

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Hello everybody. Welcome again to the WVS podcast. Uh, this is Jason. I'm here with a, uh, few special guests this time around. Uh, we like to talk with a few of our dis strict partners or in our school partners. And I actually have a couple of members from the Pathways Charter High School in Milwaukee, some new partners of ours that we've been working with this year. Uh, so I have Kim Taylor and Sarah, remind me again how to say your last name.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Sarah Mall. Like a tiger.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Sarah Mall. Got you. So I have Kim Taylor and Sarah Maule here from Pathways High School. Uh, Sarah, let's start with you. Just a real brief introduction. What you do and what's your role with Pathways.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Yeah, sure. Um, so, uh, I'm Sarah Maule, M, and I'm the principal at Pathways High. Um, I'm in my second year here. Um, and it's been fantastic. I absolutely love being here with our students every single day. And, um, what we're doing to move education forward, I think, is really innovative and unique, and I'm really excited to be able to share some of that work with you today.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Thanks, sarah and Kim, what's your role at Pathways?

Kim Taylor (Pathways): I am the director. I have been with Pathways High for about five years. I came in mid year, in the first year. I've, um, been in education for over 27 years. And so I'm excited to be at a school that is doing the work that I think is important to disrupt our educational model, um, and be a part of a great team.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Well, thank you both for taking the time to be on the podcast. This time around, I'm, um, really just in our conversations, I know a little bit, uh, about what Pathways does and how you guys function and everything like that. And as a charter school, uh, you have a little bit more flexibility in the way that you deliver education to students. So, uh, I'd really love to hear more about how you guys are disrupting education and what are some of the things that you're doing that kind of sets Pathways apart from, uh, other schools in the area or really in the state.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Cool, sure, go ahead, because you've got the historical perspective.

Kim Taylor (Pathways): Sure. Well, we were started, we're UWM Charter, and we were started, um, by four parents that were basically just dissatisfied with education models. So by definition, we were going to be different and doing different things than the traditional schools were doing. Um, what really inspired them to get started was the movie Most Likely to Succeed. Um, and so they ventured on this very, um, treacherous road of opening a school that would be, um, really studentcentered and not system centered. And I think that's a big differentiator for us. They wanted to blow up the current model, not just make changes along the edges to what education was. Um, and so they created a school that, um, we've sort of lived out their mission through, um, that's project based. It's really based on trust, interconnectedness diversity, and it's really rooted in excellence through purpose. Um, and I

think we're sort of special for a couple of reasons. Most schools in urban settings seem to be really highly compliance based, and we for sure are not. This means we start with trust. And we really talked about playing the long game with processes with our students, not only behaviorally, but academically. We're also diverse, which, uh, is something very different in Milwaukee. Um, we serve students not only from our city, but from the surrounding suburbs. So about 30% of our students come from area suburbs. Um, which means, uh, when we talk about diversity, we're not just talking about diversity, um, in race or socioeconomic status. We're also talking about the diversity that we bring together through the different communities and building perspective and bridges through having different communities, um, sort of come together. Um, uh, a lot of people know, uh, us for, um, our impact here, which is our fifth year. Um, so we have an optional fifth year. About 60% of our students decide to stay with us. Um, and these are all students who could have graduated after four years. They decided to stay with us for a fifth year. Um, and it's sort of like a supported launch into adulthood. So we have someone that works with them. We, um, pay for, um, four classes, either through UWM or MATC. We have someone that works with them in supporting their first year in Navigating, the post secondary life. Um, and many of our students are also involved in internships then, um, that highlight their strengths, whether that's at the Milwaukee Rep, um, or at the Milwaukee Health Department. They're doing those things, taking classes, and really getting used to the life, to life as an adult with some support from people that know them pretty well and can help answer those questions.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Yeah, it's a really unique opportunity, like Kim said, um, Milwaukee Health Department. We've had kids at, uh, the neighborhood House, which is right down the street. That's a local community organization that has a food pantry, but also has amazing, um, after school programming and programming for students. Um, I know that we're looking forward to in the future, continuing to build out, like, that idea of not just college classes, but also working to get kids into the trades and that kind of a thing, too. So it's a really neat, um, and like I said, unique opportunity that we offer our students.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): You guys have a lot going on. That's some really interesting, uh, opportunities that you're providing for students. how many teachers do you guys have? How many students? Like, how large is your population that you're serving right now?

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Um, including the Impact students, we have just under 150. Um, I think we're at about 142. 145. Um, right now. Um, so those 16 impact students, they're not here every single day. So on campus every day, we've got about 100 and 2930, um, and then teachers, including administration, we have about 18 staff members. So it's really nice to be able to kind of think about kids really holistically, because we're really well staffed and we're, um, small, so everybody has the opportunity to know every single kid individually, which I think allows, again, for a really student centered approach, as opposed to a system centered approach.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Yeah. So, uh, that's really interesting. So you guys have about 13, 1415 kids per adult, basically, um, which is a great way for kids to get that individualized attention and everything like that. Um, and another thing, I think that's a pretty common

misconception about schools that are project based, um, is that even though, like, yes, kids are doing projects and they're working on things, but that doesn't mean that typical academic areas are ignored, right? So everything is kind of integrated into that one. Um, of the things that, uh, is one of the reasons why we've got you on our podcast is because we're working with, uh, pathways to provide, um, kids some additional options when it comes to world languages. Um, that's been something, uh, that I think just digital content in general is a way that, uh, we can help meet the needs of more students, uh, and let the system get out of the way because they've got additional options. So, um, could you tell us a little bit more about how, um, we work together, uh, with pathways to provide kids with those options that you're looking to provide them with, and, uh, those opportunities?

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Yeah, absolutely. So, um, something that a lot of our families had said is that and just feedback from kids, like, I'm really interested in learning Spanish, and was interested in learning French, I'm interested in learning something. And, uh, we did offer Arabic in the past, and, um, hopefully we'll maybe do that again in the future. But, um, taking a look at the opportunities that existed, it wouldn't have been feasible for us to be able to hire one of those teachers for all of those languages. Right? It just didn't make sense. So, um, we learned about WVS, and it works out really well that we can now offer these languages for our students, um, even through, like, a digital format, which is okay. So, um, this works for us. I actually oversee it. I'm like the world languages teacher, quote, unquote at the moment. And, um, I serve as a coach. So those of you who are familiar with WVS, you've got a coach and an affiliate. Um, so I work with the kids every single day on, um, making sure that they're falling through on their languages and doing it. So right now we've got kids taking French, Spanish, um, Japanese. I was really surprised with the number of kids who went to Japan or chose Japanese. And then I was like, oh, wait, um, manga is super popular and so are a lot of the other, um, anime, the cartoons, right? They're really popular. And so it wasn't surprising, like, what I really thought about M. Oh yeah, they have a lot of background knowledge in that. Um, and then, uh, I think I said German is the last one. We have one student taking German. So, um, being able to tapwds as a resource to do that and um, to really connect our kids with those resources has been amazing. And even just the last couple of weeks, as we started to implement it, um, the kids actually come to one room and then, um, I check in with each individually. I just started doing that today, actually. And they'll follow through on the assignment. The communication with the staff is amazing. Um, the number of emails I've gotten from each of the teachers with the students on it, it has been, like, just incredible. Um, the support is there and it makes teaching language, um, accessible. And another part of our programming, right, like, we're all about that real world access, we're all about community. And another great way to do that is through a world language. So I think having this opportunity, um, um, it's amazing for our kids that access, it could be transformational for some of them, right?

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Yeah. And I think that, um, I like what you said about that being transformational for kids to have access to this, um, kind of content. Right. So you mentioned I counted four different languages that your students are able to participate in. Uh, and that's really where, that's really where this digital content comes in, uh, and where

we can really leverage that. To provide kids with an experience that both is rigorous academically, but also, um, provides them with, uh, the kinds of options that really get them excited about being in school. Uh, and that's one of the things I think that we see a lot with, uh, the traditional model of school is just the level of kids that are disengaged with the content or with the things that are going on there. Uh, and one of the things that we really try to emphasize is that the opportunity that choice presents, uh, so when students have a choice of different electives in different formats, in different ways that they can get the kinds of content that they want, uh, that really increases their interest in school and their desire to be there. Uh, which is one of the big hurdles that we're trying to overcome just on a regular basis.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Yeah, it's been really interesting. Again, school has been in our third week, the first week, uh, we do this thing called Culture Week, which is something pretty unique. Like, we spend an entire week focused, um, on building relationships with students and focused on building out our culture so that, um, we can set the table for the school year rights. So, um, even just being, like, in our third week of school, it feels great to have something that, um, kids, like you said, engage with, look forward to. Um, every single kid in the space is like, hey, I'm doing online learning, but I really like it, and I really enjoy being in the space, and I'm enjoying learning what I'm doing. Actually. Um, I had a student who was taking Japanese last week, and they have to do some recording, and they had to do, um, a quiz already. And the student was like, oh, Mrs. Mall, I don't know if I'm going to be able to do this. I don't speak any Japanese yet. And I was like, well, I think it's just a pretest, so why don't you try it out, see where you land? And, um, he did great. He got like 70% or something like that on the right. Seven out of ten or a surprising number. And after he was like, I got this, did it, came back and was like, this is well, all I did really well, and here's how I did. I know way more than I thought I did. So it was like project based learning. You think that maybe online learning might not coincide super well, right? Because Ppl is all about let's be hands on, let's do the things. But working with WVS and the teachers and stuff, I think has really helped me really think about how digital learning fits in a PBL situation, like, really well. And just seeing that success for that student, he was so excited, and he'll be able to take that. I think he's in a boat club with a monster group right now, too. Um, I think success and be like, hey, I learned a thing. Here's something I learned in Japanese that I can apply further on. Um, it was really fun, actually. Um, I called home about that, to say, hey, this is a big success. And it was just to share with the family, like, how fantastic that was for him.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): It's, uh, so fun. I'm glad that, uh, your students are having a good experience so far. Um, and that's really what it comes down to, is just providing kids with, again, options, quality options, things that are useful and good, uh, and a good approach. Um, but then also to provide them with those, uh, positive experience, because then that just feeds on itself and builds and builds and makes, um, things even better as we go through. So cool. Glad to hear that. Well, we're just getting started with you guys. Like you said, we're three weeks in. Um, ah, so it might be a little early to tell, but, uh, just based on, uh, in general, what you guys are hoping to accomplish as time goes on, um, what kinds of things are you thinking about for digital learning? Or is that not even yet on the table, uh, as far as

uh, future, like how it fits in with your PDF and not necessarily working with WDS. But I'm just really curious to uh, see how digital learning kind of fits into your overall plans, uh, for what you have planned for your students.

Kim Taylor (Pathways): Yeah, I think I can take that one. I think it's a pretty good question because without covid we probably wouldn't be thinking about this. So who knows what curveballs are going to come up and may change our scope and trajectory. Um, I think that for us, part of our uh, foundation is diversity and um, part of our foundation, like Sarah said, was PBL. And one of the things in TBL, one of the core tenets is giving kids choice. And sometimes you turn that way up and sometimes you turn that way down, just depending on the structure and sort of what part of the project is important. Um, and so I think part of what digital learning offers is the ability to do things that we wouldn't be able to access it from Milwaukee. We can look outside of Milwaukee to the world really. And one of the things that happened during COLVID was we um, always do impact experiences in our classrooms where um, we bring in people or kids go out to the community. Well during Cold, what that allowed us to do is we tapped into people from all over the world for those experiences. So we were talking to NASA people, um, people from Boston University. And so I think that's a really um, huge part of what we're going to probably continue to do, obviously is be able to use the digital learning platform to um, reach out beyond the confines of Milwaukee. Um, and I think there's a real opportunity um, we haven't explored deeply to do some distance learning, so to have our model, our teachers teaching with other kids and other schools and vice versa, um, so that we can leverage what we know along with what other schools know. I think there's some real opportunities there too. Um, and again, it's all about building student perspectives and experiences and then of course being able to offer courses that we can't find a teacher for or we can't afford to have a teacher for, um, in a small school. But quite honestly, probably districts across the country, um, are trying to leverage financial constraints along with providing a really top notch education. So um, it just opens the doors I think, to so many things. Um, so if there's anything that came out of COLVID that probably was good, I think it's that piece of it.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): You know, I love what I said about how COVID allowed us to do something. Um. I think that's a really unique. Ah. Perspective and a way of thinking about things like this is an opportunity to innovate ah. Rather than um. OK. These things are happening to us and we need to be reactive. But let's really take this as an opportunity to take a step back and really just figure out how do we do things and learn from this and get better. So, um, that's great to hear that kind of a mindset coming, um, from an organization, uh, like you guys, because that's really where we need to be when we're talking about changing models and how does this fit in with everything. Um, I'm also really excited about, uh, that possibility of taking the things that you do with PDL and how do we go beyond just our four walls, um, and leverage some of the technology and that idea of blended learning. And, um, how do we incorporate some of these digital learning practices that we're learning about, um, and extending and using that to extend our influence and really, again, provide students with what we is a really good option, and for a lot of kids is the best option, um, who may not have access to that in their setting where they're at. So, um, I'm really excited

to follow some of that work and see where you guys take that. That's a really cool idea. Cool concept. I love it.

Kim Taylor (Pathways): Well, Jason, we might have to have another, uh, something happen because it's always these great concepts and then sometimes you're forced to do it. Um, and sometimes the force is what actually, uh, makes you go into it. So I hope we do leverage it, um, because I think there's just so many opportunities out there that are missed and because we're small, we're able to be Nimble and Pivot very quickly. So that really helps us in launching something like this. It didn't take us months or years to sort of launch this, uh, world languages saying, all right, we didn't have to go through lots of hoops of bureaucracy to get it approved and stuff. Yes, it's going to be good for kids. Why not try it? Um, and then hopefully it's successful and it's a good model for us to talk about with other schools that are starting.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Yeah.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): I love it. Good stuff. Well, um, we're getting pretty close to the end of our time. Do you guys have any final parting thoughts or comments, uh, or anything before we let everybody go?

Sarah Maule (Pathways): No.

Kim Taylor (Pathways): Um, I think Sarah mentioned really excited to say, even though we're small, we're mighty. That sounds so cliché, but we're able to do, like I just said, being Nimble and Pivot. But I think sometimes there's a misnomer that when you're small, you can't offer and certainly we don't have orchestra and some, um, award winning teams in basketball and all those things, but, um, we are able to offer a pretty strong academic program. And frankly, without this offering, we wouldn't have world languages and that would eliminate some kids coming to us, probably, and frankly, eliminate the breadth of what they're learning. So, um, I feel fortunate that, uh, we started school in this age and time so that we are able to sort of make some of those accommodations happen.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Yeah, I agree. Um, I think opening up the opportunity to offer more languages in our context is really important. Um, and I think that kids were like, I can take Spanish now. Yeah, you can. It was nice. It was really refreshing to be like, okay, we're offering more than one language, which I think is really important. Um. And then again. Just the idea of interrupting education. Disrupting it in some way. Shape. Or form. Um. The innovation that's happening out there and our ability to be able to do that because we are small and we have a lot of support and we have resources such as WVS and other places to make it happen. I think it's really important. Um. I think thinking about the education landscape in general. Having the ability to be able to say. Like. Let's do something innovative and in this way. And with these opportunities for kids and truly being student centered. Um. I think it's important to get that word out there. And I think it's important to say. Like. You can do it. I think if we can do it, other places can do it too. Even if it's on a small classroom level or a bigger school level too. It's good.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Well, I'm really glad that places like Pathways exist, uh, and I'm very proud that we're able to partner with you guys and, uh, to be able to provide those good options for your kids because that just allows us to do what we do so that you can do what you do. Thank you so much for, uh, your service to students and for, uh, doing what you do to advance the field and, uh, just in general, keep on doing the great work that you're doing. I really appreciate that.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Fantastic. Thank you. The work that WVS is doing, some of it we can't do without. Just like I said, places like organizations like you guys that provide additional opportunities, um, for everybody out there. So thank you.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Yeah, of course, you're welcome. We're all in this for kids, so let's do the best that we can for them. And I don't think we'll ever go wrong if, uh, that's our motivation for anything that we do. All right, well, thank you so much for joining me and we will, uh, catch you guys at another point in time. I'm really interested to see how things go and maybe we'll have you back in a year or two just to see where we're at with everything.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Yeah. Checking at the end of the trimester. So how's it going, right? It's great. It's going great. Everyone's getting their languages done in the trimester. It's going to be awesome.

Jason Schmidt (WVS): Alright, well, thank you both so much for your time. I appreciate you.

Sarah Maule (Pathways): Thank you.