at all because they're focused on comprehension only in writing. School C we're seeing a mixture. So it started with, okay, we have to build a schedule that shows priority and urgency to foundational skills.

Alana Mangham: This is not just an add on, this is the most important thing as an educator in K to two that we must be doing is ensuring that they are leaving us reading. So the block of time that they were given was substantial and ideally over the course of years, as the scores would go up, we could decrease some of that time.

Alana Mangham: So for instance, kindergarten had about 110 minutes to work on just reading foundation skills. And within that time block, then I wrote up a sample guide of what a teacher should be doing during that time to help them kind of formulate their schedule and also



support leaders of the school for when they were doing visits to classroom. They were seeing that consistency, or if they were checking lesson plan, they were seeing that consistency. And it also was to support teachers. Bottom line is when they're in professional learning communities or working with each other, it's easier to share plans when you have a similar schedule and you can create that, I would say that classroom, but even create a district of an open door policy of building capacity and showcasing what others are doing.

Alana Mangham: And I think within that shift and making those numbers rise like they did is, bottom line, it was the teachers. The work that they put forth every day, but it was giving them opportunities to learn and grow and to showcase themselves when something was working and share. And that was, whether it was emails or I would videotape teachers and email them out to the entire district, or if it was PD night, whatever the case may be, it was just, or hearing from them just quick surveys or just going out and meeting them and sitting with them at lunch and just saying, how's it going? What's working, what's not. And keep it in mind that whatever was implemented as much as you want to say, it was a non-negotiable at the same time, you had to make sure that everyone was aware that it's a flexible document, and sometimes it will work. And sometimes it won't, and it can be changed and edited.

Alana Mangham: And don't feel that you are stuck in a pigeon hole of what the district put out. But again, they really took the information and ran with it. And a big part of all of this work was being able to have some funding, to provide them with multisensory, hands on materials, to fit into that block of time, and then teach and train on



those materials. It was taking something off their plate because they didn't have to go and find something online and cut and paste and create something to make it work. We really wanted to hand them that present so they could just go and teach and do what they knew best to do.

Jessica Hamman: What strikes me is the similarities between the success you found in Rapides Parish and the story behind Mississippi's literacy progress. And it's interesting in that, in Mississippi's case, they took kind of a RTI approach to their districts and they said, which ones need the most support. And then they deployed the people they needed to support those districts in a differentiated way for those specific schools. And it seems like within this Rapides district, you did the very same thing. You looked at all of these schools in the sense that you were carefully examining their own needs, even down to the element of each teacher's practice and what they needed to either learn or bolster about their practice in order to get the kind of common gains you were looking at. Would that be a correct assessment of that?

Alana Mangham: Absolutely. And what's so funny is knowing now the success in Mississippi and looking back going, man, we didn't even know about it. We should have been on the phone with them, while we're working on our plans to really dig into next steps. So it's really great to see these states that have been very low scoring doing successful things. Now, of course, we weren't at the level of being at a state level to see impacts across our entire state like Mississippi did, but just thinking about our students and changing their trajectory line of life and what a special gift that they don't realize is so great yet,



but to be a reader and to be at least more successful, even if they're not completely proficient yet.

Jessica Hamman: And if I could say from an administrative school systems perspective sometimes even thinking about raising literacy rates. Let's admit even within a classroom, I used to be a reading interventionist and sometimes it would be difficult to think about the next steps to, okay, these kids are here and what do we need to do all that we need to do to pull it together. And then you kind of zoom out and you say on a school level, okay, what do we need to do to bring the kids literacy rates, up and then on a district level, and then yet on the state level. But what I think is so amazing about hearing your story and hearing the stories of state level leaders who have made gains in this capacity is that there is an approach that works. There is an approach that could potentially in three years take your students from 18% proficient to 68% and proves that students should not be resting at 18%. We should not be satisfied with that. That we can aim for 68 or higher and there is a framework of sorts to get them there.

Alana Mangham: Absolutely. And of course it could change and work differently in different places, but we found success with that plan and then moving into what we had as a summer literacy camp. And that's part of the work that I continue to do now with my new position is supporting schools with looking and doing those data digs with teachers, sometimes without teachers and really kind of getting to that root cause. And most importantly, I really just feel it's wearing that teacher's hat and putting yourself back in those shoes. And sometimes that's difficult for some people and sometimes and it's no fault of anyone. You might have an administrator that has never



taught K, one, or two, and it's very hard to support those educators and those grade levels when the demands are already so intense on top of it, trying to get them to read.

Alana Mangham: I just actually had a school reach out to me about moving forward with some professional development and working with that alone of data, pulling in Michael Heggerty and making action plan of what to do and me coaching them through it. And it's super important to have your teachers on board. We know it's not going to always happen, but once you start seeing the data and once you start seeing teachers getting to promote what success they're seeing, it's just kind of a trickle effect. And it did it caught on like wildfire in Rapides Parish and we had great gains.

Jessica Hamman: Can you tell me a little bit, or can you tell our listeners how they might get started in supporting teachers to understand their data? Or take the first step toward data based mindset in a district because that can sometimes be a hard leap.

Alana Mangham: It's hard. It's hard to look at data and dig through it. I used to tell teachers when I worked with them and I said, it's really easy for me to come in here and give you suggestions. It's really easy for me to be on the outside and look at your data and say hey, did you think about this? I said, but when you're living it every day, you're not just looking at those children as numbers. You're looking at the trauma that they're walking into you with, or the day they're having, or did they eat breakfast and are they going to be successful at this book today or get to go to the library? So it's a difficult task.



So looking and moving through data, again, it boils back to training teachers on what do those numbers mean?

Alana Mangham: If DIBELS is such a reputable assessment and taking one of the sub skills nonsense word fluency, I had countless numbers of teachers that that would say, oh, well, my score was low on nonsense word fluency. So we are adding in five minutes a day of flashing nonsense words. I'm like, okay, now let me ask you and then of course I will do this cognitive coaching and guiding them through some questions. So they could see that the root cause, nonsense word, was connected to alphabet principle. And if they weren't successful at that, we kind of actually need to backtrack a few to find where that deficit actually lies. And I think that's what I enjoy so much, even about my current position, is being able to support at teachers again with really that no nonsense that I love that you're doing that, but we need to work smarter, not harder, and you don't have time to waste and the students don't have time to waste. So let's make a few adjustments. So you're going to get more bang for your buck.

Alana Mangham: And really going in that was my focus, even with writing, Growing Reading Brains, which is the virtual academy for the science of reading in person or virtual, but it's keeping that teacher mind of, they want the information, they want to learn, but they can't sit for hours and hours and hours trying to get and soak in all the research they need to know, I firmly believe it's extremely important that they have to know the why, but we also have to follow it with the how and give them the tool in their hand. And so again, that's part of the philosophy I've had with Growing Reading Brains was I'm going to teach you the why, but I'm going to give you some of the how.



Alana Mangham: I'm going to have your handouts ready for you. I'm going to have exactly what you can do, modeling what can be done in a classroom, how you would work with students. And I feel like that is really shifting that mindset because soon as you give teachers something that's tangible, they feel a relief. And I just am such a big proponent for our educators, our classroom teachers, now more than ever, making sure that they feel successful and not leaving a meeting with more work to do. And I think that's a big part in making any shift and hopefully it's the right shift and going towards the science of reading and with that 50 plus years of research of getting results for students that it can work and it can start right away. Doesn't have to wait until next year. But really training your teachers is, is the key.

Jessica Hamman: Can I ask you one last question about curriculum? You had started your career in being deeply embedded and trained in what is the official term? Reading and writing project?

Alana Mangham: Reading and Writing Workshop, the project.

Jessica Hamman: Workshop. Reading and Writing Workshop Project. And you made a shift through your building understanding of the science of reading to understand maybe the pieces that were missing. As you said, there were some things that were successful for some students, but the students that weren't making gains kind of seemed to get stuck. It also seems like instead of one of the successful pieces



components of the project at Rapides was supplementing the curriculum that was there with elements of the science of reading, to bolster the curriculum that you had. So would you say that a possible approach, if a school district can't just adopt a new curriculum or scrap what they have, if they find that there are holes, that you can effectively support all students by supplementing is that an approach to aim for? And what would that look like?

Alana Mangham: It is what we had to do. There was no funds to go in and start fresh. And we had a whole committee of teachers and admin, and we had several companies come out and give their presentation on their curriculum. And after the two days, I had a rubric created, we scored it, after the two days with the deep conversations you heard, I like this from there. This piece was great. That piece was really good. This one I didn't like at all. This one would be too much, I'd have to make too many things. When do I have time? And that's really, when we bottom my came and realized it's not the curriculum, it was training the teachers. And through that though, you had to make shifts and add in some supplemental pieces to enhance what we already had. And so many curriculums are already embedded with phonological awareness and phonemic awareness, but it just wasn't enough. Not with the deficits that we were facing. And I can tell you not with the deficits that the world is facing right now and with virtual students or being quarantined or not at school at all.

Alana Mangham: And we were successful with that. I think it also, still depends on what the core curriculum is. We were using a Basal, so it did have these components of phonological awareness and some decoding, and some phonics all built in. We really had to look at the delivery





method and making sure that teachers were delivering it explicitly and systematically making sure that everything just flowed better. So if you're in a place where purchasing all new material is not feasible, then it's just taking a deeper dive into what you have and kind of solidifying what are non-negotiables within a curriculum. If you're able to purchase any supplemental, looking at your data, we knew we needed more phonological support.

Alana Mangham: So that is why we bought an additional phonological supplement with Michael Heggerty. And we purchased that. And again, I could have purchased that book and it would've been successful, but I think what has made it and what made it in the past and that previous position, that role I had, was that, we had teachers trained. And so they knew they needed to have that. So when they received that gift, they were ecstatic and they weren't looking at it as another thing, they were seeing that I have this knowledge now, and this is the thing that I need to have a successful class.

Jessica Hamman: So training was kind of the key element elements, all of it?

Alana Mangham: It really was. And, and my assistant superintendent of curriculum, she's retired now, but Ms. Kimberly Bennett, we worked many, many days, many hours sorting through this plan. And she was wonderful that she really listened to the needs of teachers and my suggestions. And pretty much always said yes to me. And bottom line, she will still tell you today that the impact of training teachers first and foremost, was the best decision that was made and continuing on. And what I continue to do now is just paying



forward, paying that knowledge forward, and why I enjoy presenting and training teachers still to this day.

Jessica Hamman: Well, awesome, Alana, what an amazing job you've done and so excited to continue to see all the good work that you do in the field. Thank you so much for connecting with us today, and I'll be sure to link information on Narrowing the Third Grade Reading Gap Research Brief that's on EABs website in the show notes. So people can take a deeper look as well.

Alana Mangham: That's wonderful. I appreciate. And any of your listeners, please reach out. We all have to be in this together, no shaming. And we just have to take all of this knowledge and the science of reading and define it and move forward and ensure that we are doing what we need to do for our students.

Jessica Hamman: Thank you so much. This was amazing.

Jessica Hamman: To learn more about Alana Mangham and her work at CDL, visit [cdl.org](http://cdl.org) or follow her on Twitter at Alana A-L-A-N-A Rae R-A-E 2009. That's Alana Rae 2009.

Speaker 7: Thank you for listening to our Ed Leaders in Literacy podcast. To find links to the articles and resources mentioned in this podcast, go



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Speaker 7: Bye for now.

Speaker 11: This episode was edited and produced by Nita Sharis.

