**IEA Awesome Podcast**

**Episode 22 – What is a UD?**

00:00 KELSEY: 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’m one of your hosts, Kelsey Harms, a Computer Specialist from the IEA Program Development Department.

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

00:19 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 discuss what a UniServ Director, or UD, is with our special guest, Jon Butler. Jon, thank you so much for coming on the podcast!

00:35 JON: Thanks for having me.

00:36 KELSEY: First, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got interested in UniServ work?

00:41 JON: Sure. I was a high school English teacher. Early on, I think my second year of teaching, I started getting involved in union activities. I was a department rep at a large high school. A couple years later, I joined the bargaining committee, even as a nontenured teacher. Then, just always had a real love for getting to know my contract and being involved in helping other people.

1:05 The story I usually tell is that one time when I was bargaining that first contract, I was at home and I was researching something, reading over something in the contract, and talking about it with my wife, and she looked at me and said, “You know, I can tell that you really enjoy teaching but you get geeky about this contract stuff.” And, when the opportunity came along for me to pursue that in a more full-time manner, I took advantage of those opportunities.

01:31 DIANA: Can you help us understand more about the role of UniServ Directors within the organization?

01:36 JON: I often say to my members that a UniServ Director is the Swiss Army Knife of the IEA. We are the field level contact for most of our members. That means we’re in meetings, we’re meeting members, we’re working with presidents and locals on a wide variety of issues; bargaining, grievances, representation if someone gets in trouble with an administrator.

02:00 Even answering questions related to other IEA services, whether that’s the Legal Department or our lobbyists in Government Relations or even helping to connect them to things like Program Development and training. I feel like my job is really to be the first line of defense and to hopefully help people get connected to the organization in a broader way.

02:23 KELSEY: What would you say is your favorite part of UniServ Director work?

02:28 JON: That is a tough one. I think, again, being able to help people in a way that is really meaningful to them makes a huge difference in how I view this work. So, if someone is having a difficult day, some one has a tough question and they can’t get an answer, to hear on the telephone or see on their face when you’re meeting with them, the relief that they have for that I’ve been able to connect them with something or help with an answer, is really gratifying to me. So, it’s awesome to be able to know that you are the person that people look to hopefully help them through whatever situation they are experiencing and have it come out positively on the other end.

03:08 DIANA: Your work is really important so who do you lean on a daily basis to help you to help our members with the support work?

03:16 JON: Well, the first person in Martha Fritcher, my Associate Staff in our office. She’s awesome. She takes care of me and my office partner and takes care of our members in a fantastic way. So, there’s no way I could do the things I do if she didn’t filter through the things that she can handle first before passing on whatever is left on to me.

03:36 I also work really closely with our IEA Legal Department. If a question comes up that I can’t answer, then that’s where I have to turn. So, they are the experts and we’re really lucky to have a team of attorneys that dedicate their time and their energies to understanding school law and how to help our members in the best way possible.

03:55 And, then, like I said earlier, the rest of the organization, I really love the fact that they support our members in the same way. I really rely also on our members. I works in a region with twenty different school districts so I have to rely on the people that are on the ground, doing the work, to at least give me the basic facts of what’s going on before I can really help them. Without the members who have become really involved, I’d have a hard time doing my job.

04:21 KELSEY: Excellent. If a member has a question that they would like to share with their UniServ Director, can you share with us what the process is for getting in touch with their UniServ Director?

04:31 JON: Of course. I really rely, again, on the people in the local to do their best to try and figure out the answer first, if possible. So, I work most closely with the presidents just because in a region with twenty locals, I need usually an individual point of contact in each of those places to work best. That doesn’t prevent a member from calling here and talking to the Associate Staff and/or to me but usually we ask that people try to touch base with their president first, if possible.

04:59 Given the world we live in, any means is a decent means to get in touch with a UniServ Director, email or phone call, even calling IEA CONNECT. I’ve had plenty of members who contact that eight hundred number because they found it on the website and couldn’t find our number. So, they call CONNECT and the folks in CONNECT will do what they can to help them and if they need to pass it on to me, or just give me a heads up then I can follow up after that, too.

05:29 DIANA: So, if a member is interested in getting more involved in their local union, what can they do?

05:35 JON: I would start by contacting their president and see what kind of openings there are in the local. The best way to get involved is to know your contract and volunteer. The best way to get other people involved is to ask them. So, I always encourage presidents to go out and find people that want to be involved, to solicit those that are interested, and if you find someone who is interested, my goodness, take advantage of it and connect them with something that they have a passion for.

05:59 So, if you are wanting to get involved and you have an interest that you really want to see addressed, take that to your president, take that to your Executive Committee or call UniServ office, your regional office, and talk to your UniServ Director about how you can get more involved.

06:14 KELSEY: Jon, you shared with us at the beginning that you started your career being a teacher. Can you share with us how you started doing staff work and if someone thinks they might be interested in that type of work how they might go about getting started?

06:27 JON: So, like I said, I got really involved as a member. I helped bargain a contract in one of my districts. I then subsequently changed districts and got settle as a teacher but somehow word had gotten around that I had been involved in my union at my previous school and I quickly asked to get involved. I served on the Executive Committee at my new school district and because the person who was serving as president took a UniServ Director job, I was quickly appointed to the presidency much faster and earlier than I expected.

07:01 But, that gave me a pretty wide range of opportunities to experience similar work to what a UniServ Director does. Being a president is not the same but you’re doing a lot of the same things; advocating for members, going to meetings, and working through problems of trying to help members in any way you can.

07:19 So, I had the opportunity at the time, we had an intern program, internship, so I did that with the UniServ Director I had worked with at the previous school where I had bargained that first contract and really loved that experience and through those experiences was able to get a real life look at what being a UniServ Director would be like on a relatively regular basis. So, when a job opportunity came up, I applied for the pool and been placed in the pool and applied for the job that I currently have here in Region 62.

07:50 DIANA: It sounds like our UniServ Directors are incredibly important and really the backbone of the organization. Is there anything else that you would like to share with our members about what our UniServ staff do?

08:04 JON: I think, in my experience, the people that do this really love this work. They take a passion in making sure they’re advocating for their members. They really care about the outcomes that are in front of them. They believe, I think, in justice. It’s huge part of public education. It’s a huge part of being in union. It’s a huge part of why I got involved in this sort of work because I try to fight as hard as I can for the right thing for our members.

08:28 Overall, I think you have to love this so that you can deal with what might not be the greatest situations all the time. But, realize that what you’re trying to do is make those situations as good as possible for your members and for the students they serve. Ultimately, most of us came out of education like I did. We know that the end result is creating an environment for teaching and learning that is going to create the most success for students and for our staff.

08:57 KELSEY: Thank you so much, Jon. If you have any questions, comments, or feedback, please check out the contact section on the Podcast page on the IEA Website.

09:05 Diana: Special thanks to Mark for the audio help, Amanda for the transcription, and Dan for the website. As always, thank you so much for being a member, and thanks for joining us!

09:13 End