

Episode 17 - Horace Mann and For-Profit Schools with Andrew Collins

Conner Prairie's Director of Business Intelligence, Andrew Collins, joins us to discuss funding and oversight for K-12 education. When common school trailblazer Horace Mann began his campaign to establish universal education in the United States, he saw it as the only way to overcome disparities plaguing the country and give every child an equal opportunity and access to education. However with public schools faltering on this promise, the recent rise of private charter schools have claimed to offer a similar opportunity as an alternative. Some charter schools succeed at providing this opportunity with an 'atypical' education in an honest way while some fail. Easton, Zoe, and Andrew Collins dive into just how deep the issue has become, who the true victims are, and how we can begin to re-center those who have always deserved a fair shot at achieving their dreams.

Transcription:

Andrew Collins 0:00

This episode is rated E for Everyone

Easton Phillips 0:09

welcome one and all to another episode of 'This is Problematic' Conner Prairie's one and only podcast. I'm Easton. And I'm Zoe. And I'm Andrew. Today we are joined by Andrew Collins, director of business intelligence and information systems at Conner Prairie. Welcome, sir.

Andrew Collins 0:27

Thank you. Happy to be here.

Zoe Morgan 0:29

Thank you for being here. Andrew, we're really excited to have you on today.

Easton Phillips 0:33

This isn't a 'part two' to any episode. But we did also have a fun talk with Brandy about education. That's a season one episode. So if you wanted to go back and listen to that, before you listen to this one, we kind of talked about some similar themes. Today, we're going to be talking about kindergarten through 12th grade charter schools, and the weird relationship that the state of Indiana seems to have with them. For me, I'm not like an education specialist like y'all are. So I'm just happy

to be in a circle comprised of, you know, U.S. public school system veterans, so did y'all would maybe want to talk about your experience before we get rolling about the public school system?

Andrew Collins 1:10

Sure. So my, my career from a former life was, I was a high school music teacher for eight years in the suburbs of Chicago. My bachelor degrees in music education. So certified K-12, was certified K-12, to teach music in Illinois, before changing careers, and coming here to Conner Prairie. So education is something that's very near and dear to my heart, I still have a very strong passion for kids, and especially public school. And yeah, have a lot of thoughts on how public and private charters are funded.

Zoe Morgan 1:50

Yeah. And I have a bachelor's degree in secondary education, social studies, and I was certified to teach fifth through 12th grade social studies. And yeah, I left the classroom in 2021, after just one year of teaching, because, yeah, couldn't do it. And I'm sure we'll get into that over the course of this conversation.

Easton Phillips 2:08

Well, before we go in I think it's helpful to kind of define what a charter school is. So charter schools, according to Indy.gov, my favorite source, charter schools are tuition free public schools that are open to any state resident. Charter schools are free from any of the regulations governing traditional public schools. They control their own curriculum, staffing, organization and budget. And in exchange for that freedom. They're held to rigorous accountability standards for academics, finances, and more by their authorizers. So charter schools are acquired by state law to be headed by an IRS recognized tax exempt nonprofit board, which is the group that holds the charter contract. Also known as the charter organizer, or operator.

Andrew Collins 2:58

There's a lot of different laws that govern public school boards. In terms of accountability, the public school board is elected, you're accountable to your constituents who elect you. The school board is responsible for governance of that school district, they hire the superintendent. This board that governs the charter school is slightly different. I think the the biggest issue is the number of different bodies that can issue a charter certificate to this nonprofit board that you're speaking of. So for example, in Massachusetts, the state board of education is the only body that can issue a certificate -charter certificate. In Indiana, there's hundreds of different bodies that can issue this charter certificate. So you lose a lot of the oversight that comes with a single body governing charter issuance. In Indiana, it's obviously a lot more. So there are plenty of opportunities for you know, abuse of funds or lack of accountability to rigor standards.

Easton Phillips 4:10

So there's like as many unique cases as there are groups out there.

Andrew Collins 4:16

Yeah, I think that you can point to, you know, certainly there are charter schools in the state that have been successful and, you know, have helped students attain at high academic levels. There are other examples of charter schools closing abruptly due to financial mismanagement, poor enrollments, poor academic achievement, and they can close seemingly overnight displacing an entire school's population, somewhat without warning. So, yeah, there are a lot of instances where you know, what you thought you might have been getting in your school. You know, that promise wasn't really upheld. *Musical interlude*

Easton Phillips 5:02

Okay, so before we dive into the current situation with for-profit schools, we wanted to take it back, all the way back, to the genesis of publicly funded schooling in our country.

Zoe Morgan 5:14

So here's a brief summary of colonial American education and how it was funded before. Holdovers of English tradition: education was the role of the family and the church. But there was a wide variety of laws related to education depending on the colony and an array of how schooling was funded. Church supported: organized by towns or groups of parents, tuition set up by and paid to traveling schoolmasters, charity schools run by churches, benevolent societies, like the New York African Free School for enslaved and freed black children in New York operated by the New York Manumission society, for example, boarding schools for children of the well-to-do, 'Dame schools' run by women in their homes, private tutoring, or homeschooling, work apprenticeships with some rudimentary instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic. So without a formal funding system, children would be excluded in part by class, race, ethnicity, gender, or just location. There are examples of publicly funded schools as early as the 1630s in New England, like the Mather school, founded in 1639. First to be free based on tax revenue.

Easton Phillips 6:16

The Revolutionary generation knew that education was vital for a sustained democracy. Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "I think, by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people, no other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness." It's important to note that folks in this generation, especially Thomas Jefferson, only saw it necessary that citizens who could vote should be educated to participate within the democracy, which may be why voting and education are so linked for much of our history,

for better or for worse. So this meant that it was not necessary for those who weren't voting citizens to receive an education. So this is why we see that it's not popular for women and minorities to receive an education. And the dream of public education wouldn't fully come to fruition until a next generation with a guy by the name of Horace Mann. So who else who in here show of hands, even though nobody can see knows who Horace Mann is? Yes.

Andrew Collins 7:19

So Horace Mann is often referred to as the father of the philosophy of the American education system. He's responsible for the K-12 structure, the universality, the concept of compulsory education. And he really believed it was the great equalizer. It was the the fuel that would propel our democracy forward, it was something that would prevent caste systems from forming- taking America from an aristocracy to a meritocracy. He's really, when we think about what what you know, the American education system, the American public education system is, it's exclusively because of Horace Mann and his beliefs in establishing the first public school system in Massachusetts. So he was really, really important in, you know, helping the nation become really progressive in the terms of educational opportunity and equity and access to school.

Zoe Morgan 8:25

I learned more about Horace Mann and the research for this podcast than I did. In my undergraduate studies for secondary education. Horace Mann was mentioned once in one class I had an educational philosophy. So he's definitely a forgotten figure. And it was, he was mentioned very briefly. But I will say it went into like a larger conversation about, I guess, the kind of teachers that we wanted to be- kind of based on his philosophy. So we talked a lot about like social reconstructionism, perennialism, essentialism, all kinds of philosophies that stemmed from, I think, Horace Mann's educational philosophy. And so yeah, we kind of touched on him a little bit, but I think maybe that's part of the problem. today.

Andrew Collins 9:06

Yeah, I definitely learned about him in my educational philosophy or philosophy of education class, which was one semester and and that was it. I think it sounds like we maybe you've touched on him a little bit more than than you did Zoe. But you know, I think not having thought about as a student going through K-12. School and then through three years in college, not really thinking about why our system was set up the way it was, and then learning about who he was and really being the foundation or the roots of the system that we- most of us grew up in that really stuck with me so yeah, I do you think that he's probably glossed over or under-represented or you know talked about but only because of the tremendous impact he's had.

Easton Phillips 10:02

So, Horace Mann is a man that I have a lot of respect for, which is crazy, because I didn't even know who he was before I did this research. So I will admit my own lack of knowledge on Horace. I wasn't familiar with his game, but I am now because Horace Mann is the father of the common school. So, his whole thing was- he was elected to the newly created Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837. And he was like, We need education reform immediately. And he spearheaded, what we would think of now is the common school movement, which meant that every child could receive basic education and it would all be funded by local taxes. So he believed that a society couldn't call itself a democracy unless it had a free and non selective, academically challenging, morally just schooling system. So it needed to be universal, nonsectarian, and democratic in method and it would be reliant on the professional teachers that would that would be- which would call for the professionalization of teachers. They need to be well trained, they need to have their- they need to be available so that our kids can be the best that they can be. And in his appeals to the public, he said that schools we're going to unify our nation, like our nation is diverse and it needs and schooling is going to be a great equalizer. Dang, that sounds like a really good episode (title) idea. The great equalizer. No, yeah.

Zoe Morgan 11:36

Horace Mann was born on May 4, 1796. In Franklin, Massachusetts.

Andrew Collins 11:40

May the fourth be with you?

Zoe Morgan 11:41

May the Fourth be with you. Too bad. They didn't have Star Wars back then.

Andrew Collins 11:46

I mean, really too bad for them. It's really too bad for them.

Zoe Morgan 11:48

Too bad for Horace Mann. Man originally studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1823. He settled in Dedham, Massachusetts, and ended up in the State House of Representatives where he served from 1827 to 1833. But poor man's approach to education and the origins of public education. And the way that his educative consciousness developed was really because of the circumstances of his childhood and how he grew up. So Horace Mann was brought up in a sectarian approach to education. So it was very religious. And under this approach, it discouraged curiosity, understanding, comprehension, critical thinking, but placed importance on prayer, piety, obedience, with the reminder of a looming and angry, omnipotent God. So Horace was basically in fear for most of his life. And so he kind of associated literacy and education, with morality, but also with horror and

fear. And so it was under the teachings of Reverend Nathaniel Emmons that he felt guilty, he felt depressed, lonely, self-tormented, and he even had hallucinations of Hell, is what I've learned. Yeah, so I would be pretty scared to get an education, if it sounded anything like that. In his education, they rarely ever spoke of joy, or why it was necessary to be happy and live a virtuous life. So that was how he experienced education for most of his life. And then it was actually after the death of his father and his brother, that he went to the same reverend. I think seeking comfort over these deaths. And especially as someone who was his teacher and tutor and was not comforted at all. He was instead like, "they went to hell, you will be going to hell", essentially.

Easton Phillips 13:44

And I was just wondering, do you happen to know how Horace Mann's dad died?

Zoe Morgan 13:47

Um, I did not that article did not say but I do know that his brother drowned, actually. Yeah. And Reverend- What was his name?- When so when Horace Mann went to Reverend Nathaniel Emmons seeking comfort, Reverend Emmons just said, "Well, he sinned because he was swimming when he wasn't supposed to be. And that's why he drowned. And so, yeah, which is awful. (Yeah, it's horrible.) It was at that moment in his life that he was like, I'm going to reject the teachings of- I wouldn't say the church- but I'm just going to reject this sectarian approach. And he began to think of literacy as liberation instead, and he began to link literacy with achievement, self expression, and imagination. And so he used this new perspective on learning and education to prepare himself for college and also sought as a way to like escape this life affirming that he was. He felt like predestined, I guess I was kind of like, what his entire life was going to be. But yeah, but because of his upbringing, that just totally I don't know, transformed, and I think shaped what he thought education should and could be.

Easton Phillips 15:06

Wow, that's wild. So Horace still persevered and actually ended up helping create the first public institution for the mentally ill. It's the Massachusetts State Hospital for the insane- little dated language, but that's just what it was called. He promoted the idea of colleges specifically designed for the training of teachers. So as we know, there are plenty of teacher's colleges, in around universities out there, and they established libraries within schools and presided over he actually ended up presiding over a college: Antioch College, which was the first to offer open enrollment to men and women of all races. So this guy was mega-progressive for his for his time, especially. And it's also kind of interesting to think just as an aside, like there was a time when there were no libraries and schools, like the library was my favorite place to go in school. No offense, but I liked reading on my own.

Andrew Collins 16:02

How big do you think these schools were?

Easton Phillips 16:05

Because I wasn't trying to say that, like I didn't care about like the teachers teaching me but I felt like I got better. I got better stuff when I was sitting in the library reading on my own, I didn't like to read what the teachers made me read, I like to read what interested me is what I'm trying to say.

Zoe Morgan 16:23

Horace Mann felt the same way. Yeah, he like, turned away from reading scripture as a way to again, learn to read and write and all of that and began just reading books that he loved and enjoyed and was curious about. And yeah, so I think it- Yes, similar, you understand.

Easton Phillips 16:40

So a lot of folks actually remember Horace, for his very, very famously coined quote, which was, "I beseech you to treasure up to your hearts, these my parting words, be ashamed to die until you've won some victory for humanity." And after his death, his principles led to a huge shift of the light towards the holistic perception of education. So a school career as we would think about it, like going to school all the way up until you go to college and then get a job was plausible for people who really could never (previously) afford to go to anywhere- for people who couldn't previously afford it. There are ways that you could go in without even needing to- education as a right instead of a privilege is what I'm trying to say. So that led me to a very interesting article called Mann's legacy, or in parentheses, does Horace Mann still matter? And it's, it kind of takes a different aim it at man's whole thing as more of what we would call like a 'bully pulpit'. So he used his position in government to make people in the Massachusetts public see the value in education. And specifically that- it wasn't just the best and brightest who deserved to be educated. But systemic issues like poverty and crime and poor health and ignorance, sloth, greed at its source, all of these things can be taken away specifically at an early age, if schools were just given a little bit more importance in day to day life. And one of the obstacles that we now see in implementing this philosophy even today is that wealthy people have little incentive to abandon their privately run, well-appointed institutions where they hold significant power and, and throw support behind democratically controlled public schools. So the people in charge now basically still, like being in charge, and Mann managed to communicate that all Americans, especially the most affluent have a shared social responsibility for the future of the country as a whole. So he actually said, "If one class possesses all the wealth, and the education while the residue of society is ignorant and poor, it doesn't matter what name the relation between them may be called the ladder in fact, and in truth will be the servile dependents and subjects of the former." An increasing number in like the public schools, especially in urban areas, as we see nowadays, public schools are faltering. And a lot of people in urban areas are now, rather than trying

to save schools in the inner cities and cities like Indianapolis, they make alliances with the people who are living in the suburbs and kind of circumvent the public schools demanding private school vouchers. And at the same time, anti tax advocates are undermining public schools because they loosen the ties between property tax apportionments and funding. So recently, even The Southern Baptist Convention, which is the nation's largest Protestant denomination, drafted, like a huge resolution urging its people to flee public schools. So what we see now is what caused Horace Mann to both start and pursue his reform efforts. However, during Horace Mann's own lifetime, the quality of education had deteriorated, as school control had gradually slipped into the hands of economy minded local districts.

Andrew Collins 20:26

The tragedy here is that, and we've- a lot of different topics, I think were brought up from funding formulas for public schools. You know, you brought up local property taxes being the primary funding mechanism for local school districts, to the academic expectations, the standardization of curriculum and testing to that curriculum. And what's interesting, I think, is that charter schools, which used to receive strong bipartisan support it, they were initially conceived of as incubators for innovation in education, it was a way to untether schools and teachers from that bureaucratic institution that that many felt public education was becoming, and allow them to be laboratories for delivering the best educational product to their students and to meet those students. where they were and to serve the needs of that specific community. The and that still exists, right, like, so we talked about Massachusetts, and the State Board of Education and Massachusetts is the issuer of charters to to become a charter school. When you've got more authorizing bodies, there's opportunities for corruption or lack of adherence to quality. So in most situations, in this in this funding mechanism, and why it's problematic is that the tax dollars the public tax dollars, apportion to each student follows that student, whether they go to a K-12 public school, or to a private charter that's governed by a nonprofit board. The reason why that's problematic is because typically, those tax dollars are accountable to the public through levers of democracy, right, elections. So people get to elect representatives who determine priorities, who determine funding mechanisms who determine funding apportionments. And then there's accountability through local school boards, and leadership. However, when this public school student travels to a private charter, that accountability is weakened. Right? So those charters sometimes aren't held to the same standards. They close, like I said, abruptly, there's problems with academic achievement, there's problems with financial governance, there's problems with the type of students that they have to or don't have to take in what ends up happening is you weaken your local school, or school district as those dollars flow freely out of that school district and into private charters. So, what what started out as a great idea, and I think still can be, really ends up feeling whether it is or isn't a public gift of taxpayer dollars, under the umbrella of or the disguise of school choice. But a lot of times these, these charter schools are failing at rates equal to or greater than the public schools that they pretended to be replacing, or

innovating in place of so charter schools can work. I don't think charter schools could be- should be an exclusively four letter word, so to speak. But it all depends on oversight, and it depends on governance, and it depends on the standards to which they're held and who is monitoring that right, then they always say follow the dollars.

Easton Phillips 24:27

It's kind of funny, in a sad way, because Mann was concerned with the pursuit of academic excellence and thought that instruction should be adapted to meet the needs of the individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, but state standardized exams only assess like the same minimal competencies in all of their students. So the teacher is expected to adhere and teach to standards, rather than individual talents.

Zoe Morgan 24:56

Oh, yeah, I mean, they're 100% teaching to the test. First, and it's hard not to win, like your assessment is based on how, like the performance of your students. And then also, you know, you have what, like 50-something standards or something like that, that you're supposed to teach in a year, which is impossible. And then you have, like, the priority standards is what they call them. So you can't really deviate from those priority standards, that you have to teach your students and then again, they're teaching to the test, there's really no room at all to just follow the curiosity of the students, unfortunately. I mean, you just have a limited amount of time in a day. Right, right, like with the kids, and you're like, Okay, well, we have to make sure that you have mastered this standard by this time. And if not, unfortunately, for most teachers, it's like, they slipped through the cracks. It's, it's, it feels like, Oh, it's too bad. No one likes to say that. But that's the reality of the situation. And then they just have to keep moving through to the next standard.

Andrew Collins 26:01

You know, it's interesting that part of Horace Mann's philosophy is that education needs to be compulsory, at least for K-12. And when you mandate something, right, you create an opportunity for markets to be in competition. And that, honestly, was one benefit of the early charter movement, it was to challenge the monopoly that that was the public K-12. system. And that's where that idea of charters incubators for innovation really came from, because you really only had two, two school systems, you've had public K-12. And then you had parochial, private, religious, and there were some that believed there were better ways, right? Or that there could be better ways to approach teaching and learning. And that that charter movement was really the solution there. And it, like I said, had bipartisan support. In terms of 'has that competition, you know, been good for education?' I think in some ways. Yeah, it has. I think the problematic aspect is, and continues to be when you have public dollars flowing out of the local school system into a system that lacks oversight. It's an opportunity for corruption. So in Michigan, for-profit organizations govern private charters, who receive public tax

dollars. And I think we lose the the underlying promise of publicly funded schooling at that point, right, like, we lose oversight, we lose accountability, we lose control. And there's nothing wrong with with schools as laboratories, I think, as long as you're able to deliver on your promise of providing your students, you know, the things that they are the most deserving of. And I think sometimes charters break that promise, and that public trust, so.

Zoe Morgan 28:14

Would you say that the way that Massachusetts is, I guess, handling or dealing with charter schools, kind of the example as to what the solution can be for other states that have charter schools as well?

Andrew Collins 28:26

Yeah. I think that I think they're doing it the right way, so to speak. Ohio, for example, was at one point referred to as the "wild west of charters", Michigan, Betsy DeVos, former Secretary of Education under President Trump, she's credited or she's famous or infamous for Michigan's charter school structure, and there have been a lot of challenges with that. Indiana's own own structure is pretty similar to Michigan's and, you know, we've seen in our own press, where that's, you know, failed. And I think Massachusetts, as an example, is a potential solution. But you know, it's interesting, the people who in Ohio, Michigan, Indiana advocate for the way that we do charters, you know, they would say that the decentralization of authorizing or governing bodies is important, right, that promotes competition, even if it is prime for corruption. But the reason Massachusetts is so successful is because it's got this single authorizing body with really rigid standards and oversight. So the people advocating for charters because of freedom. Probably would be resistant to the idea of a single bureaucratic institution. Looking at authorizing those charters, even though Charter is in Massachusetts still can be, you know, laboratories for education innovation, it's just that they're held to a high standard to make sure that they're meeting their charter promise.

Easton Phillips 30:12

So as someone outside of the public school system, is there a balance to strike between creativity and standards? Because charter schools are not standardized enough, but then public schools are too standardized? So like, is there a balance to be struck between the two? Like, where's the happy medium in there? What could that look like?

Andrew Collins 30:32

You know, I think when we talk about standards, we're talking about state learning standards, right? That's the minimum expectation for proficiency as measured on academic exam. So in Indiana, that's ISTEP that you take in 10th grade. And that's essential to graduate, right?, like that's the barrier that we say- 'you must meet or exceed in order to receive a high school diploma'- which is an indication that you've achieved this minimum skill set or educational attainment, right. So those are standards,

right. In terms of creativity, I think there are a lot of ways to be creative, you can be a creative educator and still teach your students content or skills that meet standards, you can teach creatively, you can teach creativity, you can encourage creativity. You know, I think that charter schools, it's not about standards in terms of academic achievement, necessarily for charter schools, it's the fact that they aren't held to the same type of oversight, right, like financial governance, their commitment to ensuring students achieve at a certain level. You know, it's not like, you go to a charter school, and all of a sudden, you didn't have to pass basic proficiency. It's that, that school was never going to deliver anything differently to that student than the neighborhood school, they were going to before. Nothing changed. They're not laboratories, they're just taking taxpayer dollars from the public school system, it's traveling with the student to the school, there is no oversight to ensure that the student at that charter school achieves and there is no consequence when they don't other than the charter school closes.

Zoe Morgan 32:29

Yeah well, it almost feels like, in order for there to be room for creativity, you have to sometimes create a charter, which we just talked about those failing, I almost feel like the standards just need to be rewritten, like they kind of need to be burned down to the ground and rebuilt in my opinion. Here at the museum, like our educational philosophy is giving kids the time, space and freedom to explore, to be creative, to just follow their interests, their passions, what they're, you know, what they're wondering and what they're curious about. And again, that's hard to do when you have to master a certain standard. But in addition to our philosophy, we also believe that there like these universal themes of the human experience that are maybe more important to focus on, but you also get like, you cover kind of all the other standards so and learning about like, I don't know, kind of touching on grief, or joy or happiness, like these are all, again, these universal emotions and feelings and experiences that we have. So it's almost like learning again through living. And that experience. And I think that we're really kind of like missing that. And I think that also gets us back to what Horace Mann believed about schools was that they were supposed to be these tools really for survival for students once they leave school, but also for the betterment of our communities. And I think just the way that schools are structured right now, like no one's better off for that, in my opinion.

Andrew Collins 34:02

Thinking about the school here, it is a laboratory for innovation. And it's, you know, the way that children learn here is non traditional, but it's, but in a way, it is the most traditional way that humans learn, right? Like we honor children, we honor their interests, we let them explore. There's a lot of self motivated learning. And I think that's really important because you instill a love of learning, you instill a passion for discovery, you promote creative thinking and problem solving and curiosity. When you root your learning experience in that philosophy, so and you can still meet or exceeds, you know, quote unquote, standards, like minimum expectations for a skill, right, so like, I don't think anyone

could say- I don't think you're saying Zoe, like you wouldn't expect a kindergarten-aged student to not have some mastery of reading by the time they're six or seven, right? Like, that's not what we're saying. We're just saying that the way in which we get there needs to be unburdened by the, you know, sometimes dictatorial approach to pedagogy that's become really confining because of these standardized expectations.

Easton Phillips 35:29

I was thinking about- as someone who at one point wanted to be a teacher in a classroom setting- it's like, I also do kind of feel like; Say the charter schools do break their promises. But there's so many other charter schools to fill in or replace it. It's like, if I'm in a public, like a teacher in a public school, it's like, I then suffer because the more charter schools exist- the more at risk the quality of education is for the people in the public school. So it's like all I've done is follow my dream and get the degree and be hired by a school and yet I'm suffering because this whole system just is in place and in the instances here, it just seems like it's dug its claws so deep in that there's really no getting rid of it unless we have like a huge overhaul. And I just don't know what that looks like, you'll have any ideas?

Andrew Collins 36:27

I don't know what the overhaul looks like. But what you're describing is one of the main concerns for, you know, people who challenge what the charter system has become the way that they undermine, you know, the the local public school system. And I think that that's why that oversight is even more important, right? So competition is important. And I think that the challenge to the concept of like the the monopoly that public K-12 had on education and learning can be beneficial, but it's when resources- public resources, are taken from public schools and diverted away to a system that isn't held to the same accountability standards as the public school that it took those resources from, like, that's the biggest challenge. You know, if there is a better way to teach and to ensure children who let's, you know, bring it back to the most important people we really haven't talked much about today, it's, it's for the kids, right? And children have to be the center of the conversation. And they often times are overlooked. You know, at the end of the day, what is best for students I think, is what what has to center the conversation. And, you know, if competition in finding new ways to teach, and to make sure that students are achieving is that that can be a good thing. But what we're finding is, it's, it's not when there's lack of accountability, or oversight.

Zoe Morgan 38:04

Well, and it's also I think, the biggest thing is that when the funds are, you know, like leaving our public schools and going to these charters, it's listening to the, again, if we're going to center students, we also need to listen to those that are like actively, you know, creating their environment. So listening to parents, listening to teachers about what we need to do with those funds, I think that

they are also missing from that conversation. And so there's this like lack of transparency as to where the money is going in the first place. And so, I mean, I think that's really all we can do is like, listen to teachers, and listen to parents.

Andrew Collins 38:42

In addition, maybe just ensuring that once you enroll your child in the school, you make sure you do the research because sometimes, just because it's cheaper or different, doesn't necessarily mean that it's doing the most long term good, as well. But hey, I have one more question for you, Andrew, because you're about to leave, you're the best. And I would like to ask you one more question. So you're working here at Conner Prairie, in your area of expertise, because I know you up there and you'll be cooking-you'll be cooking up there. And in all my admiration for you. I want to ask you, how do you think that we are here at this institution that does educate the public answering the call? Kind of like, we can't fix it, but maybe we can alleviate some areas. Potentially.

I think museums play an important role as informal places of learning to inspire curiosity. And to you know, I think, I think back to my own time coming here. Just being exposed to different people, different environments, and the way that that did spark interest in history for me. So, yeah, I think Conner is doing a great job of me making sure that the public is finding relevance and history and encouraging people to, you know, follow their own interests and curiosity and to dig deeper and peel back layers. And, you know, I think the biggest role that any educator educational institution can play in a person's life is the one that instills a love of learning. And I think we do instill a love of learning here. We encourage it. And, you know, can we do better, of course, but I think we're doing a good job.

Zoe Morgan 40:33

One of the questions that our education team, as we, you know, think about like programming and planning and things like that. For students and teachers, we always kind of come back to the question like, What can we do, because we're Conner Prairie. And I think we always use our educational philosophy of time, space and freedom. We're always thinking about it, like from that lens. And so I think because of that, again, when we don't feel like I guess dictated by standards, you know, like, the grounds like that's the classroom, and then the students are just, again, allowed to follow their curiosities, whether that's learning a little bit more about William Connor, or they're like, 'Oh, I kind of want to go to treetop, and oh, I see this bird over here.' Like, again, it's just kind of following, like, what are they curious about? What is it that they wonder, and just also giving them the time to wander as well. And so, I do think that we are doing a pretty good job of like, inspiring that curiosity, like Andrew was saying. And, yeah, I mean, I think that, you know, we probably, I think there's room for improvement as well. But I think overall, again, going from the traditional classroom setting, to museum education, it was very different for me, and I was not used to it. But I think that yeah, I think that it is also a great place for teachers to come to just kind of like, also kind of just take

a step back and relax. I feel like there's also just like so much pressure on teachers every single day again, with these like, Okay, you have to like, make sure that your students are mastering the standards, and it's kind of just like, the goal really, of every single day. And so, again, I think that they bring their students here and they realize like, 'oh, okay, I can kind of like, relax and take, take a step back.' And they're able to just see their students just wander and wander. So I think we're doing a pretty good job in that aspect. But again, there's there's always room for improvement. Does that answer your question?

Easton Phillips 42:41

Yes, it did. (Okay). And it makes me kind of jealous that as a kid, I didn't get to come and do camp here. But yeah, that's really good. I feel inspired, which is always how I like to leave here after we have our discussion. Thank you so much for joining us through another episode of 'This Is Problematic' taking another dive through some problematic history. As always, we're where you can always find us. So we're on Apple podcasts, we're on Spotify, and we're over there on the Conner Prairie website.

Zoe Morgan 43:09

And you can find us on Instagram @ thisisproblematicpodcastcp and on Twitter at @problematicpod2. We'll see you next time.

Easton Phillips 43:09

All right, see you next month. Take care!

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>

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Further Reading:

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