

## Focus on the One #1: Standards

**Anne R:** So welcome! We are Anne Ristow and Pam Sudduth from Student Support and Academic Achievement Unit of Florida's Problem solving/Response to Intervention project. Focused on the One: Desired Results is a multi-session experience that we want to support Florida educators in not only utilizing but also sustaining a multi-tiered system of student supports with fidelity in every district, school and classroom. So today's guest speaker for our inaugural podcast is Rebecca Meade, the as-of-today Executive Director for Just Read! Florida. Thanks for joining us Rebecca.

**Rebecca M:** Thank you.

**Anne R:** So let's go ahead and get started with first thing's first. Could you tell us a little bit about how your learning journey brought you to this point in your work as an educator here in Florida?

**Rebecca M:** Absolutely. Like a lot of educators, I'm a career changer. This is my second career. Twenty years ago, I was practicing law and did not see this as what was going to be my eventual journey. But it has been and like every first year teacher, I know that if any of those of us who taught for a number of years remember that first year, and then there's a lot in the middle. We remember all of the kids, but that first year I was trying to figure out how I was going to make this happen. And so that self-learning, that wanting to make sure that I knew everything that would help my students, I think that's what so many of us do. And part of that journey led me to a no-grade kindergarten. I taught in several interdisciplinary, integrative programs. I had several certifications in every subject, but reading was what kept coming to the fore because students who can't read can't actively participate in those other subject areas in a way that's meaningful. And so I have been so lucky and fortunate that that journey has led me now so that I can share the connections I've seen between the subject areas, the benefit of having coached and working with other alt-cert educators. Knowing exactly what that experience feels like, being able to make sure that we all get to the point that we're as effective as we can be.

**Pam S:** Wow, that is just beautiful. I had no idea that you were an attorney before this, so we're learning so much about you. So this is great and this is a wonderful stepping stone into the next questions, which is can you please quickly share about your involvement with the BEST standards? How did that come into play?

**Rebecca M:** Absolutely. Keri Sweet, who is one of my reading specialists, she and I had just done the Florida Standards Academy for the last, the previous set of standards, and she and I had just created this beautiful implementation guide, still available on the Just Read! Florida website, and we were in the middle of a roll out of this momentous implementation guide and we found out that these standards were about to change. And at first we were a little crestfallen because we had done all of this work. But the same time throughout that whole process, we had been identifying things that we felt could be fixed with the standards, things that were maybe not grade level appropriate, maybe that left huge gaps in left teachers to try and figure out what instruction looked like with not a lot of help. So we found ourselves to be the most knowledgeable because of the work that we had done people on the map. So when the opportunity came up, we actually volunteered. We stepped forward and we were involved with the process of getting our ELA organizations together, identifying teacher experts, drafting we went through several drafts. We went through work groups. We were lucky enough to work with an online platform where we could get feedback from everybody that was willing to do so. And I'll tell you when Keri Sweet and I sat and read every comment that was made, so I know sometimes when things like that

come out you think that nobody's hearing you. We were hearing people. We were hearing them. We went on a listening tour to get more information. We were improving the drafts based on feedback the entire time and now we're working on the implementation guide that support instructional support to teachers in implementing. Because that implementation, you can have the best standards, we do have the best standards, you can have the best standards and if you're not implementing those properly, nobody's going to see them for the way they were intended to be. So that's our big project working forward. The standards work is non-stop.

**Pam S:** Well that is a relief I think for both of us. Thank you because Anne and I were actually part of that and sharing our thoughts in regard to that online. So thank you and I'm sure that several folks who are going to be listening to this are gonna go, oh great! So thank you so much for taking the time to read it. So sharing all that, and you wrestling with the prior standards and creating these new standards, so what is so unique about the BEST standards? What would you say?

**Rebecca M:** I think a lot of it has to do, one is the experience level of the people drafting. We were lucky enough in that most of us who have been involved in at least one standard implementation, whether at the school or district or state level, and so we knew what that looked like. Keri and I also come from a coaching background, so we have worked with teachers seeing what sort of stumbling blocks one may run into when trying to implement standards. And I think what's so unique about them is that we didn't try to kitchen sink every standard. And now what we call standards at the grade level is now a benchmark. So we did it thinking we want to be very precise, so people knew exactly what was being asked for. Not just teachers, but students and parents as well because I think it's important that it be communicated to students what the learner outcomes should be. So that concision, that's a work we kept throwing around. The concision, making sure that there was clarity and nothing put in that didn't relate to something else. And it was difficult at first with the organization, but that part may make it unique. The focus on the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing I think is one that you're not going to see with other standards. Unfortunately, even though we have these integrated language arts that work together and help us communicate and then read and process the communications of others, too often in instruction we're putting them inside of, compartmentalizing where they are. So we took great pains to sort of show where those relationships were. The EE's or ELA expectations sort of fixed expectations that go with each of the strands. So are you producing quality work because you've internalized instruction and you know what's required of the format you're working with? Or are you reading at grade level and proficiently? The overarching expectations then tie into each of the other standards. I know we're going to talk about stacking shortly, but stacking is the other thing. So often we talk about standards, and I know we've all seen progress monitoring or initial instruction where they're all, I'm showing you this benchmark. I'm going to show you this beautiful work, and I just want you to zero in on the theme. Just tell me the theme. How do I know that's the theme? And we're ignoring all the other wealth that's there, and we don't do that in any practical, real-life experience. So the idea that we stack these benchmarks, that we work together so that students can see the relationships and the connections. That's where the comprehension and true understanding comes in. It's when they see the connections between each of those components of the text or of a communicate in some parts. The other way in which they're different is the idea of text. We don't define text necessarily as the written work on a page. A text is any way in which information is presented where the student has to interpret it for meaning. So a film can be a text. A picture can be a text. A song can be a text. By widening that, I think that we're actually cueing students' ability to discern. That's what we want. We want people who

can look at situations, look at whatever it is that's conveying meaning and discern that meaning from it, and then representing. Because yeah.

**Pam S:** That's beautiful. And then you jumped into the next portion of it, just quite seamlessly of course. Which you touched on the purpose of the stacked benchmarks, and what does that mean? I don't think anyone could have explained that better than you. So thank you for that. So there's also that term, and you mentioned the new term, there's also that term of the spotlight benchmarks. So how does that come into play?

**Rebecca M:** Absolutely. So now that we're making so that people aren't teaching standards in isolation, we need a way, we need a nomenclature. And we actually worked with our teachers first for quite some time about what that would look like in lesson planning. We're still working to see what that would look like in curriculum mapping. So the idea is, there are three sort of different scenarios in which a benchmark would appear in a lesson. If I'm introducing it; if I'm focusing on it and sort of making sure that we're getting to match at that point; or if I'm reviewing it. So it's depending on what that primary purpose of the lesson is, as to which benchmark is going to be the spotlight. The one that's taking the greater light. And we use that term because the idea is the way a spotlight works is you shift them, right? You move them to show emphasis at a given time. So the supporting benchmarks are the ones that are bringing out the roundness of that existing benchmark., that spotlight benchmark. And sometimes you'll have a lesson that has two spotlights, and that happens, right? We've seen that where we have two leads on stage and they both pull focus. But at the same time, sometimes you'll have one spotlight and multiple supporting. And within the supporting, you're always gonna have at least one, usually two or three of your ELA expectations. And that first ELA expectation about being able to tie evidence to justify reasoning, that goes with everything. We always want to be able to explain they're thinking. So that's always gonna be there. So those are our language pieces. We will, in the implementation guide, have a template of a stack and several examples of stacks at different grade levels, so teachers can see how that goes. But it's also something we plan on doing for professional development.

**Pam S:** That visual and that analogy was beautiful. That was great, thank you for sharing that. That makes a lot of sense and I think folks that are listening in on that are gonna go, oh yeah. And of course they're gonna align with that beautifully.

**Rebecca M:** We were blessed to have such great teacher experts, and you should have seen the metaphors that came up. That was the one that resonated for everyone.

**Pam S:** So you know some people have been asking about, so are access points still gonna be available? How does that come into play? Can you share a little bit about that as well?

**Rebecca M:** Yes. There's a committee has put together, I have not yet seen the files yet but they have put together the access points and what I love is, we would get questions as they were going through the process. And one thing they kept saying was they loved it when there were clarifications, which again is another innovation that we have within these standards. Where sometimes language just creates ambiguity, we then put in clarification to clear that up or to give instructional pointers here and there as to what would be required later or when something should start. And they found that so helpful in ceding their access points. The other thing they noticed is that the old standards, they would often have several access points tied to a single benchmark because there was the there were so many

skills of knowledge sets or tasks tied to one. And here, we were so purposeful that it's not it doesn't look the same, because there is that one learner outcome, and very often if we had to have an additional outcome, it's still tied to that one idea. So that and the one thing that they found very helpful were the spiraled standards where you can see all the progression. So that gave them sort of an idea as to where they could get that access point, because they knew where it was going from grade to grade. So I'm super excited to see them. They will be included on the website as soon as their finalized.

**Anne R:** That's so exciting, because I want to connect it to something you mentioned earlier when you were talking about what's unique about the standards and I heard you very clearly when you said students should know their learner outcomes, and that's really keeping in mind all of our learners when we look at the access points in that way, right? So given that, we have a range of practices in Florida around creating learning goals and essential questions. What connections can you offer our educators?

**Rebecca M:** Now I have to say, this is something that we at the Just Read! Florida office have been talking about a lot recently. One is, we value essential questions. Now some people use essential questions. Some people use the premise that students either prove or disprove. They need very much the same end goals of creating a framework within which the information and the learning is to take place. I know that we have seen a lot of educators want to work more with essential questions and now necessarily have this background or this training to do that in a way they're comfortable. I know that we've gone into classrooms and we see a common core configuration, the essential question is there. Sometimes it's a yes/no questions. There's a lot of interest in learning how to do essential questions correctly and effectively, and we're putting together professional development around that. I think especially where it's such a hallmark of the TIS model in close reading, having students have that purpose to go back into their text, and there's so many ways to do it effectively. Having a concept or thematic question, or also having a skill question related to the techniques that the writer is using. So I think that there are ways that we are building on that. We are very lucky in that we currently have just on-boarded, are in the process of onboarding twenty state regional literacy directors to help support the implementation throughout the state, and many of them are very adept with professional development. I've been lucky enough to see two of them actually present with essential questions. So one thing that they're doing in their work with us is help us develop those modules, because we do need something that's important, to emphasize with educators. Another thing that we're looking at is C-PALMS, where so many of these resources can also be found. Some of them can be found on our website as we develop them. But we're also looking at the model of ... C-PALMS, because that's a way where you have that scenario that acts very much in the way an essential question, as a way for teachers to get more comfortable with that frame for learning. And because it's interdisciplinary, it helps bring in the content areas which especially within elementary is so important in bringing that background knowledge.

**Anne R:** I'm making so many connections here with the resources. That's incredible and having those additional advocates and contributions to the trainings is going to be incredible for the teachers here in Florida, especially in that class to develop student agency and leveraging the standards to do that. That brings me to something you said also about the three areas of the standard, because when we're talking about that and depending on that primary lesson and shifting the spotlight in that beautiful analogy you've used, it really made me think about universal design for learning and when we begin instruction around those standards, what are you suggesting to ensuring the learning for engagement opportunities for representation, action and expression, when that core instruction is being designed for all students?

**Rebecca M:** Okay, and I wanna touch on that. I want to touch on how important UDL is to us and I don't know if it's apparent. I hope that it is before people use our standards package. But we sought to create a packet that was based on UDL principles. If you look, you'll see the information is presented several different ways according to the way that people process information differently, where we have the implementation guide. We even have a third way that we're visually representing the standards so that people can really look and process, because it's so much information and where we want virtual planning to happen. So we knew that we needed to make that more accessible, and that's why the progression to the front we thought were paramount. The glossary, so that there was no confusion over those terms. Elimination confusion, making sure that the language was understandable and agreed upon. Almost every element, the chart where you can see which standards and which texts go together, sort of that visual representation again, but also so that for people who need it in a list, we have it in the appendix and a list together, by grade level. Throughout we were trying to model what we hope is happening in instruction. But I think one of the most important things too is this part that we're doing with implementation. So we have the standards here. Building text sets for accessibility and for representation. We have a group currently working on getting input in that. We want community input around the text sets and were doing chaining with districts on how to build those text sets. And again our literacy directors are gonna be a vital part of that process. The other thing is I think the whole reimagining of text is tied into that idea, right? It's different representations and not necessarily being typed on paper. The idea that we can look at that in different ways, even in the ways that we frame the communication. It's not writing. And writing is vital. It's important, but it's communication. So we have all the forms of communication within that, and they all bear instruction. And it's trying not to default to one normative, to emphasizing the experience of the student, and I think it's in that way that we're going to make that accessible. We also know that that's going to require a significant mindset shift, right? We get that. I get it. So that's something that we're only going to accomplish with professional development, is getting teachers to the point where they understand those connections and feel comfortable, even when they understand them, but the part of feeling comfortable teaching that way and that's what Just Read! Florida's here to do, is to offer that support. So we have identified ways to specifically bring to move that in. I know that one way specifically is looking at our reading strand. We were very careful to, we do have reading prose and poetry, and we have reading informational text, but we also have reading across genres. So it's this idea that we're more fluid within this representation in helping students identify these common elements. I think too often, the disconnection that we have and I know I talked about it before, but it's true. It's so true. The more you disconnect things, the less students understand because it feels segmented. It feels so arbitrary. They're just learning it for the rules because they don't see the big picture. So I think by removing these artificial constraints, it actually is helping all learners get to that point because we've eliminated the strange change in language that we have from reading to writing. Well it's the same name. It's the same principle. It's the same thing happening on paper, and by eliminating these levels of confusion, I think that we're able to make it more accessible. That I know I've gone on a bit, but it's something that is so important to us in terms of, one thing that we wanted to make sure is that purple box things didn't happen. Right? So when we went through, we made sure that they were accessible. Like we went through and we also had community groups and advocacy groups sort of make sure, and that's why MTSS and PS-Rtl has been included in every part of implementation that we've done, because we wanted to start from an equal start.

**Anne R:** And we totally, we appreciate your passion to begin with because it is such a great game changer for all of our students just by design now. And like when you were talking about the isolation of

practices, that's been a struggle in our implementation of MTSS as a state. So thank you so much for bringing that point into the conversation. I could just go on and listen and talk with you forever, but we've got to let you go. I thank you so much for all of that information.