

## AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

### **“Ayers All Access” Podcast**

*Ayers Institute for Learning & Innovation  
Lipscomb University College of Education*

### **Episode 6 – April 11, 2022**

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#### **SPEAKERS:**

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#### **FULL TRANSCRIPT:**

**Rachael Milligan:** 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](http://AyersInstitute.org). You can also find us on Twitter and Facebook at @AyersInstitute.

**Karen Marklein:** Thank you for joining us. One aspect of our job as educators and consultants with the Ayers Institute is traveling and visiting many school districts. We get a chance to meet educators in rural and urban settings in PreK-12 and higher education. It's a great opportunity to see what's happening broadly in education today and to collect stories about our experiences. And it always leads to interesting conversations as we reflect on those experiences.

In this "On the Road" episode of the Ayers All Access podcast, we wanted to share what we've been seeing and hearing and hopefully spark some ideas that you can use to make a difference in your community. I'm Karen Marklein and I serve as the Director of Programs for the Ayers Institute.

**Rachael Milligan:** And I'm Rachael Milligan, Assistant Dean for Program Innovation in Lipscomb's College of Education and the Director of the Ayers Institute. So, let's get started, Karen. We have recently had the opportunity to really travel all over the state, facilitating professional learning sessions. We've been talking about instructional leadership, best practices in coaching, student ownership of learning, and a lot more. And it's just been a lot of fun.

**Karen Marklein:** Yes. And yeah, we've been in West, Middle, and East Tennessee working with some incredible educators. And it's just so inspiring to see their commitment to professional learning.

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**Rachael Milligan:** Absolutely. So, what have you been seeing lately? What stood out about the people and the places that you have been visiting, Karen?

**Karen Marklein:** Well, I had a really interesting experience in what I believe to be a haunted Airbnb that we might save for a later time. But definitely, as we've been, you know, connecting with these educators, I've seen such a commitment to excellence. And, you know, another thing that has really struck me is just how much they love their community. And I'm so encouraged to see a feeling of joy is in school again? It's not that joy left school, but I really think it's more palpable than it has been in a while. And so those things have really risen to the top.

But what stands out the most is we've just seen how much pride these educators have taken in the work that they've done. They have such pride for their students, and they have such pride for their schools. And it is so encouraging to see that, you know, how proud they are.

**Rachael Milligan:** Yes, I totally agree with you. I can think of just a lot of examples that are coming to mind right now as you're talking about that people taking pride in their school and the community as a whole, in their students and in their own practice as educators and what they're able to accomplish on a daily basis, what they're able to get their students to be able to do.

And before we really jump into what we're talking about, I want to kind of define what I mean. And you can agree or disagree about what we mean about pride. For me, it's, you know, more than a comparison of just myself to others. You know, I don't want to limit it to that. I think one of— both of our favorite quotes is, "Comparison is the thief of joy."

**Karen Marklein:** Yes, absolutely.

**Rachael Milligan:** And but it's really more about positive self-identity. When a community is really proud of their school, it means "I'm happy to say I go there, I'll work there, because it means I have a positive feeling about being connected to that community." And that positive feeling truly binds us together. It's really— it's a family. I mean, it really is a family feel when you have that pride in your school as a student or as an educator.

**Karen Marklein:** Yeah, I mean, I totally agree with you know, it is more than comparing myself to others. And I feel sometimes I even feel like they're just so proud that they have locked arms together in in this work. And they are just they're all moving forward together. The educators, the leaders, the students, you know, the entire community is just having that feeling of camaraderie that comes with that sense of pride. And so, for sure— what about just specific things? So, you know, when you think, yeah, that this theme of pride is, is obvious. But what are some specific things that really stand out?

**Rachael Milligan:** Well, one thing that. Comes to mind. It's a small story, but it really kind of encapsulates this at a very fundamental level. You'll remember you and I were going to do a

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professional learning session at a high school, specifically in their career and technical education building. And we walked in with all of our supplies. The Institute has a well-traveled suitcase that we take everywhere we go. And it's all full of all your teachers, supplies, markers and our clicker for our computer and our Bluetooth for our music. And so, we also in that suitcase, we had just some blank paper that we can pass out and use as name tents so that we can call our participants by name and easily see their names displayed on their table.

And so, we just so happen this day, we happened to have purple paper in the suitcase. And this isn't really a conscious choice by us. It's what we had available to us in the suitcase. Sometimes we have multicolored a paper. Sometimes it's just white.

**Karen Marklein:** Mm hmm.

**Rachael Milligan:** But this particular day, we just had the purple paper. And we walked in. We started passing it out on the on the tables. And we kept getting these kind of side eyes and comments from all of the individuals in the room who all happened to be mostly principals or assistant principals in this district. And, you know, we were like, "What is what's going on? Is something wrong? Do you not want to do the name tags?" And they were like, "No, the name times are fine. It's just that this is the color of our rival district." And so, we don't— We really have a hard time using this purple paper." And so, you know, it was it was really funny. But I mean, a small story that just kind of speaks to that, that they really have pride in their school as a district, in their athletic teams. And just really to the point that they didn't even want to be associated with the purple color.

**Karen Marklein:** Yeah, they really didn't even want to touch the paper, if we're being honest. And so, I also remember the next time we went, we did not take purple paper.

**Rachael Milligan:** That's right! But we, we remembered that. Yeah, it was a— yeah.

**Karen Marklein:** Yeah. And they remember too. They were like, "Thank you so much. We do not have to use purple paper." And as you said, you know, it seems like a small example, but it's really important. You know, and so it sort of added another thing that I need to think about, you know, when I'm when I'm interacting with these people.

**Rachael Milligan:** Yeah. Yeah. So, so what are some stories that come to mind for you, Karen?

**Karen Marklein:** Well, also, it's a career and technical center that I'm thinking of in a different district. And the last time that I was there, my contact met me at the door. (Of course. They always do that.) And I was walking me in and she said, before we go in, I just want to introduce you to the secretary. And this secretary has been with the school since the construction phase of this school. And so, she...

**Rachael Milligan:** And that was like, how many years ago?

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**Karen Marklein:** Over 30 years, I want to say like 37 or 38 years.

**Rachael Milligan:** That's amazing.

**Karen Marklein:** And as I said to this woman, she must have started when she was five. I mean, she looks like she's not aged a bit. And she was just so happy talking about how long she'd been there and how much she has seen and been able to do. And I said, "Well, if you don't mind my asking, what keeps you, you know, engaged like this? like why, you know, such a long career?" You know. And she said, this is my favorite place in the world to be.

**Rachael Milligan:** And, you know, it's just that I could just see her just gushing with pride at what she's been able to do at, you know, how she always puts the students first. She makes everyone feel welcome. She was the one who had put the spread out for us of refreshments that morning. And she was, you know— she made those muffins before she came to school. And so, she very much is— she wants everybody else to feel as positive about this experience as she does. And so, I was I was really touched by that.

**Rachael Milligan:** I love that.

**Karen Marklein:** Yeah, that was wonderful.

And then in another district, my contact was just kind of showing me around the school and they had done— It was an older building. They had done so much on the inside to really kind of spruce it up. They had taken some ugly lockers out and in one of the little alcoves where the lockers were, they had made like a seating area for students. And he was talking about how proud he was that students actually wanted to like gather there and be there to engage with one another. And that that was really important to him.

And on that walk through the school or seeing those renovations, the head janitor came up and he introduced me to this gentleman, and he was so proud of how clean the school was. You know, I was I was complimenting him on— Everything just looked so— it was like I couldn't even tell a kid had been in school that day. You know, everything was so clean. And he was just beaming with pride at the way he could go about his work. And so, it's just endearing to see that.

**Rachael Milligan:** Absolutely. And that every member of the community was taking pride in the area that they had, you know, responsibility over or their purview. And they were just really taking pride in that.

**Karen Marklein:** Absolutely.

**Rachael Milligan:** I really that.

**Karen Marklein:** It was wonderful.

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**Rachael Milligan:** I love that.

**Karen Marklein:** And then I also met an art teacher who had displayed— they had done felt flowers the day before. And she had this beautiful display on the wall of all these felt flowers that her sweet little fifth graders had made. And she was just so proud of them for being able to see that and, you know, really create something that they were proud of. And so, it was neat to engage with her in that way.

**Rachael Milligan:** I will tell you, though, what really, really stands out is I was at one school where we did a session in the morning with a group of teachers and then a session in the afternoon with a group of teachers. And a teacher straight after the first session to say, you know, I really enjoyed this. This is great. And she had kind of a— Not a complaint, but she wanted me to know that her substitute teacher was not going to be available for her to eat lunch with us. And that she was feeling that that was a little unfair. And she wanted me to know that.

And so, I said, you know what, "I'm sorry about that. I would love to just make you a plate of food and I'll bring it to your classroom, if that's okay with you." And so, I didn't see her. She said, "Please don't do that. That'll upset my students. I don't I don't want you to do that." And so, of course, I didn't see her while we were eating lunch.

And then when I went into the second session, she came in. And she said, "I walked into my classroom a little upset that I wasn't going to have lunch with y'all. And one of my students said, "Yea. Miss so-and-so. I'm so glad you're in here." And she was like, "Well, of course I'm in here." And he said, "I heard that some of the teachers were all going to have substitutes today, and I was so sad that I wasn't going to be able to see you, today." And so, she came back to say to me, "I'm so sorry that I was selfish and I was thinking about lunch and those children are so happy to see me." And she was just so proud that, you know, they had welcomed her back and they were looking forward to being with her that day. And, I mean, she was— she almost teared up.

**Rachael Milligan:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Karen Marklein:** And so, it was just great.

**Rachael Milligan:** I love that story. That that almost gives me chills to really think about that. And that she was so reflective to come back and tell you about it. She just met you that morning, I'm assuming.

**Karen Marklein:** She had, yeah. So, she was like, "You know what? Those chicken fingers were not more important than that." And so, I said, "Well, I'm just so glad you came back to tell me that!" You know, and again, it speaks to the to the joy and just the pride that we're seeing.

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**Rachael Milligan:** Yeah. I love all of those stories and the stories from all around the school that you're thinking about. You know, from the custodian to the art teacher to the classroom teacher who has, you know— And it's hard to get a substitute to be able to come to some of these professional learning sessions. And then for them to continue to exude that pride in their work and in their school and in their classroom.

**Karen Marklein:** I'm thinking on a on a big kind of community level. One of the districts that we've been working with decided a couple months ago that they wanted to have kind of a leadership summit. An educational leadership summit is what they called it. And the district leaders were very clear that they weren't just talking about school principals and assistant principals. (Although those are very integral roles in the district.) But they were also talking about the director of transportation and the director of food services and people who work in all of these supporting areas in a school district.

**Karen Marklein:** And that that idea of when they came together (and we got to be there for that session, you and I both did). When they came together, you know, they had a nice meal. They had taken the time to find a location where everybody could come together and really concentrate on the task at hand, which was "How are we going to elevate our schools and make sure that every student is getting what he or she needs?" And it was a true community effort. And you could just tell from the way everybody was speaking— from the, you know, the small groups at the tables to the speakers who were, you know, speaking to the entire room— that they just had such pride in their district. And that just really came forth. And so that was just an inspiring moment for me this year, too.

**Karen Marklein:** Yes, I was I was really glad to be able to engage in that session with them. And, you know, so many people came up to us afterwards to say, "Thank you. Thank you for helping us even get better." And so, you know, it's that idea that we feel good, but we're improving, too.

So, I just wonder, in general, what do you think? Like, what do you think this says about educators in general?

**Rachael Milligan:** Well, this this pride idea about, you know, when I think about just educators as a whole are really do feel like regardless of what level you're teaching, whether it be in a pre-K classroom or in a higher ed classroom, that connection to community is just really important and valuable. That the community, you know, of your actual educational institution, but also the community of your classroom. And you take pride in that, too.

You know, I think about when I was in in the classroom as a seventh grade teacher, you know, we took pride in our little silly traditions. But they were what made our classroom community one that we were proud to talk about. You know, it's like, well, we do this in our classroom, or we do this every Friday or whatever that might be. And so, you know, I think I said at the beginning that it's just that family identity. And I really think that when you have pride in your school and in your community, you really have that family feel.

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And that is also an opportunity for energy building. You know what if I'm feeling. You know, if I've got that anxiety coming on that Sunday night about ready to walk in on a Monday morning, I can really link back to an anchor back to that that pride that I have in my school, pride that I have in my classroom. And that gives me a burst of energy to be able to persevere through the hard times as well. And so, I think that all is centered on school pride, classroom pride and what you do as a as an educator.

**Karen Marklein:** Yeah. Definitely the energy building piece, you know, like that energy building feeds into the resilience that we've seen.

**Rachael Milligan:** Yes. Yes.

**Karen Marklein:** Just the ability to really face difficult times. And I think for me, what this speaks to is what we know about the human brain and how people interact and in really the foundation of that positive psychology. And what positive psychology tells us is everyone is born with this desire to self-actualize. We all want to be the best versions of ourselves.

And so, as I have been interacting with all these people I've been so struck by: they are truly driven to be the best version of themselves. Like they— but because they know that's what kids deserve. And so, I feel like that's for me, it's all connected in my head, you know? It's true. Everyone wants to succeed. You know, and so they want to— that need for that success truly compels us to do extraordinary things.

**Rachael Milligan:** And, you know, I had a conversation at one of my schools with the principal, and he said, I will tell you what my learning over the last two years has been is that I know my teachers can do extraordinary things. They've proved it day after day of the last two years. And so, I said to that principal, "I totally agree. You know, here's what I think. Teachers have always done extraordinary things." Like, we've always seen just amazing things happen at schools. And what the past two years has really driven home for me is that now everybody sees that. Everybody can see teachers really doing extraordinary things.

**Rachael Milligan:** Well, something you just said really sparked something in my mind, because often we're talking with principals and we hear them refer to the people in their— the educators in their building as my teachers.

**Karen Marklein:** Mm hmm.

**Rachael Milligan:** My teachers can do extraordinary things. My teachers are great at this. My teachers need this. And that just speaks to the pride that a principal or a leader has in the team that they built and the team that they get to run this race alongside. And I just I just think that's really neat.

**Karen Marklein:** Absolutely. Yeah. I never really thought that either.



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So that's you know, that's what we think all this pride says about educators. What about what about impact on students? What do you think? What impact might there be?

**Rachael Milligan:** Well, I think, you know, I think when, of course, we know that as the adults in the building. Right. That we have to we should be that positive role model. But I think it's more than that. I think it's more than just modeling this pride. I think that students are looking to us to set the tone right. And that and we can set the tone of a of pride in our work, of pride in our classroom, of pride in our school, of pride in our content. Right.

I mean, when I was again in the middle school classroom, everybody knew that I 'social studies was the best subject.' Right. And so that that positive self-identity is cultivated when the for those students when the adults are modeling that. And we know that for students– I mean research tells us that, really, they need to be connected to one significant adult. And for many students, that significant adult is somewhere in the school building. And it's sometimes a teacher. Sometimes a coach. It could be a leader. It could be a custodian. It could be whoever they have a bus driver. You know, all of these interactions. And so, I think that when we think about pride and when we think about having that that positive outlook, that cultivating that positive self-identity. That's what that idea of pride means for students is they are able to witness that and then cultivated in themselves.

**Karen Marklein:** Absolutely. As you were talking, I was thinking about the significant teacher for me.

**Rachael Milligan:** Mm hmm.

**Karen Marklein:** And in what he was able to do is make me proud of what I was accomplishing. You know? And so, he took great pride in what he was doing. But then somehow made us all feel like we could just do whatever. Like we could just do whatever he asks us to do. And he made us so proud of those things we were able to accomplish. He was the one who did the camera, the photography club. So we, you know, developed photos. We did a musical production at Christmas. You know, we did amazing things that we were really proud of. And it was a result of his pride in his work. So. Absolutely. All of that is true.

**Rachael Milligan:** Yes. Yes. Well, this has been fun and topic to talk about and really dive into as we think about what we're seeing around Tennessee and all these amazing districts that we get to work with. So, I truly hope others have enjoyed hearing about the importance of taking pride in our work and taking pride in our context, our school and wherever we may find ourselves. It truly is part of what makes it great to work within this field of education.

**Karen Marklein:** Yes. And be sure to check out the show notes for this episode where you'll find links to helpful resources and anything we've mentioned here. I hope you've been encouraged and inspired to look for the extraordinary things your colleagues and students are doing every



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