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Thank you for joining us today in the Unpacked podcast, where we are
unpacking

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the realities of today's public schools.

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I am Mickey O'Neill. I am your host today, and I am joined by Jason
Malema.

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Jason, could you please introduce yourself to our audience? Hello.

00:00:24.906 --> 00:00:29.486
Sure. I am Jason Malema, superintendent here at Ingham ISD. Thank you
so much.

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Yeah. Well, today we're going to talk about artificial intelligence,
the world of AI.

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Could you share a little bit about how you think AI is changing the
landscape for schools? Yes.

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AI is not just a buzzword at this point in time. It is probably the
biggest

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disruptor when we are looking to the future of education.

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So this is an awesome topic. I'm very excited about, glad we are
unpacking this today.

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So the landscape in schools is something that I think is going to see
some rapid

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change over the next five years as we see these emerging technologies
start

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to become more readily available and hopefully are developed in a
manner in which they can be

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safe for the students and staff that are using them.

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In education for years, we've talked about trying to set up a culture,

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the right types of environment where we can be more personalized in
our learning.

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That's been difficult. When we think about a traditional classroom
setting and

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how many students are there and the staff that support them,

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you typically see a student to staff ratio somewhere around 17 to 20
to sometimes 24 to 1.

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That can be difficult than when we talk about personalized learning.

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But when we think about what AI can do and we think about how it could
assist

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students, it becomes exciting when we think about.

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Ways in which it directly can work with students, provide real-time
supports

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based on that individual's needs.

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So this is kind of exciting, right? Again, I was in college starting
in the

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90s, and this was stuff that was talked about and how we're going to
radically

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change education, but we haven't been able to figure out a way around
it.

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And this isn't just putting kids in front of a computer and hoping.

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This is about embedding the right types of frameworks and supports for both

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in-person and virtual, thinking about ways that are there, and then also being

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able to be receptive after hours.

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Our staff do a phenomenal job every day when they are there working with students.

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But it's unrealistic to expect when a kid's working on a homework assignment

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at 1030 at night, hey, I'm going to be able to connect in with the teacher all the time.

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Our teachers have lives as well. We all go home, we've got lives.

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But what if there was a system, a way of supporting kids in which they could

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get some of those answers and continue with their learning.

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And I think that's what's cool is we look at this with AI and we think about

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the possibilities of how learning isn't just something that happens in a classroom,

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because that's the way it traditionally has been thought.

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You go to school, you learn during this period in time, you go home

and you

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quit learning. That's not true.

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We know that's not true. That hasn't been true for decades, right?

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Because you've had homework and everything else that's happened.

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And we should be learning in all different capacities wherever we're at.

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And that's where I get excited because I think AI gives us a way to provide

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some personalized tutoring, personalized supports in manners we've not had before,

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or at least I should say masses of population haven't.

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You know, there's a big divide between those who have and those who haven't.

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And so for those who have, they probably have had some resources.

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They've been able to afford more of those supports, whereas those who haven't.

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They've kind of been left behind. And that is something I worry about when we

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think about AI and the landscape in schools as well in the future,

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is how do we be cognizant of those challenges,

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those divides that could happen, a digital divide that could happen,

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and how do we set structures up to make sure that part of that bias
isn't coming

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from an affluent standpoint.

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But super excited because we think about what more we can do to
support kids.

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Yeah, that's fantastic.

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And we know that kids are on AI, right? They're using their,

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first of all, they're online all the time. Second of all, they're
using AI tools

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to create fun and creative things, too, not just, you know, for
learning.

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But that helps them, right? It's an outlet for them.

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Talk a little bit about Ingham ISD's role in AI with students.

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We've got some pilot projects that are going on here.

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Some districts are afraid to embrace AI and some districts are not.

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And I know that Ingham ISD has moved forward in doing some pilot
projects.

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Talk about one of those, if you would.

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Sure. So in the 23-24 school year,

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we actually kind of jumped in with a little bit of a pilot trying to
figure

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out what would this look like and how could we set up a structure to provide

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some tools to students they don't normally have as these emerging technologies are coming out.

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And we worked with our staff to try to build a program which we knew at best

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was going to be clunky and at worst was going to be just a complete learning

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experience. I mean, we were very honest with ourselves right up front.

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Like we saw tremendous potential opportunity, but when you're dealing with trying

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to build a plane while you're flying it, it can be difficult.

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So the origins of that kind of went back to the spring of 23 there.

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We were kind of challenged with Ted Dintersmith from What Schools Could Be,

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the outside group, about how can we continue to think about ways we can challenge

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and embed some of those structures.

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Here within our school, I had a great conversation with him.

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We brought that back to our staff here, and we kind of then grew that into what

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could we do? Not what can't we do, but what can we do?

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And how would that look? And what does that mean? And how would we
support them?

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And how do we inform parents? And how do we inform staff?

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And so our staff, Jim Kelly kind of ran the point on that.

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Dr. Kelly did a fantastic job of trying to provide a system and
structure where

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we included student voice.

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We got the students to be able to tell us as to what they thought AI
would do

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to their respective field of study that they were involved with at our
Career and Tech Center.

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So we've got about 20 different programs at our CTE Center with about
1,000

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students that show up every day from 17 different high schools.

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And by getting kids from different CTE programs, you can ask the same
question

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and get dramatically different answers. Oh, I'm sure you can.

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What does this mean for cosmetology versus what does this mean for
business?

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Wow. That's a huge difference. Yeah. And so it was exciting for us to
look at that.

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Now we told the kids right up front, this is going to be hard.

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We didn't have, and this was part of the challenge. There is no right
answer.

00:06:29.729 --> 00:06:34.409
Right. It's an experiment. That was something that I think stopped a
lot of kids in their tracks.

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Like, what do you mean? Well, I want a rubric. I want to know how I
can get

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an A. That's not the way this works.

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This is about you critically thinking about how is AI going to
potentially disrupt

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the field that you're studying, that you're engaged with right now?

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And what does that mean? What could it do? How could it help you?

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We saw some amazing projects that came out of that.

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It was super exciting. We had a panel that came in with some of our
partners

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and it was just amazing to see The kids that were able to finish and
get through

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the final project blew our mind away as far as what was there.

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And it was neat to be actually recognized at a statewide level for
that.

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So something that was super exciting.

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And we've just continued to try

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to learn that. We use that as an internal research project for
ourselves.

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We studied ourselves and said, all right, how do we keep getting
better at this?

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How do we keep growing? What can we do better?

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How can we change the system to try to figure it out? And so we've
continued

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to dabble in this field and think about ways in which we can embed the
right

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types of AI-infused tools to continue to supplement educational
opportunities for kids.

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And I think that's really important when we look at AI, whether it's
for kids

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or whether it's for our systems and structures as an organization.

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This is about supplementing, not supplanting.

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This is about in addition to not subtracting and taking away.

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And I think that's one of the big areas philosophically that parents
as well

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as community members need to know.

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When we do this well as schools, it should be in addition to. It
should be adding.

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It should be making things better. This isn't something we're trying
to take away.

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The future for our students needs this because I think they're going to go into

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a very different work environment than we are currently seeing today.

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That makes total sense. Yeah, yeah.

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Talk a little bit about how your operations teams or your non-instructional

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teams are using AI to help with their work.

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Yeah, thanks for asking because I think this is also an area that can get lost

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at times when we think about education.

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Education has two sides of the house. We have instruction, we have operations.

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And when we're at our best, there's a marriage between the two of them and they

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work in harmony, right? It's a symbiotic relationship.

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We have to have the right amount of staff members on the operations side to

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make sure that the right things can happen inside the instructional side.

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Let me give you an example.

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If we don't have tech staff that are able to support and make sure that our

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infrastructure for the internet, that makes sure that our computers,

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that makes sure that our phones are working, that can be a major
problem inside a classroom.

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A little disruption there. You want a bad day? Let me flip the
internet off.

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Days get real bad inside a classroom real quick, right? So when we
talk about

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operations side, that's what we're talking about.

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We're talking about those staff that provide the right types of
supports from

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the instruction side. So we've got operations for communications.

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We've got operations for technology. We've got operations for HR, for
business services.

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There's a whole bunch of stuff that happens on the operations side,

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PD. There's lots of different things.

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Thinking about our operations side is really important at this point
in time as well.

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This isn't something that's just disrupting the classroom.

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This is disrupting operations because what are we able to, and we're
challenging

00:09:44.527 --> 00:09:50.027
ourselves, what are we able to critically think about that we spend a
fair amount

00:09:50.027 --> 00:09:51.787
of time that we could make better,

00:09:52.347 --> 00:09:54.847
systemize, but we've never really had the chance to do before.

00:09:54.967 --> 00:09:56.087
So let me give you an example.

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Let's assume in an organization of our size, we've got over 500
employees,

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that on an annual basis, we're going to have staff members that are
going to

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need time off and are going to utilize FMLA.

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Well, that happens every year, by the way, all the time.

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When we think about the amount of time that goes into it, could we
create an

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AI-infused support system that could help answer some of the basic
questions

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that we get from staff for filling out those FMLA forms,

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as opposed to having physically one person who's going to do that
every time

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we have a staff member goes across.

00:10:32.294 --> 00:10:36.234
So is there something that AI could do if we set up the right type of
an agent,

00:10:36.854 --> 00:10:43.314
that could answer 75% or 80% of the questions before they get to the
right staff member.

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So we can sort and we can actually then assist them the right way.

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That's what we're trying to think about in the operations. That's just
a great

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example of things that I think business is doing at this point in time
too, right?

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When you call in quite often, it's not necessarily a person. You think
it's a person.

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It's not really a person quite often that is answering that call,

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but they're trying to sort the calls to get into the right spots.

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And that then supplements. It that allows us to focus on the best ways
of providing

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the support. So operations is really important when we think about
this.

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It's both and, it's not an either or.

00:11:14.533 --> 00:11:18.753
It's really important for us to think about both and, both operations
and instruction.

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That makes total sense, yeah. And you've used the word disruption a
couple of

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times, and I just want to address that because sometimes people can
think that

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it's a negative thing, and really disruption, what we're talking
about, is positive, right?

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We want to disrupt things so that we can find efficiencies, we can do

things

00:11:34.013 --> 00:11:37.653
differently, and we can be creative in the ways we move forward.

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Yeah, for me, the disruption isn't a negative. You're exactly right on.

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The disruption is a positive, but the disruption comes at changing adult behaviors.

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Our kids are growing up. They're digital natives.

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For many of the adults that are still working, we're not, right?

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I'm going to guess most of our adults that are 45, 50 plus that are still in

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the work field didn't grow up or weren't born at least with a computer inside their house, right?

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They may have gotten one by the time they got to the mid to late 90s or early

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2000s. But for our kids, if you're 20 years old right now listening to this,

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you almost think that's incomprehensible because that's just been your life.

00:12:16.493 --> 00:12:19.513
Okay, so let's think about our students that are inside schools right now.

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Their lives have always involved smartphones.

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Smartphones didn't come out until, what was it, 2009 when Apple came out with the iPhone, right?

00:12:27.313 --> 00:12:32.133
So I think it was 2009, 2012, somewhere in there was when those phones
came

00:12:32.133 --> 00:12:36.253
out, right? But smartphones haven't always existed, except for our
students

00:12:36.253 --> 00:12:38.233
who in their lives, this is the way it's always been.

00:12:38.733 --> 00:12:42.113
So the disruption is about how do we think about our skill sets?

00:12:42.233 --> 00:12:45.513
How do we think about what we need to continue learning, again,

00:12:45.653 --> 00:12:51.013
to supplement and make sure that our students have the right skills
for the

00:12:51.013 --> 00:12:52.593
environment they're going to be going in?

00:12:52.733 --> 00:12:55.433
This is the best technology we've ever had as adults.

00:12:55.913 --> 00:12:58.613
This is the worst technology these kids will ever have.

00:12:59.275 --> 00:13:03.195
And we laugh at that, but it's the truth. And so if we're focused on
our student

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needs, if we're focused on our learners,

00:13:05.275 --> 00:13:09.655
we've got to consider how do we continue to disrupt things that we've
done as

00:13:09.655 --> 00:13:13.455
adults, systems and ways in which we've learned to make sure that it's
focused

00:13:13.455 --> 00:13:14.975
on what the students will need.

00:13:15.595 --> 00:13:19.575
Perfect. Perfect place to end our podcast. So thank you for joining us

today.

00:13:19.675 --> 00:13:24.575
That's all we have time for and helping us unpack the realities in
today's public education.

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Thanks so much. We look forward to you listening to future episodes
when we continue to unpack it.