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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode):

Karen Marklein: Hello. Welcome to the Ayers All Access podcast brought to you by the Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation. This podcast is a chance for us to help you access compelling people, current topics, practical tips, and innovative solutions— all related to the field of education. To find out more about this podcast and all the work of the Ayers Institute, check out our website at AyersInstitute.org. You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook at [@AyersInstitute](https://twitter.com/AyersInstitute).

I'm Karen Markland and I'm an assistant professor in Lipscomb University's College of Education and Director of Programs in the Ayers Institute. Thank you for joining us for this 'spotlight' episode, focused on innovative pathways to teacher certification. Today, we will be talking with Dr. Vanessa Garcia, Senior Director of Partnerships in Lipscomb University's College of Education, and Lisa Baker, Director of Federal Programs at Clarksville/Montgomery County Schools.

Vanessa is a dear friend to the Ayers Institute and I've had the pleasure of teaching courses in this pathway to certification. So, I know firsthand how much work goes into this innovation in education. We're so happy to spotlight this and we're so happy to have you today. So, Vanessa and Lisa, thank you for joining us.

Lisa Baker: I'm so happy to be here.

Vanessa Garcia: The pleasure's all ours. Thanks for having us.

Karen Marklein: All right. So let's start with some introductions. Vanessa, why don't you tell us a little bit about your background and just your work in general?

Vanessa Garcia: So I think this is maybe my 22nd year in education, and it's been an amazing journey. I started off as a middle school teacher. I've also taught at the high school level. I have served as an assistant principal, as a principal, as a principal supervisor. I was the executive officer for elementary

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schools in Metro Nashville Public Schools. And then I also served as interim Chief Academic Officer. So, I feel like I've done almost all of the jobs— all while teaching here. Previous to this position, I was an adjunct for Lipscomb University and for Trevecca University. And so I'm happy to say that I've enjoyed every different job that I've had in this field. And really the only focus is to ensure that we are creating better environments for all of our students to learn.

Karen Marklein: Well, thank you. Yeah, I would say you have had every job in the educational landscape. And yes, just the smile on your face shows me how much you love it and how engaged that you are all the time in that. Thank you so much.

All right, Lisa, how about you?

Lisa Baker: Well, I've spent almost 30 years in the field of education. Most of that in the Clarksville/Montgomery County School System. I taught elementary and middle school. I served as assistant principal in elementary and middle school. And the last 12 years for principal at Ridgeview Middle School. And then I transitioned into this position over the summer. And I oversee see the federal programs, primarily Title I funding, and I provide oversight for the teacher residency program. And like Vanessa said, I'm just so happy to have that opportunity to impact students and impact the teachers who take care of those students.

Karen Marklein: Absolutely. You know, I say all the time, here at the Ayers Institute, "We spend a lot of time with adults. (You know, a lot of my time is spent with adults.) But I never want to forget there's a child at the end of every one of these conversations that really is counting on us to be who we need to be for them." So it's really exciting to have this conversation today. I have been looking forward to it because I know that the teacher residency program is such a unique way to fill such an urgent need in education.

This particular educator spotlight is going to have two parts: one from the director design perspective and one from the practitioner perspective. This conversation, of course, will be focused on the design elements because you guys have been involved with that and the direction. So let's dive in.

First, let's hear both of you describe the residency program in Clarksville/Montgomery County Schools and explain your role in that program. So, Lisa, let's start with you. Describe the program and then your role.

Lisa Baker: Okay. We currently offer multiple pathways. We work with Lipscomb University to provide two different pathways for individuals who have college degrees. And they can focus on an elementary certification or a middle school certification. We also offer two three-year pathways (working with Austin Peay State University and Nashville State Community College) and these are for individuals who do not have college degrees. And theirs is a three year program.

And all of our residents are hired as education assistants in our district. They're fully employed, fully paid, while they work with their university to complete their coursework. They are taken on by an exemplary teacher who mentors them, helps them through their competencies, and by the end of their program, they are ensured a teaching position in our district.

Karen Marklein: All right. Well, thank you for that description. So, Vanessa, what would you add to that?

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Vanessa Garcia: The only thing I would probably add, and that was a great description, Lisa, is that our two pathways in partnership with Clarksville/Montgomery County, also include a master's degree. And so we're really proud to not only have candidates here, as part of our licensure program, but also be able to— all of our candidates are able to earn a master's degree in addition to that licensure. And what's so beautiful is that the district actually pays for that. And so we continue to remove barriers for teacher candidates by ensuring that they don't go into debt for teaching our kids.

Karen Marklein: Okay. All right. So it sounds like this is an extremely innovative approach just based on what you just described. So what would you say is the most exciting innovation within this teacher pathway?

Lisa Baker: Well, I think that, you know, we are dealing with multiple problems of practice. We're talking about increasing teacher diversity, teacher shortage, teacher preparation. And so having these opportunities to "grow our own" where, you know, we recruit our classified staff, our high school seniors, our community members, and give them this wonderful opportunity to learn and grow and become teachers in our district and serve our students. And that's just so unique and different from what we're used to in the past. So it's a wonderful opportunity. It also provides a lot of leadership capacity building amongst our teachers and other teacher leaders. So it's really been an exciting adventure.

Karen Marklein: All right. Yes, exciting in many ways. Vanessa, what were you thinking?

Vanessa Garcia: I think the beauty of this work is that, as Lisa mentioned, it's there's so many levels to it. But I think the number one aspect to be the most proud of is that we are addressing a shortage. We are ensuring that there are quality teachers in every classroom for our students. And if that's not important work, I don't know what is. I think that's the most important work here. So, yes, we have wonderful relationships with our partnering school districts and we get to meet great candidates through this program, candidates that later on become our friends. They are part of our ever-growing network in education. But the beauty in all of this is that then we know (kind of helps you sleep a little bit better at night) knowing that you have quality teachers to teach our kids well.

Lisa Baker: And I just want to jump on what Vanessa just said. We and our district had over 150 or about 150 open positions at the beginning of the year. And nearly 60 of those were filled with residents. So that's exciting because there's clearly a shortage. We are meeting a need we hope to do more to meet that need— even better. But it's fun to have the opportunity to go in and visit the schools and see them in action and see how excited those residents are. How excited their students are; and as well as their mentors. And then going back and seeing ours that are teachers of record now. That's something we're also getting to see. And you see that benefit and how well prepared they are. So, there's so much excitement to the entire program.

Karen Marklein: Absolutely. So I kind of want to go back to the parts that you were identifying. So we have mentor teachers and they support the residents.

Lisa Baker: Yes, they are the examples in the classroom. That job embedded daily example of modeling what teaching looks like, the instructional piece, the planning piece, and the professionalism piece. All of those pieces. And they're also helping those teachers and residents develop their competencies. Because they are apprentices and they are working toward developing the competencies by the end of their program. So there's a lot of modeling and feedback throughout that time.

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Vanessa Garcia: I love the alignment of the competencies. So what we worked on with Clarksville/Montgomery County is to ensure that there was clear alignment between the competencies that the master teachers were displaying and expecting of our residents. Those competencies are directly tied to the TEAM rubric. So as we know, that is the accountability system used in most counties across the state of Tennessee. So we love that we're all working on the same work. Right? We all we know that that model is a research based model. We know that those strategies work. We incorporate those strategies throughout our coursework. And so it's wonderful to see then the master teachers utilizing them, modeling them, and for our residents to be really familiar with that rubric by the time they become the teacher of record and they're evaluated themselves by administration.

Karen Marklein: Wow. And what an advantage that is. You know how many brand new teachers go into a district and they've never seen the TEAM rubric? They don't know. And so, of course, though, some of the work of the Ayers Institute is supporting schools in training those candidates who have no idea what the TEAM rubric is. So you guys are setting them up for success way before they even walk into a classroom.

Lisa Baker: I'd also like to share some more support that the teacher resident same the mentors have. We have our Educational Pipeline Facilitators, you know Tracy and Levita. And they provide ongoing, wraparound support for all of our teacher residents. That may include just checking in, "How's their coursework going? Did they— How's their practice assessment? Are they getting that work done? And, how are things going in the classroom?" They may have personal barriers. Their whole role is to help them eliminate barriers so they can be successful.

Vanessa Garcia: We also have our Lipscomb Teacher/Resident Liaisons: Chris and Jenna, who, you know. And they provide extra support for our Lipscomb residents as well. So the wraparound support is ongoing, intensive, and makes all the difference in the world for those teacher residents to become successful.

Karen Marklein: Yeah. And you mentioned Chris. Part two of this episode is going to be with Chris Dial and Jermaine Purdie, who is a resident. (Jermaine is a resident.) And so we're going to get their perspective of all this wraparound support as well.

So we've got the mentor teachers, we've got the residents, we've got the big support, and then we've got the very specific Lipscomb support within that program. What would you add?

Vanessa Garcia: We are entering year three of "Grow Your Own." Year three of working in partnership with Clarksville/Montgomery County School System. And the one— I would say the most important thing that sets Clarksville apart from all the other school districts that we work with is that we have such a... It's all hands on deck.

It requires— this is what we've learned— It requires a lot of people that share the same goal of ensuring that teachers are prepared to teach students around the table and consistently working to remove those barriers. And so, I'm so proud of the Clarksville group. It's a large group to work with, but we really do feel that the wraparound services that they have set up, that we help support, really do make a difference. It's one of the reasons why these cohorts that we start each summer work so well. It's one reason why these teacher candidates, once they become the teacher of record, are so successful in their classrooms. And we couldn't be more proud.

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But it truly does take a village and we're just so happy to work with that village in Clarksville, because it can't just be two people. It can't just be three people. We usually start roughly 45 candidates every summer. That is a large group of students just for one school district. And it takes people like Tracy and Laida and Chris and Jenna to all work together to make sure that everyone is successful in this program. Because without teacher success, then this work really isn't very meaningful. But it takes it takes a lot of people to do this great work.

Lisa Baker: And to add what vanessa just said, in the district you're working with H.R. You're working with the finance department. You're working with communications. Your professional learning team. There are so many layers embedded of that support toward helping this work and help these teacher residents be successful. And working with Lipscomb is a dream. It works really, really well.

Karen Marklein: So we've talked a lot about specific things in the district that serve as supports. I wonder from a university perspective, Vanessa, how are we specifically supporting these candidates as they enter this program?

Vanessa Garcia: Not to brag. We have a pretty amazing team at Lipscomb. And there's no way, again, that one or two people could be responsible for all this work without the help of so many people in this college. We have amazing professors in this college, and I stand by that. We have experts in the teaching field that pour their hearts into teaching teachers how to be prepared to teach students. And so I'm really, really proud of that work. Really proud of the work of the team that we have here. I think it makes a huge difference when we have faculty members and adjuncts that are so strong in their craft. And that's what we really shoot for, more than anything. We want quality people teaching our future teachers.

Karen Marklein: Well, I would say as a as a person who teaches one of those: I find it very helpful for the for the candidates that this is a cohort model. That in those courses that they are just with their Clarksville specific cohort. And it's not that that's a, you know, weakness in other courses or anything like that. But this is a strength for them because they do have that support of each other too. You know, you have all those layers in place for them, but then they have each other and their experience is unique to them and their conversations are unique to them. You know, they really get to have a focused gaze on what they need to do.

Vanessa Garcia: That journey is unique. And so the fact that they have now created this network. And I tell them all the time, my network (to this day) includes people that I taught with...

Karen Marklein: Day one!

Vanessa Garcia: Day one. Back at Antioch Middle School; back at Centennial High School. My network still consists of those teachers. And so I tell them all the time, "Look around. Make friends with these people, because these are the folks that are going to support you along this journey."

And I personally love the cohort model. It's how I got my master's; it's how I got my doctorate. I stand by that, just for the sheer feeling of knowing that you're not the only one going through this journey by yourself. That you have others that you can lean on and others that you can go to for support. I think the cohort model is one— one tiny bit of this big puzzle that makes a lot of sense. When we started creating these grow your own cohorts.

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Lisa Baker: And you can see, Vanessa, when you go and meet with the different cohorts when they have time together. Over the course of time (and this has been— we're into the second quarter), you can see those relationships developing. You can see that unity in the cohort. They depend on each other. It's— you don't have to be there in person to see it, but when you do, it's a lot of fun.

Karen Marklein: It's really sweet, the camaraderie. So I have the pleasure of teaching one of the first courses they have. And so the first night...

Vanessa Garcia: And it's a difficult course to teach.

Karen Marklein: Is really hard. It's really hard. It's a stiff climb, but I love it every time. The first night, it's like they really are strangers. And by the last night of that course, no one wants to leave. You know, it's a celebration. We have this family feeling in there. Yes, they're relieved that the work is done, you know, but it's just this feeling of "we locked arms and we did this."

Vanessa Garcia: But that's what makes Lipscomb so special. Again, I have worked for this institution for a long time. Even before my position, I was an adjunct for over ten years. You feel that when you teach your classes. But with— Again, I think it just speaks to the quality of people that we have teaching these courses. You don't just have that family feeling without creating it. And so you create that for students. And so students then just buy into that feeling (because it's a great feeling to have). And so it's no surprise that, by the end, they really don't want to leave.

And I think what we've learned from all of these different cohorts that we have is that they learn how to advocate for themselves. And every now and then, I love receiving that one email from the one person who has made themselves the 'spokesperson' of that cohort of that cohort. I love that. I love that. They're like, "Look, this is not working for us. Can we talk about this? Can we..." You know, doing this for the third year, there are things that we've done that have not worked, and that's okay. As long as we are reflective and we are, you know, we're really dedicated to continuous improvement, we can go back to the drawing table. And if the progression is not working because students say it's not working, great, let's fix that. Let's get that feedback from students. Let's make it better from that for them as they continue. And then let's make it better for the next cohort. And so I do love that they advocate for them for themselves, and they reach out to us when something isn't working. Because I don't want to paint a picture that this has been a very smooth road. It hasn't. There's been lots of ups and downs, but I think that's expected when you're innovative and when you're creative. And so we just we just want to continue to make the work better.

Lisa Baker: And Vanessa, I can see with the Lipscombe teachers and liaisons, Chris and Jenna, if the students reach out to them, as opposed to reaching directly to a professor or someone else in the program, they are excellent advocates for them. And I can tell that the feedback, the response from Lipscomb is immediate. It's open. It is a very positive growth situation. So we thank you for that.

Karen Marklein: Okay.

Vanessa Garcia: It's a two way street.

Karen Marklein: It is. The lines of communication are always open and I know that. And so that's really exciting. So you've talked a little bit about lessons that you learned and maybe the path was a little

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rocky. So let's just say as a university, you know, from the university perspective, if another university were asking your advice on how to start this program or what are the best first steps? What would you say, Vanessa?

Vanessa Garcia: And I think one thing that's really important is just building really strong relationships. As I kind of go back and reflect on the different partnerships that we have across Middle Tennessee, it all started with great relationships. Again, we're all in. We all have the same goal. We all want to make sure that we have strong teachers in every classroom, and that takes a lot of work from both the EEP and from the K-12 school district. And so I think it definitely starts with the strong relationship.

And the only really way to get to a strong relationship is to have lots of open communication. You have to be flexible. You have to be able to, you know, really use those listening skills that we learn through coaching because the work sometimes as a higher ed institution, sometimes it's easy to forget the hard work that's happening in K-12 schools. It's very unique. Every school district operates differently. And so we're constantly putting on different hats to make sure that we can serve each district accordingly. And it's different. No two districts that we work with through 'grow your own' operate the same way. And so a lot of listening, again, that commitment to excellence, building strong relationships and really focusing on communicating.

It's ongoing. I probably take four calls daily from all of our different partners. Just on 'Grow Your Own,' which by the end of the week, that's a lot of phone calls. And so it just takes that ongoing communication. But I think creativity and not being limited to that box and really learning to think outside of the box of what it could be is also something that's probably very much needed in this.

Karen Marklein: Okay. So those are some really important things that we've that we've considered as a university. So what would you say if a district were asking your advice? What would you say?

Lisa Baker: Well, I think exactly what Vanessa said. You do want to have those relationships of reaching out to your local universities and different partners that you could work with, but also having some really serious conversations about what funding is going to look like and how you can be creative and open minded about that. And I was not involved in the heavy lifting at the beginning of the program. And so coming in, I'm hearing those stories. But I also see now professional development is very important for your mentors. And I think that that we're working to grow more now with that professional development piece. So I think in the front end, you need to think about what does that professional development look like as well.

Karen Marklein: Okay. All right. Well, thank you so much. So this will be my last question.

This really has been an especially challenging time for education in general. So what is it about this innovation that causes people to engage, in such a difficult time?

Lisa Baker: Well, I think it all goes back to how you're going about it. And I think reaching out, it's a 'grow your own.' And we're reaching out to our employees, to our seniors, to our community that there's an investment there. People want to be invested in their community. But I think it also opens up in people's minds that they can do something they never thought they could do before. So that's what's exciting about that for me.

Karen Marklein: All right. Thank you.

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Vanessa Garcia: That's a great response. I think the only thing I would add to that is that you're immediately seeing the impact of the work. Sometimes in education, it takes a while to see the impact of your work. Here we're seeing it. You know, there's a quick— there is somewhat of a quick turnaround. You know, we're able to have teachers in the classroom learning under master teachers as teacher assistants. So we're able to see them grow within that capacity. And then I mean, I feel like they feel they blink and then all of a sudden that the teacher record! Which is kind of how life happens. It happens fast. And so we're then able to see them really impacting the lives of students. And so we don't have to wait very long to really start seeing the impact of this work. And I think that's what keeps me so engaged, is that I know with every graduating cohort there's hundreds of students who are benefiting from each one of those teachers.

Karen Marklein: Absolutely.

Lisa Baker: I would like to share something, if I may, that you made me think of. I was in a classified representative meeting yesterday sharing about the upcoming information sessions for our residency program and application process. And one of the classified representatives from a school building stopped and said, "I just want you to know..." (she identified a particular teacher resident who just started this year) and went on about very specific things that she had witnessed where she knew she was going to be a great teacher. So it's not just us, it's not just the mentor teachers or the principals, it's other people in the building that see that impact as well. And they get very excited about knowing what the future holds for the kids that get that person as a teacher.

Karen Marklein: Absolutely. And your whole face is lighting up just thinking about that.

Lisa Baker: It was really fun!

Karen Marklein: Just the culture of excellence that this is really encouraging within a school has to be so motivating and so exciting.

Vanessa Garcia: You know, we hear often, "There's a teacher shortage." And I don't know that I necessarily buy into that. I don't know that there's really a teacher shortage. I think there are lots of barriers that prohibit people from becoming teachers. And I think this work really, truly does help remove those barriers so that we have great candidates who are ready— day one— to lead a class of children. And I think that's really cool.

Lisa Baker: And that goes back to the wraparound support we provide as well. I mean, with the support they get along the way, but also that it's no cost to them. There are so many different factors. I couldn't have said it better. But you're exactly right, Vanessa.

Karen Marklein: Yes. So just removing barriers is so important.

Vanessa Garcia: Once we've removed those barriers, it's not just Clarksville that has 150 possible candidates showing up to interest meetings. It's other surrounding districts that have hundreds of people showing up to interest meetings. Because once we tell them we have a funding source, you don't have to get into debt, this won't have to— this won't cost you anything out of pocket. Then all of a sudden we have people who are raising their hands who are saying, I can make that difference in the

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lives of kids. I want to make that difference. So I think that's just really special. I really that's the part of the work that I probably enjoy the most.

Karen Marklein: All right. Well, thank you both so much for all of this wonderful information. And thank you for your work in education.

Lisa Baker: Thank you so much for having me today. I enjoyed it.

Vanessa Garcia: Thanks, Karen.

Karen Marklein: And to all our listeners, be sure to check out the show notes for this episode where you'll find links to helpful resources and anything we've mentioned today. I hope you've been encouraged and inspired to consider some innovation. You can find more episodes of Ayers Institute podcasts at <https://podcast.ayersinstitute.org>, on Apple Podcasts, and anywhere podcasts are found.

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