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## Episode 50: Interview with Leslie Summers

**Becky Lewis:** Hello, fellow educators! Welcome to our episode today and Danielle, welcome back to this episode. I'm excited to continue our conversation.

**Danielle Irby:** Well, I'm excited to be here, Becky.

**Becky Lewis:** We have a very special guest with us, Danielle, would you like to introduce our guest?

**Danielle Irby:** Yes, today we have Leslie Summers from the WVU extension office. And we're so glad that you are here to share all the things that your agency does for the state of West Virginia.

**Becky Lewis:** Yes, thank you Leslie for being here.

**Leslie Summers:** Thank you, I'm very excited to be here!

**Becky Lewis:** So, Leslie, to help our audience connect to you in the work that you do, can you tell us about your role in how it directly connects to public education?

**Leslie Summers:** I am the 4H agent for the WVU Extension office in Cabell County. The extension office is literally an extension of the university, so we bring research-based knowledge to our communities, and we do that through workshops classes 4H clubs, camps, and other programs like that. My role as 4H agent is to focus on positive youth development by offering programs to my county. And that connects to the public education system by being a resource for teachers, we can provide supplemental education to schools in a variety of ways. We can do it in class after school or in person or virtually, and we can just simply provide the materials and the curriculum for the teacher. We work with the Board of Education in each county to determine the needs of each county and then try to fulfil those needs.

**Danielle Irby:** Leslie, thank you so much for sharing all the different things that your agency is able to do, and I know that you're representative of just one

county. Are there agents available in all counties that the schools could connect to or reach out to?

**Leslie Summers:** There are in all 55 counties in West Virginia, We do have an extension of us, and school enrichment programs are available in each county. However, they are specific to each county we have just completed a statewide needs assessment survey and one of the questions on that survey was about what programs are needed in our schools, and it does seem like that we need to offer a few more personal finance classes, STEM classes, and healthy living. But if a teacher were to call us and request a specific class, we can absolutely provide to that.

**Danielle Irby:** That's really nice and with the services that you do provide, is this something that you provide K12 or to a particular age group?

**Leslie Summers:** We can provide it from age 5 to 18. There are different levels, of course for each age group. The five through 8 year olds are considered clover buds, so there's is a little different than you know from 8. But yes, we can provide each grade.

**Danielle Irby:** Well, it's good to know, UM, at this point, what do schools need to do to reach out to get support with the extension office?

**Leslie Summers:** They can call us directly in Cabell County. I'll give you my phone number, you know for anyone listening who wants that. But if you're in a different county, you can go to [extension.wvu.edu](http://extension.wvu.edu) and scroll all the way down to that page and there's a big map of West Virginia, and just find your county on the map and click on it and that will take you to local resources. Our phone number in Cabell County is 304-743-1342.

**Becky Lewis:** Thank you and I'll share that website that you just shared with us on our show notes so listeners can go there for easy access. But Leslie, thinking about the work that you have done with schools right here in Cabell County, can you talk about maybe some of the experiences or one memorable experience that you have done with partnering with a school?

**Leslie Summers:** Yes, I have lots of those memorable experiences. Working with Daniel Urby, for example, we ran a high tunnel at Explorer Academy Elementary School and we let the kids grow a variety of things. One of them was

watermelons. And we had a secretary at the school who was not very tall, not very big. She was very, very small and we brought that one of the watermelons that the kids grew. It had to have been 40 pounds at least.

**Danielle Irby:** It was big.

**Leslie Summers:** And we had to bring it in on the cart and we asked the secretary to hold it to take a picture, and she was. It looked gigantic compared to her, but the kids all got the chance to taste it and see where the seeds came from to plant more watermelons. And that high tunnel was full of memories for me.

**Danielle Irby:** Yes, well there were a lot of different things that we grew in that hot tunnel for the kids to try and be able to take home as well, which was nice.

**Becky Lewis:** So, I'm just going to flip this script for a minute and talk to you. Daniel from a teacher's perspective. Can you talk about what that experience was like and how you were able to address your standards while working on this project?

**Danielle Irby:** So, with the collaboration that we had with Leslie at the time it was an actual after school program. It was a mentoring program and so we met twice a month. During that time and we were able to hit many standards and we actually offered it to students K through five at the time.

And so, with the experience that they had, we were able to tailor it to those different age groups. Then we were able to also share that information with the teachers. So, when we started the seed planting for the high tunnel, we were able Leslie shared some of the extra materials that we had to take back to the classrooms and so then, students were able to actually grow and create seed starters within our classrooms with what we had started for the high tunnel as well and some of those seeds. We were able to take down to the High Tunnel to plant to see what would happen and some of them. The kids just took home and we were able to have good conversations about the life cycle of a plant. You know, starting from a seed and they were able to actually see that process.

**Becky Lewis:** Yeah, thinking back to our last episode where we talked about adding steam activities into the extended learning either school year or day, this sound. It's perfect for that with the high tunnel and integrating those science skills right in there.

Uhm Leslie when you are working with schools to plan these extended learning and extended day opportunities, do you help bring in workers to support these activities or is this fall directly on the shoulders of the school system?

**Leslie Summers:** We do, we do rely on volunteers heavily and extension and they are absolutely necessary for our programs. We wouldn't be able to do them without our volunteers. When it comes to providing all of the manpower you know, all of the workers for a program, it can be difficult for me to make that commitment fully. We do try to provide us as much help as we can, but a lot of times we'll need to ask for, you know, a teacher and extra helper in the classroom, especially if it's a larger class just to kind of help manage the kids and keep everything under control.

**Becky Lewis:** So, it sounds like just like it's a partnership in creating the experiences with the school, so is getting the helpers and supporters in there to help run the activities themselves. It's kind of a group effort.

**Danielle Irby:** So we've heard a lot of ways that you all connect to the schools and resources that you can provide. What are other additional things that the Extension Office provides just to families in the communities that they can get involved with?

**Leslie Summers:** We can provide a lot of help with agriculture nutrition services is like you mentioned before, we do a mentoring program. If you need help identifying plants or diseases in your garden, you can call in and our agriculture agent Evan will come out and look at look at your garden and help identify what's wrong with it. We can do soil samples and we can even offer recipes. For families who are growing a garden and they want to use that, you know, in a specific recipe we can offer different recipes and cooking classes.

**Becky Lewis:** That would have been a great extension on that high tunnel activity, so if you wanted to do like a summer long program where you start and the extended day maybe in this spring cultivating that high tunnel and then carry it into this summer and then harvesting and doing some steam activities around.

**Leslie Summers:** That does sound like a good idea.

**Becky Lewis:** Yeah, around those you know vegetables and fruits. They were growing and create those cooking classes and recipes and opportunities for students to continue, yeah.

**Leslie Summers:** This is why we need collaboration. So, I like this idea.

**Becky Lewis:** Yeah, you more people you get brainstorming going, yeah.

So let Leslie, are there any additional resources or opportunities that we may not have talked about today when it comes to the extended day and extended year programming that the WVU Extension Office can support schools with that you want to talk about?

**Leslie Summers:** We do offer a lot of various things. We offer, for instance, in the summertime, the 4H camp we can offer energy express. We do that in a lot of in a lot of counties the Energy Express program is a six-week program for reading to students in this summer so that they will have less. Basically, if a teacher knows that they need something and knows that there's something missing in their classroom, but they don't have the resources to provide it, and they don't have the time to plan it. You can give us a call and we can help plan that we can help with the process of it and we may already have the resources available. We can just bring the whole program; you know in a box. And help do that. So, if there's anything missing just give us a call and we can provide that.

**Becky Lewis:** I think that's. Great because I know that we had an extension office when I worked in the county that I was at, and they offered the program. Like you said, energy expressed so I knew all about energy express, but I I didn't realize that as a classroom teacher that I could have reached out to my extension agent for STEM and STEAM activities to support the learning in the classroom, so I think that's going to be really valuable to our listeners out there.

**Leslie Summers:** I agree we have one right now. It's about coding. And we have beads that we give to students and each bead color is representing a different number, either zero or one, and they may make a bead bracelet with their name on it, so it teaches them about it teaches them about coding, and you know the basics of it.

**Becky Lewis:** Oh, that's awesome.

**Danielle Irby:** Yeah, yeah, and I know a lot of times people think of the extension office or 4H of of you know farming and agriculture and raising animals. But it sounds like you all have so much more than just that available as well as resources, which I think is great to know.

**Leslie Summers:** Exactly, we have been trying to adapt our resources throughout the years and to meet the needs of the county.

**Becky Lewis:** And I think that's going to be very valuable as well, because again, you think the WVU extension office you do think 4H and you do think of just the 4H programming or you connect it to Energy Express. And again, you just think about energy Express. So yeah, knowing that you can connect to science and technology. And I'm sure you do things around engineering as well, and the arts and mathematics and kind of integrating them all into that project work.

So Leslie, we're getting ready to wrap up this episode. So, when we're thinking about educators who are just beginning to plan for their summer programming, and they want to incorporate some stem or steam activities into their summer programming or extended day programming. Do you have any tips or advice that you can give them?

**Leslie Summers:** Our slogan is learned by doing so. Anything that you need to do, that's hands on give us a call and we can either provide ideas or provide the whole program and project area. Just give me a call and we'll brainstorm it together.