**IEA Awesome Podcast**

**Episode 10 – IEA Executive Director Audrey Soglin**

00:00 K*elsey*: Welcome to the Awesome IEA Podcast brought to you by the Illinois Education Association.

00:05 *Diana*: The podcast for curious, well-informed Association members.

00:08 *Kelsey*: I am one of your hosts, Kelsey Harms, a Computer Specialist from the IEA Program Development Department.

00:13 *Diana:* And, I’m Diana Zaleksi, one of your Instructional Resource and Professional Development Directors from IEA Teaching and Learning.

00:20 *Kelsey*: The goal of this podcast is to educate our members about important new educational policy initiatives in a brief and, hopefully, entertaining format.

00:27 *Diana:* Today, we’re going to with IEA Executive Director Audrey Soglin. Audrey, thanks so much for being with us today.

00:33 *Audrey:* Oh, it’s my pleasure

00:34 *Diana:* So, tell us a little bit about yourself and how you become IEA Executive Director.

00:39 *Audrey:* Sure. First I do want to thank you for inviting me to do this. It always a pleasure for me to be able to talk to members. So, thank you. I started my career as a special education teacher and taught for eight years in a behavior disorder classroom of primary aged children.

00:57 After that, I taught regular ed from every grade from Kindergarten to fifth, except for third, and my total teaching career was 25 years. I know you can hardly believe that. You’re probably think that I started at age twelve. But, I didn’t.

01:13 *Diana:* Exactly what we were thinking.

01:15 *Audrey:* I left the classroom in 2001 and I started working for the Consortium of Educational Change, CEC. CEC is a 501(c) (3) non for profit that actually IEA started almost 30 years ago. And, I was one of the first employees, if you will, of CEC.

01:35 *Kelsey*: Audrey, what did you do for CEC?

01:37 *Audrey:* I worked with joint committees, both school management and unions. I worked with our presidents and our UniServ Directors and central office administrators in those districts.

01:50 Just to reminder everyone, CEC is a collaborative not for profit. In other words, in order to join CEC, the president of the union, the superintendent, and the president of the board has to sign a letter agreeing to work together to improve student learning.

02:07 And, so I was one of the staff people that worked with all three of those anchors but mostly the central office administrators and our union presidents and UDs. And, I did that for about five years. And, in 2006, I joined IEA as the director of what is now the Teaching and Learning department in IEA.

02:30 And, part of what IEA does to support CEC is at that time, I was also the executive director of CEC. It’s a dual role because IEA makes in kind contribution to CEC through the executive director position.

02:48 In 2009, in October of 2009, I became the executive director of IEA. This was not anything that I ever imagined that I would do or be. But, when I was a teacher I was always very active in our union.

03:07 I was the president of our local, that would be the District Educators Council in Evanston Skokie District 65. I had every job in, known in that local and I was involved in IEA in terms of going to RAs at both the national and the state level.

03:31 So, I was always involved. I always found that involvement to be critical to my students’ success as well as to the teachers and educators’ success. I always believed that the union was truly the voice for kids.

03:50 *Kelsey*: Audrey, can you help us understand a bit more about the role of executive director and maybe what your favorite part of the role is.

03:56 *Audrey:* As executive director, I am really in charge of everything that happens through our awesome staff. So, as you may know, IEA has two big parts to it. It’s our governance leadership which are elected leaders. And, then our staff who are hired. And I was hired by the president, the officers, and the IEA Executive Committee in 2009.

04:29 So, I do a little bit of everything. I am involved in every department. I know what is happening at those department levels. I am involved in working with the officers and the IEA Executive Committee and the board of directors.

04:49 And, so depending on what is happening, that sort of dictates where I spend my time. I prioritize my day based on two big ideas. One, I have to address the immediate and I do that as quickly and as efficiently as I possibly can. And, fortunately, I have a great team of people around me who helps me do that.

05:15 And, then the second is to be thinking and having that long view, the long vision, the something that Covey would call the important but not urgent. That if we don’t spend our time on those things then we lose track of the big picture, where we’re trying to go, how we’re trying to implement the goals set by the board of directors.

05:38 *Kelsey:* Audrey, I know that you spend a great deal of time with a lot of partnership work. Can you maybe mention a few of the partnerships that we’re involved in and the kind of work that they do?

05:47 *Audrey:* So, we are involved very heavily with the Partnership for Resilience. And, actually, the Partnership for Resilience that I’ll talk a little bit about was started through IEA’s efforts.

06:01 And, the Partnership for Resilience is currently in two areas of the state. In one area is the south suburbs where we originally started. And, the Partnership aims to bring trauma-informed practices to our students and their families.

06:20 And, trauma-informed practices is an umbrella topic that includes things like supports for parents, access to primary healthcare for students. And, I don’t just mean the physicals. But, things like dental care, vision, asthma, all those things that we know as educators affect students’ learning.

06:43 And, so the partnership addresses all of that and the behavioral health of our students. So, we started that. That’s a partnership that we’ve got in the south suburbs. And we just started another Resilience project in the southern part of the state with 15 school districts and our unions are a key partner in the Partnership for Resilience work that we’re doing across the state.

07:12 So, that’s one big piece of work that we do in partnership with others. And those partners are the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatricians. We’re partners with the SIU School of Medicine in Springfield, Cook County Health and Clinic Services Advocate Healthcare.

07: 36 All of these partners coming together to form the Partnership for Resilience. So, we work a little bit separately sometimes outside of the Partnership for Resilience in other places. We are working really closely with the SIU School of Medicine in places like Decatur and Macon Piatt as well as the southern districts that I mentioned.

08:01 We do also try to work as collaboratively as possible with the Illinois State Board of Education, ISBE. We have a lot of relationships there and, honestly, those interactions and those conversations directly affect the life of our members in classrooms.

08:21 That relationship isn’t quite as robust with the new administration but we keep working at it because it’s important that we advocate on behalf of our members at the state level. We do that as well with the politicians and advocate for our students’ interests at the state level as well.

08:44 So, we work with a variety of organizations and we don’t always agree with those organizations so what we do is when we do agree, when we can work together, we do. And, when we don’t agree, we step away. Those are our guiding principals and that is a policy actually that is set by our Executive Committee and our officers.

09:10 The idea that when possible, we collaborate to make things, really, as good as possible for our students and our members. And, when we don’t, we just step away.

09:21 *Kelsey:* That’s extremely helpful to kind of understand the big picture there.

09:25 *Diana:* Can you lay out for us how the IEA management team is structured and how decisions are made?

09:30 *Audrey:* So, we work probably a little bit differently than most state affiliates because this commitment to collaboration that we have really goes through everything that we do.

09:43 So, we do not have management team meetings or calls without our officers. So, we call our team the officer manager team. And, this is a, really a pillar of our belief system. And, so our officer manager team, we have two, approximately two calls a week to keep everyone abreast of what’s happening in the different departments. Because what happens in IEA is every manager has a department and in that department are the staff people that really do the work and are implementing the goals of the organization.

10:24 Our managers are all working managers. There’s no one that actually just says, “hey, my job is to see what the people do.” Um, that’s not how it works. We all work. For example, our legal manager, our General Counsel, Mitch Roth, does actual real legal work.

10:43 So, he is the general counsel for IEA which means he’s also is the general counsel for the board of directors as well as the members of IEA. So, every department has a manager, every manager has people who work with them, and for them, and my job is to coordinate that work.

11:11 My job is to convene the groups and to make sure that everything that we say we are going to do actually gets done. In addition to those calls two times a week, we do meet monthly as a team usually in person, which is, since we’re all over the state is a challenge and a big commitment of time, sometimes through video conference.

11:34 But, when we do meet together, we really, we value that time and we really focus on the big picture. Are we moving towards implementing, successfully implementing, the strategic goals that have been set in front of us?

11:47 *Diana*: What are some of those strategic goals that we are currently working on?

11:50 *Audrey*: We have two large strategic goals. One is really to create an organizing culture in the organization as a whole. This is a direct response to our desire to be relevant to our members in many different ways.

12:09 We have challenges right now in terms of recruiting and retaining our members so we are just going to double down on that goal of being relevant, talking to our members, making sure that we do three things.

12:23 And, those three things are, one, we want to advance the professional interests of our members. In other words, we want to make the professions that our members work within as positive for them and their students as possible.

12:40 We also want to amplify their students’ work. In other words, what do the students need? Our members are the people on the ground who have the very, very best idea of what to do for students and we want to amplify their ideas, we want to amplify what they want to do to make things better for their students. That’s what they care about. That’s what they know about. And, it’s our job to make sure those voices get heard.

13:12 Finally, unapologetically, we need to make sure that their economic interests are met. We say that because our educators are forming the next generation and they need to be able to have a good middle class life that provides all the things that people strive for.

13:36 And, so we will never apologize for being the advocate for our members to both succeed with their students and make sure they can have a great life and get some economic security.

13:54 That’s one goal, okay? Sorry. The other is to really create a structure in both staff and governance that can meet the changing needs of our students and our members. So, we look to see what’s the best way we can match our staff’s skills and interest to the needs of our members and our leaders?

14:17 So, we’re working on that and the more we’re able to do that, we believe the better our staff will have high job satisfaction which turns into great progress for our members.

14:30 The governance piece of that really falls to the board and the executive committee and our officers. And, so, maybe in a future podcast the president of IEA will explain how that works.

14:42 *Diana*: Definitely. We would love to have our president on the podcast.

14:45 *Kelsey*: Audrey, are there any pressing issues you’d like our members to have more information on?

14:50 *Audrey:*  Yes, thank you for asking. So, there are a number of different programs and resources that we have developed for our members to help them with their students. We view our job to assist our members in doing the great work that they do.

15:07 That’s why I’m here. That’s why I’m in this job. Because I don’t think there is anything more important than our educators and doing what they do for our students. So, that’s the part that drives me every single day.

15:22 And, we know right now, for example, that a lot of our member are really struggling with the implementation of a law. The law is SB100 and it really changed the way schools are to discipline students.

15:40 And, the law’s intent, we applaud. Because the intent is truly to reduce the number of suspensions. It’s to reduce the number of people going through that school to prison pipeline.

15:59 And, to help students as they struggle with some of their own issues that are causing these disruptions. The intent, though, is not to say that there are no consequences for students. It’s not about giving a free pass to kids to do whatever it is that they want to do and the teacher has to take it. Or, the bus drive has take it. That’s not the intent.

16:25 The intent is to use different systems and to use different programs to help our students. So, one of the things that we do is we do a lot of work on helping establish trauma-informed systems in schools and districts and communities. And, we have a lot of resources on this.

16:49 We also are building a lot of expertise and capacity in helping people with restorative practices. And, restorative practices are actually named in law. That what you want to try to do is to replace one punitive discipline system with a system that helps student is to use those restorative practices.

17:12 So, we’re, we have quite a bit of expertise. Diana Zaleski who is on this podcast with me is one of our experts there who can help you in your district, in your schools, understand how to implement this.

17:28 Kristine Argue is another one of our Instructional Professional Development experts in the division of Teaching and Learning, can also help. So, we urge you to, to reach out and get some assistance because one of the failures of the law is that there was zero training offered.

17:49 Ok, so we’re going to say this with the benefit of the doubt, okay? That administrators haven’t received the training or even the explanation of what they’re supposed to do with this bill.

18:05 So, we can also help with administrators. We have developed, thanks to our Deputy General Counsel Paul Klenk, who has recently retired, a step-by-step guide of what you are supposed to do as a district. What the district is supposed to do. How they’re supposed to involve you, the members of the IEA, the practitioners, in this process.

18:32 So, that’s another thing we can help you with. If you have any doubt about how to access these resources or find anything on our website, you can call IEA Connect at 1-844-432-1800 or go onto our website, [www.ieanea.org](http://www.ieanea.org), and click the live chat button so that you can be connected with IEA Connect.

18:59 IEA Connect is a member service that is truly there to help you navigate any part of IEA. And, we’ll help you answer any questions that you might have.

19:12 *Kelsey*: I’ve had a lot of experience with IEA Connect. They’re fantastic. Audrey, is there anything else you’d like to mention?

19:17 *Audrey*: Yeah, just a couple other things about what we offer that I want to make sure that our members know about. One, is that we have an entire online professional development center put together by our Teaching and Learning department.

19:32 These are online courses that you can take at any time that works for you. They are free. They provide you with clock hours that you need to have in order to keep your certification and your licensure up to date. And, I really encourage you to check those out. They are high-quality and available and ready for you at any time.

19:58 The other resource that I want to mention is a program that we have, Degrees Not Debt. So, if you are a recent graduate of your program and just have begun teaching in the last couple of years, you should check this program out because there are ways that we can help you reduce the amount of debt that you have as long as you are teaching in one of our schools.

20:28 So, you can find that on our website. You can also ask IEA Connect about a training coming to your office this school year.

20:36 *Diana*: Thanks so much Audrey. If you have any questions, comments, or feedback, please check out the contact section on the podcast page on the IEA website.

20:44 *Kelsey:*  Special thanks to Mark for the audio help and Dan for the website. As always, thanks so much for being a member and thanks for joining us.

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