

# Arizona K12 Center

**Julie:** [00:00:00] I am honored to have our guest today. She is a National Board Certified Teacher, an Arizona Educator for the past 27 years, and she is also the Executive Director of the Arizona K 12 Center. I would like to welcome Daniela Robles to NAC TEP Now. Thank you for being here today.

**Daniela:** Thank you, Julie.

I'm honored to be here with you. I've

**Julie:** been looking forward to this interview, Daniela. I, as a former Arizona teacher, you are inspiring to other teachers out there, and I'm just, as you can tell from my voice, I am super excited to have you today. I

**Daniela:** love it. Excited to be here. Oh, great. I'll begin,

**Julie:** will you share a little about your journey as an Arizona K 12 educator and historical view about the Arizona K 12

**Daniela:** Center?

Absolutely, and this is a perfect [00:01:00] question because my journey does definitely intersect with the Arizona K 12 Center. And so it's a perfect combination. Let me start with the fact that I never wanted to be a teacher. My mom, my dad were teachers, my uncle. And so I just always said, that's never going to be me until I was at South Mountain Community College and was taking a course and we had to have volunteer hours.

And one of the options we could use was to volunteer at a school. Well, it just so happened at that time, my mom was a principal while serving a school district in Phoenix. And I thought, well, this is perfect. I'll just go to my mom's school for, I think, The requirement was two to four hours a month. I mean, it's very minimal.

So I started and what started to happen is the two to four hours a month increased to eight to 10 hours a month and then [00:02:00] 10 to 12 hours a month. And the piece of really, really drew me in. I loved being with students, for sure, hands down, but I loved being with teachers. The best professional conversations sometimes happen in the workroom and Those were the conversations that I just couldn't get enough of.

I just loved the passion and the commitment that teachers had to serving their students well. And so, lo and behold, I wind up pursuing teaching as my life's work. So served 10 years as a classroom teacher, then started to go into a reading intervention, then instructional coaching and right around that time.

So specifically year nine is when my world started to intersect with the Arizona K 12 [00:03:00] center. And that was through national board certification. And so that process. Truly awakened me to who I wanted to be as a teacher. So that really guided me, then instructional coaching and district leadership around teacher retention and professional development, teaching and learning, research, evaluation, and assessment.

So really great opportunities at different levels of a system. As I go along Arizona K 12 Center's history, I'll be able to share where. I intersected as a practitioner and as a system leader with this work. That's great. So the center started in 1999 by Governor Jane Hall and we will forever be grateful for her vision to create a center that focused on teacher professional development with the clear [00:04:00] understanding that when we invest in teachers and their learning and growth We are doing that in service of student learning.

And so that was really the pathway and the vision for the Arizona K 12 Center. So for a good portion of time, the center really served as a direct provider of grants. And then significant to the center's history was in 2005, a new executive director came on board and that was Dr. Kathy Webke. And to honor her legacy and her work, her vision was centered in governor Hall's vision, but to say, we will become a direct provider of professional development.

And so that's very significant in the center's history, right at that same time. Through another visionary governor, if I shall say so, Governor [00:05:00] Napolitano created the Master Teacher Program, which was the vision for a teacher to be identified and supported with knowledge and skills around mentoring other teachers.

And so we can even look back through old newspapers and see Governor Napolitano announcing this program as a direct response to retain teachers. And you'll think I'm talking about 2005 2006 when teacher retention. Was an identified issue in our state. This funding also included support for teachers to pursue national board certification.

And so that's right about the time. Daniela Robles was able to take advantage of that funding. Significant to the Center then moved into 2007 2008. We [00:06:00] had our first publication. The website was launched. That moved us

into the individual development, professional development plan for teachers. So teachers could become owners of their own professional learning through a process.

We also began to celebrate national board certified teachers, and I'm going to use the language from the original grant master teachers who had completed mentoring, learning, and application. And so this was an opportunity to honor teachers who had voluntarily gone through a process to elevate their practice.

A rigorous process, a rigorous process. Yes. And a process meant to always give back to the larger grade level department school district in [00:07:00] service of student learning. And there are many historical pieces that are important to the center's history, but I would be remiss if I also didn't. Talk about in 2011, there was a full featured documentary titled Mitchell 20 and that was a movie that told the story of me and my school at the time that engaged in a process.

Of national board certification as a way for school improvement. And so that was a little bit of a change because school improvement tends to be top down. Right. Experts coming in to tell you what to do, where we took the vantage point organically as a staff, we will [00:08:00] commit to a process that we know is research based to improve student learning.

And if we have 20 teachers at a school engaging in the process, the power of the collective is surely meant to also have a greater impact. Also significant to that, and I call this out because I am constantly working, I think, as many of us are to dispel misconceptions or narratives that are not supportive or not inclusive in nature.

And Mitchell 20 broke down one of the greatest misconceptions about national board certification is that it is specifically for a particular type of teacher. And we can look at our data to show most often a national board certified teacher is [00:09:00] White, female, and typically will serve a more affluent school.

And so Mitchell 20 broke down that misconception since the majority of teachers were teachers of color. We were serving majority students of color. And so that was really significant to the center as we started to share some different narratives. We also launched work significant to teacher leadership, going down the line now about 2017, we engaged in our own podcast, three peas in a pod, practice policy and passion, and that, yes, and that is still going strong.

And so we're very excited about that work and also the power that it gives educators, much like this podcast. to learn when they want to, whether it's to

[00:10:00] inform or to disconnect or to just find joy. And then in 2019, thank you to Governor Doug Ducey. You can see a thread here about the significance of governors in our history with the Arizona Teachers Academy, NAU.

Chooses that with their Arizona Teachers Academy funding. Part of that support is direct support of a mentor to a new and a you grad. And so the Arizona K 12 center provides that service. And we also had additional funding for national board. So that's very significant. And then most recently we had the creation of the Arizona induction standards.

Sometimes that's a document that is brand new to systems to say, no, there are Arizona standards to guide your induction program. Um, and those were adopted in 2021 by the state board. [00:11:00] We have the, um, ESSER funds. We definitely were able to expand our current previously known as master teacher program to our Arizona new teacher support program so we can support many more districts and the Arizona teacher residency also came on board in late 2020 so a very concise if you think that's concise try to view of 20 close to 25 years of history.

I just want to

**Julie:** stop for one second and just thank you for your commitment to elevating the teaching profession in Arizona, just having a role model. Like you said, teaching wasn't calling your name in the beginning and thank goodness. You still heard a voice and followed it because I can only imagine the amount of teachers you've touched and it's inspired and it's just so exciting to have a teacher that loves [00:12:00] teaching and loves training teachers as much as they love working with students as well.

So I think you found the perfect profession for you. Are there any other initiatives that you would like to share that you're currently engaged in at the K 12

**Daniela:** Center? Yes, in fact, and to be fully transparent, the Arizona K 12 Center is in a bit of, I don't want to use the term transition, but a little reset and refocus, I think, probably describes what we're doing a little better.

And so current initiatives for us really relate to establishing the Arizona K 12 Center as An Arizona organization focused on being a solution, a thought partner to the teacher retention crisis in the [00:13:00] state. So if I could encapsulate everything that we're doing around that real unifying theme, that When systems are struggling with teacher retention, should it be their novice

teachers or their teachers with a little more experience that they think of the Arizona K 12 Center as that solutions oriented thought partner and that we can share the programming that we offer, which leads me to our biggest initiative right now is around induction and mentoring.

So we have the Arizona New Teacher Support Program, which Was the master teacher program that I alluded to earlier and previous to 2020. We were really only able to find about 7 school districts in a 2 year grant cycle. Essar funding allowed us [00:14:00] to open that to many more programs and we also just received.

The governor's grant of educational disparities and teacher development. So we were able to expand additionally. And so currently right now we are supporting 33 programs in the state across seven counties. And that really is. Um, and our passion and our priority because we can clearly see the evidence that supports a comprehensive induction system, increases student learning, teacher efficacy, and teacher attention.

That is great.

**Julie:** I will say, looking at the current trends and then ensuring that your initiatives are. Working towards solving that teacher retention problem. I know it's just critical to your success and also to have teachers who have that [00:15:00] support. We know from studies data that one of the main reasons that teachers leave in the beginning or even later on is that they Don't feel that support or they don't have someone they can go to for questions.

And that's a scary place to be, especially when you're starting your day with 30, 40 students, and that might be changing by the hour. You want to make sure that you're doing the best job that you can be. And, and so just in your, with your passions and the K 12 centers, initiatives is really combating that.

Retention issues. So that is wonderful to hear. I do see, because I was doing a little, maybe not Google searching, but on the K 12 Center website, and I see that you have many upcoming events. Could you spotlight a few of them that would benefit our teacher leaders out in the

**Daniela:** field? Absolutely. And I'm going to try to keep it short and sweet, but I can't [00:16:00] promise that I'll stick to that because we are so purposeful in our design of offerings for teachers.

So if I think, and I'll also say a little bit, we are in a place right now where we are really being curious. about the term teacher leaders, because, and I will say for the center, we really used experience as one of those main drivers that identified teacher leaders. And so knowing that the profession is much greener and You know, really questioning are we then imposing our own barriers to those that are entering into our profession and want to impact.

In a different way and [00:17:00] expand their own leadership capabilities. So we're wrestling with that and remaining curious, but as I think about just teacher leaders, a teacher that looks at different opportunities, and I'm not going to necessarily go in chronological order. So I'm going to start with next summer, so we have.

**Julie:** I do want to mention for our listeners, we will link to those current events also so I just to take a little bit of the pressure off to make sure you don't forget one, we will link that in the episode description as well. So my apologies for interrupting but I wanted to make sure you didn't feel like you had to

**Daniela:** go and chronic, you know, awesome, awesome that's fantastic Julie Yeah, takes a little pressure off.

For sure, mark your calendars for this coming summer, the week of June 24th, we will have our 19th annual teacher leadership Institute, which is a multi [00:18:00] day event where. Teachers, teacher leaders can come together with a really organic community who is focused on what is in my locus of control and how do I take those elements of empowerment to influence and to nudge whatever might be happening in my system because the one thing we know is there's always More than enough initiatives going on, but what does it mean for you who may be the person that has six initiatives that they're trying to move their team towards or they themselves?

So what does that mean for you? And our whole theme is amplifying excellence. And so this summer's note will be Michelle Poehler and she's focused on tenants of her book. Hello, fears and moving out of our comfort zone. So just [00:19:00] really honing in on what's within our power, our control. And yes, some of those tenants of positive psychology, but for sure, not toxic positivity.

So we're very excited about that event. So that would be my number one. Great

**Julie:** place here in Phoenix.

**Daniela:** That's a good question. It will be in beautiful Tucson. And so we will be able to experience for those of us in Metro Phoenix, a couple temperatures less during the summer. So yes, in the getaway. Yes. A little bit of a getaway, which also adds to that sense of community.

And then I always encourage any teacher who is focused on building their own self directedness or those of others to look at our cognitive coaching offerings, and if there's a wait list, that's okay, join it. And so you'll be on the list [00:20:00] for the new offerings that occur. That is

**Julie:** wonderful. So, so cognitive coaching, is that an online like a module or is that in person?

**Daniela:** It is in person and it is eight filled days that will push your own thinking in ways that really allow you to connect to the individuals that we really hope all our students will be around being able to self monitor, to become autonomous, all of those elements. But how do we support that type of thinking?

And then the other event that just rings so true as we're thinking of teachers who are looking for that next step of impact, Or to feel that validation of the impact they're doing. We have a one day event in the spring called Voices for Impact, and that will really just help guide towards your [00:21:00] spheres of influence, identifying the decision makers in your system, and just really help you center on what are your goals and what are, what's some action steps that you could engage in.

Oh,

**Julie:** so a lot of great ways to support Arizona teachers with professional development activities. As you're talking about each of these events, would you recommend them for all teachers? Maybe that are new to teaching, maybe even in teacher education programs now becoming teachers or veteran teachers, or does it really address all teachers altogether, wherever they fall

**Daniela:** in their careers?

Well, I will say, and this is back to being curious, if you had asked me two years ago, I would have said, Oh, well, kind of back to that experiential kind of barometer. And now my answer [00:22:00] really is. What speaks to you, what resonates as you hear, that's absolutely what I need. Do we have additional offerings?

Yes. Sharpen your skills to hone in on student engagement and brain based teaching strategies. We have many others, but as we identify that leadership, moving and thinking in a way of impact. What speaks to you? And if it speaks to you, sign up, that's great.

**Julie:** So for those that are listening, grab your educator friends, get a group together and go have some fun with some professional development included in there.

And I think that's a great and what a great time in the summer when they have a little bit

**Daniela:** of time that they could do that. Yes, fine community. Yes. I love

**Julie:** that. Well, let me go on. I'm going on to [00:23:00] our last question today. And this is one. This is a question that we will ask many of our podcast guests because we have had a lot of read a lot of people inquiring.

What are those teacher leaders that are currently working in the field? What are they reading? So is there a book that you have read that has positively impacted your role that you would recommend to another educational leader?

**Daniela:** I would and I'm going to take a little liberty with this 1 because. So being new to an institute of higher ed, I will be very transparent that it caused me a little nervousness because I've been in K 12 systems forever.

Um, and so One of the topics, and this is again, if this resonates with you, then you will find some connection in what I share. I have been on a personal journey [00:24:00] to be a learner about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, and in the K 12 sphere. I'm not going to say that I felt like I knew everything related to those elements, but I felt much more capable.

And so moving an Institute of higher ed, I just questioned that. So one book that I've been leaning heavily on, and I don't read a book from front to back. So also know that about me. Um, but one book that I just have at the ready. And it's all tabbed up is titled The Necessary Journey, and it's Making Real Progress on Equity and Inclusion, and it's by Ella Washington.

And what speaks to me about this book is it does give narratives about different organizations, not in education, which [00:25:00] I will say sometimes when we stay in that education sphere. We miss perspective, so I have enjoyed reading



the journey of companies like Denny's and Best Buy and Sodexo as they've been on this journey as well to really operationalize belonging.

So this has been really significant to me and the piece I want to share is. I'm a big annotator in my books, but to know that the topic of diversity and the workforce is not new and to read about 1987, having a report commissioned by the secretary of labor and that workforce 2000 report that really started to show.

How as a workforce, we were changing and what [00:26:00] were institutions businesses going to need to do to be responsive and inclusive. And so that's just been phenomenal for me to learn about. But the piece I'll share kind of as my, if you like this piece and hopefully you'll get the book is Ella Washington describes it.

D. E. I. D. E. I. J. B. as elevating humanity. And that just encapsulates my personal journey as an organizational leader. Daniela,

**Julie:** I. I want to thank you so much for being a champion for educators everywhere in today's podcast. It is so clear your vision and the K 12 Center's vision is just, it's just positively impacting [00:27:00] education, not just in Arizona, and that I want to be clear to say, Say yes, the K12 Center is, in Arizona, but really nationwide.

So I want to thank you for your time today. I want to thank you for your commitment to elevating the teaching profession and it was such a delight to meet with you today.

**Daniela:** Oh, same. Thank you so much. Thank

**Julie:** you.