Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Alright, hi Rebecca so I was just thinking that we could start off with you, giving us a little bit of background on how you got into teaching.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Sure. Hang on one sec. So, I got into teaching…Not intentionally. I basically --my mom was like you have to go to college. I was like Okay, so I went to college, I had no idea what I wanted to do, but I had to go. So I started taking classes, I went to Depaul University in Chicago and started taking, you know, economics, communication-- just trying a whole bunch of things and nothing was really interesting to me at that point in time, so I just took a bunch of stuff and then I actually ended up getting a job as an after school basketball instructor for a company called One on One Basketball. And I was a three sport athlete in high school, that spoke to me, I used to run camps and clinics and things like that and I worked with kids a lot. So I was like perfect job for me it's only a few hours a week, I can work with kids I can play basketball great let's do it. So I worked for them, for a long time, and through like my entire college career and I discovered I’m really good at teaching people things. I can --I’m really good at explaining things getting people to move from A to B to C I love working with kids it's enjoyable. And so, by my junior year, I decided after teaching basketball for a couple years and getting--I got to go into a bunch of schools across Chicago: North side South side West side all over the place, I got to see what it was like in public schools, private schools, work summer camps in the Gold Coast-- and I just ended up taking elementary ED classes and that's kind of where it--where it came from is teaching kids basketball and I loved math and science and in school, and so I ended up becoming a math and science educator.

00:01:58

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Yeah, that's super interesting. And so, then what was the first school you worked at when you started teaching?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Ah, so I actually worked at a very elitist private school called Francis Parker. Which is in a really-- in Lincoln Park in Chicago and that was interesting. And then I started working at… let's see I went to Chicago Lab School down on the South Side in Hyde Park Another really nice school and then I just started working at a bunch of Chicago public schools all over the place just randomly, and so I just get on the bus with my bags of basketballs and I just go out. So I did some really elitist private schools and then a lot of public schools.

00:02:46

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Okay. And then did you-- how did you transition from coaching basketball to teaching science?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

 So I finished my degree program. I got bachelor of science in elementary ED and that positioned me to student teach at a school on the North side called Ravens Wood School. And I student taught there and that's actually where I got my first job. I student taught I taught fourth grade-Fifth grade, fourth grade, first grade there for a while and then I was sort of not really sure what grade level I wanted to go into. But I had gotten the middle school social science endorsement during my time at Depaul so I knew I could teach middle school social studies. And social studies is OK, but it wasn't my favorite thing, so I ended up going into a master's program at Loyola university Chicago for masters in Science and Education. And so I became a science specialist where I can teach middle school science and with that program came in math endorsement as well, I applied for Boeing math scholarship and I ended up getting it--all of the scholarships and I ended up getting my masters for free, which was incredible because now I don't have massive student debt, I only have a little bit. And so I ended up getting a master's in science education, plus an additional endorsement of science for middle school and math for middle school as well.

00:04:10

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

That’s awesome. Yeah, so what were those first years teaching in public school like in Chicago?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Incredible. We had a fabulous schedule, I worked from basically 730 to 145 every day it was a very short day, but it was great because I had to teach blocks, and if you don't know blocks are there hour long classes, where I taught a block of math, a block of science, and I would switch kids and teach another block of math and a block of science. And so it was really great because they, you know, built relationships with kids really well and I had the same kids for both math and science. And I loved it, I mean the first year teaching is hard, everybody knows that, but it's just a matter of learning how to prioritize, test management, just learning how to manage everything that comes with it. So those first years were just incredible, I loved every minute. I was joyful, I was happy, I loved my colleagues, I loved my kids. I worked in my neighborhood so it was close. I see the kids as I walk home, you know that's good and bad sometimes, but it was great just being part of the Community, so I loves it.

00:05:18

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Do you remember about what year that would have been?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

I started in 2004. At Ravens Wood School. And then I ended up at a different school for over 10 years which was Talcott Fine Arts and Museum Academy, down in West Town, which is where I moved then, so I was also part of that community, so it was great.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Yeah, and so between that time and the 2012 strike, did the dynamics in the classroom change? Can you talk a little bit about that-- You know that time period and how it kind of culminated into the strike?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

 I definitely can. Because this is what impacts what I do to this day. And really what happened in the time --so I've been an educator for 18 years now. And, at the very beginning, it wasn't all about standardized testing it wasn't about looking at kids like they were data points that simply generated funding. It was about humans, and you know developing humans for the greater good of the society and working with kids and being joyful in that space and probably around

when No Child Left Behind came in that --right that was my profession at the time, and I was there, during that time, those very awful awful policies were part of what tainted you know my vision of being an educator.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Is my Internet stable? Am I frozen.?

00:06:59

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

I can still hear you. There was a little bit of a blur for a second but I heard you the whole time.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Okay okay sorry.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

No, You’re good.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

So, what happened-- what happened over time, is when I first started teaching I only had to give one standardized test. That was it. I didn’t really think about it, it was called ISAT the Illinois State Assessment. I didn't teach to the test, I didn’t believe in any of that. You know some of my colleagues were very freaked out about the test and doing those things, and I just knew in my heart that if I were a good educator, and I embrace students and built those relationships with them is that they'd be successful no matter what. I knew that in my heart. And over time it all shifted from this joyous collaborative happy space of helping kids grow and learn --and I’m with middle schoolers, so that's a tough time in kids lives and I love being a middle school mentor, right?

And over time, those policies started to break me. And the the-- not having resources, you know I worked in Chicago public schools, I had resources as in like curriculum and textbooks that kind of thing. And our Union actually give us $250 reimbursement so that was really nice. But what did I mean about resources is we didn't have a nurse every day, we had a nurse two days a week, we didn't have a counselor every day, we might have a counselor two days a week, so if there was a crisis that was put on my shoulders.

And that is troublesome. And you know, over time, for me, it was the shift to honestly just looking at kids like they are data points. I just to this day cannot fathom why we believe this is the right path forward. Because I was a math teacher at the time, and math teachers are very much under a microscope. Very much under a microscope. Uur scores were looked at. The policies that were put in place attached the test scores to my evaluation. And we know that you cannot apply a business model to education, it just doesn't work, no matter how many times you try, it's going to fail, over and over and over again because these are human beings. They are not data points that you can just fix and change the variables. There are so many variables that go into our kids lives, whether they're hungry or they're homeless or have you know, family that is worried about ICE. Or folks that are in jail and they are taking care of brothers and sisters and things like that. Just social trauma. And we can't look at kids just like their data points and we're just going to move this point from here to here. You just can't do that, and so it was really demoralizing to me as an educator.

 And you know leading up to the strike where they they tied--it's called VAM: Value Added Measure, which is basically looking at your test scores from the students you have from one year to the next, and determining their growth. Which sounds great, however I-- you cannot just judge me on what happens to them, right? Like these are, these are humans. So and you're looking at this finite data on just math and ELA, like what about the humanistic nature and how happy they are? Why aren't we measuring that somehow? And so it really just turned me off from teaching-- it really as a math teacher, I was-- had some principles, who used me as a pawn, so to speak. Where, I was a great teacher, I’m still a great teacher, I know that. But it's because of my ability to teach people things and concepts and conceptually and deeply understand them, that is the reason I’m a good teacher. And I was used as “look at her scores” right, “look at look at Becky’s scores,” --I went by Becky back then, “look at Rebecca scores. Oh, if she can do it everybody can. Doesn't matter how many kids are in her class.” And so I became this thing, and it was very frustrating and I didn't ask for it and I didn't want it. And so I was this model teacher in my building and I was just I didn't like it, I don't I don't I don't need to feel competition with my colleagues like we are here in a Community growing together like, why are we building in this competition? Very uncomfortable it didn't like it. So over time just these policies that are very detrimental to what education should be, in my view, just really tainted how I envisioned that.

And then, of course, you know the closing of the Community schools-- neighborhood schools in Chicago leading up to that. Or maybe that was right after the strike I always get the years confused 2012 and 13. But really, just like this lack of respect for me as a professional and the autonomy of letting me do what I know works best with kids instead of just making sure I teach to these tests and these test scores work really just changed everything for me.

00:11:44

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Yeah so, what was the dynamic between you and your colleagues in, I don't know, the month or year up to the strike? Because, clearly, I mean, with those policies that seems like it was divisive, but you all found a way to unify.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

I think, and again, that was a really long time ago. And I-- you know I think when I think back to like data meetings, because that was the thing that like hurts my soul the most that I remember the most --because it actually led me to quit and 2015--is like we're all just we're working together we're you know we're we're colleagues, we care about kids and when there's harmful policies and harmful programs, it's really hard to just sit with your colleagues and be like yay we're going to do-- like we're not interested we're not motivated, we're not-- You're taking away the joy. And so all of us were like we’re just going to do what we've been doing best, right? Like going to keep doing what we're doing. The mantra in teaching is you just close your door and do your thing, right. You don't worry about the rest. What you can control is behind your door and you just go in and you do it. And that's what we did.

But we had camaraderie right? Like Chicago really taught us the power of Red For Ed Days. And wearing our shirts every Friday, having Union meetings every Friday. We can sit, we can talk, we discussed issues, concerns. I was actually elected to the local school Council which is like a governing board for each school in Chicago. I was elected as the teacher representative, because I had a strong backbone and I wasn't afraid to advocate. And I had the trust of the Community, and I was a good teacher and I had all those leadership qualities. So that put me in a position where I could start advocating. That was actually in 2010 right before the strike.

And I found my voice pretty early on, and that was another thing that that put me in that advocacy role-- is now I’m sitting on this governing board, and I have a voice. And I’m the teacher representative. I’m the teacher representatives, so you get one person that represents the teachers, that was me. And so, I really enjoyed being in that position and being able to listen to my colleagues bring their ideas to the table advocate for their needs and that sort of thing. So, I don't remember exactly what the conversations were like or the fine details I just know what solidarity felt like. I know what it was like to be wearing red with everybody on Fridays, being in those meetings, discussing issues together, identifying issues that were widely and deeply felt. That's what I remember.

00:14:19

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

And then, what do you remember about the strike in itself?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Ah. A lot. I remember being very excited. And like ready. Because I had watched in 2010 the Florida teachers had their first wear red for public ED day. Then in 2011 Milwaukee teachers filled their capital halls and I know Chicago sent a bunch of buses up there. And they were all wearing red. And so I --it was kind of already like escalating little bit in the education world. And I remember when we were talking about it and talking about you know contract issues, and you know thinking about oh my gosh are we going to go on strike, this is pretty wild there hasn't been a strike in 25 years, this is pretty exciting and historic. And I just I remember getting as many red shirts as I could. Right like all the T shirt shops around Chicago had these amazing shirts, that you can get, if you are a math teacher, a science EG, they had like fun, you know beakers on it math symbols and things like that, and I remember getting excited to get gear.

And that's like a first step right it's a very easy action for folks it's not like you're ready to go on strike, you're not taking a strike authorization vote. But you're you're gearing up for something and I think. There's something about that that helps you realize like “I’m a part of this movement and part of a movement means I’m going to start moving myself and my colleagues and doing things, right?

So I remember being excited about that, and then I remember our Union REP, I had a very strong Union REP. Her name was Stephanie Collins. And she was actually a delegate, and she was very-- she's like my Union mama right? We still talk to this day. When I go home to Chicago we sit and we had lunch, back in July. And she was actually like a regional organizer. So she was going to be pulled from you know our our workplace organizing to do other regional things. So you know get signs out to different schools in an area. And so, she asked for people to step up and we had a phone tree, and I remember being like “I’ll do it. I’ll do it” I raised my hand so excited to put my name in that spot, right? Like oh man, this is pretty responsible like I, I have to contact X, Y amp Z. Like now I’m accountable. Other people are accountable, we're accountable to each other. Okay I’m gonna do this right? like so I put my name in that spot. And I just remember being excited like what do you need me to do what do I do I get signs? What I do? Do I have to talked to parents? What do I do right? I was like ready for marching orders right, I was a good rank and file, marching ready to go.

And then I remember… I didn't know that it was called escalating actions at the time, I now know all about it, because all I do is read Labor books now and I’ve built escalating actions here in Arizona with our 2018 Red For Ed campaign. And we literally took all of what we did from Chicago. And specifically, you know, starting wearing red shirts on Fridays, okay start talking, we had meetings, we had to vote on different issues to find those issues that were widely deeply felt, we had conversations around it right? Then we had to get out into the Community, we had a canvas businesses with signs, ask them to support teachers. So I remember doing that, walking up and down Chicago avenue, where I was, going into restaurants and then one by one, I started seeing signs up everywhere, I went. And I’ll never forget it, I’d be on the train I’d see signs, walking down the street, I’d see signs, in a bus I see signs, up in condos right? People had them in the back of their cars, putting them everywhere. And so I remember that community Solidarity like it was yesterday. Anywhere you went you saw the signs right?

And then I remember like they're like okay that's that's good, but we got to talk to parents, the Community has to be behind us. And I was like great. So Chicago highly organized, taught us how to do walk ins. And so we walked in many days with parents, we had music and speakers and donuts and coffee. And I was lucky to be in a very progressive school. With some parents who were actually nonprofit activists kind of like advocates and we're used to this work. And they were like, we got you. Like we're going to organize X, Y amp Z. And they had huge banners that were like half a block long. You know what I mean everyone standing behind it? So we had this great sense of Community solidarity as well.

And then I remember finally taking that strike authorization vote and going I’m doing this, I put my name on the ballot, I put it in the envelope. And then the vote came back, and it was overwhelming that everybody wanted to strike. And then being down on strike that first day marching in the streets. like chanting. I was just like this is where I belong. I never had a sense of belonging so much in my entire life. I knew that I wanted to be part of the Labor movement from here on out, like I knew it in my soul. And I just I have my signs and my newspapers, I have all my stuff still and I just remember the power of the Union. And then looking up at all the workers in the high rises downtown like we support teachers, we support teachers. It was like worker solidarity, and it was beautiful and amazing and powerful and I just wanted to be there every day of my life, like forever. And that's not how it works. Every day we went back, though. wasn't like you could march everyday, can’t closed down downtown every day. We had assignments, and we had to do tasks, and we had to go talk to these people, or to get out in the Community, go canvas these people, you know informational picket. So we had to do it to keep continuing the conversation and owning that narrative in the Community, which is very powerful, so I remember, I remember all of it, is what I’m saying.

Yeah and then afterwards, when we got our first draft of the contract, you couldn't… You couldn't have those conversations on site. You had to go somewhere else. So, we all marched down the little park around the corner and I remember all these teachers in red just sitting around with our red shirts on swinging on swings, playing you know, just sitting around, you know, playground equipment, looking at our contract, being like “we don't like this, we like this, what do you think?” And we just-- it was like, I don't know, it was the most grassroots thing I’d ever really been part of where we're all just hanging out at a park talking about contract issues, which was great. And one thing Chicago did that was so important is give us that time. Our Members need to read this over and then take it to the delegates and then take it to a vote. That doesn't happen often and that certainly didn't happen in Arizona, which is the downside. But that was very powerful and very smart to allow us time to look at the contract. And then happened and we got some things and the details right now are shrinking in my brain, because Arizona ia now in my brain, but those are the things I remember.

00:21:24

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

So, you said that you ultimately ended up quitting three years later, and can talk about that a little bit and what led to that decision?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Yeah I—they asked us to do data walls. And again, for me it all comes down to this mess of standardized testing, which is just horrific. And they wanted us to put—we had to like track progress of kids but do it publicly. Which is horrific, dehumanizing, demoralizing and I don't want to do it.

So I got as sneaky as I could, I tried to hide the data best I could, and then I ultimately refused. And that was just part of it, I really--The evaluation system was really horrible also with the whole test scores tied to my evaluation. My scores were always good, I just didn't like the whole process, made me feel really uncomfortable. And then it was… every year, I kept being asked to do more with less resources. So, for example, Rahn Emanuel increased our school day by 10-- or school year by 10 days and added an extra hour on to the school day. So remember I said I used to work a very short day and it was great and I wasn't exhausted? Well he added on an extra hour where we had to do intervention. Where again we had to track kids, get them from A to B to C to D to E. I had to post where kids were at. HORRIBLE, HORRIBLE. I disagree with all of it. So basically my entire job shifted to “I'm a data tracker of kids and their test scores.” And I’m not a fan of that I’m a fan of authentic formative assessments that I produce. I can figure out where my kids are at, what they know, what they don't know and use it to drive my instruction forward. That's called teaching I can do that, and I can do that in a heartbeat.

And so it -- I remember, you know, digital technology was starting to increase as well, and it was like “You need to go on your one free period of 40 minutes, you need to go take this webinar and turn in your certificate, by the end of the day” I had to go take these, all these different courses and turn in certificates. They never gave us time to do anything. I was pulled out of my classroom to go to data meetings like nothing that I wanted to go to to improve myself as an educator, it was “you come to the data meeting, we're going to teach you how to analyze data.” I’m a math and science teacher, I can analyze data in my sleep. Like that's what I do for a living, like I do that. Like I don't need you to explain to me how to do that, like I don't need this.

So I was just really angry that I wasn't respected and didn't have my autonomy-- which I did have. I had autonomy, I do whatever I wanted, I could teach whatever I wanted. And it just slowly started to erode really with like taking away the autonomy, putting more on, not giving us time. And I just… I felt like my brain was just starting to like fry, like I started having sensory processing issues, with you know large class sizes and then noise in the room, and just…

I don't know I just started to just become angry about not being respected and I just needed to get out. I just need to get out-- that's-- I made it 11 years that's a lot longer than a lot of teachers, the turn over is three to five years. And so I did. I decided when I got pregnant with my first kid that I was done, I was just done, I was going to go try something else that actually believed in the work I do and provided dignity and a work work life balance.

00:25:03

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

So then, how did you end up in Arizona?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Um my family's had a vacation house here for a really long time. For like 20 years. And so my mom and her brothers and sisters all bought a house together kind of like a timeshare thing, but they own it. And I’ve been coming out here for years on vacation, two times a year, three times a year, so I’m very familiar with it and--

--- I’m just going to turn the fan on, sorry. It's like super hot today I don't know where I put the fans remote, sorry I’m like dying.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

No, you're totally fine.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Okay, I’m like sweating sorry.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

You’re good.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

And so, like Chicago winters are pretty brutal and I have seasonal affective disorder pretty badly in the winter, especially when there's like 40 days with no sunlight. Really hard, I was eating horse pills of vitamin D, you know big ones with the 50,000 IUs. And when I had children, it was really hard to be like “mom can we go to the park?” and “no it's too cold.” And I said that for like eight months out of the year, you know? And so, it just got to a point where you know our family goes out to Arizona all the time, because that house is there, like we can move there and still be connected to our family, so let's just do it. And so we decided to do it in 2017. We're a little crazy we had three kids under the age of three of the time. We had eight month old twins and two and a half year old when we moved out here. Almost three-- so I just I couldn't-- I was pregnant with twins and just thinking of being stuck inside with three kids that were so little for all of Chicago winter I just I couldn't do it, I was like I have to try, I have to try sunlight, let's go try sunlight. And here we are.

00:26:49.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Yeah so, then you ended up moving to Phoenix, is that right?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

I’m in a suburb of Phoenix called Gilbert yeah.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Awesome and then, so what was your experience in Arizona with public education--I don't know, maybe like how your children were in the schools there? You know, what led you to this activism in Arizona.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Yeah, do you mind if I just close the shades? Because the sun is like baking me right hold on---.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Okay, so you were talking a little bit about your experiences with public education, when you got to Arizona.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Yeah so, I mean my frustration with this place started even before I got here when searching for jobs. And I realized even before I got out here how low the pay was. And I was like appalled. I was going to take like a $35,000 pay cut. And I have a Master’s degree, plus 27 extra graduate credits in math, like advanced math. And I was going to be offered like 48,000, 49,000, 51,000 was the highest offer I got. And I just kept looking at my husband going, “are you sure we should do this? We're literally going to the worst place for what I do. Like Is this the right move?” And so I had looked up all the stats, like I pay attention right? I’m politically aware. I’ve been, you know, watching the Badass Teachers Association Facebook page. I was an old member in there for a long time, like, I pay attention to like austerity, ALEC, Koch brothers, all of the things. And so I started digging in and I realized like oh man this place really is fiftieth in the nation, like for almost every education statistics should we do this?

And a stroke of luck came along a gal I used to teach with in Chicago actually worked in a district in Phoenix, similar to what I was doing in Chicago, same demographic, same kind of community feel. And-- but they paid the highest in the state. Over 10,000 more than anybody, and they took all of my years, which is unheard of. So at the time I was --I had taught for 13 years. So I had 13 years, and a lot of districts here don't take all your years when they decide how much you can make. So some would take eight years, five years, I had 13. I found a district that took all 13 which bumped my pay up. And they also, since I’m highly qualified and math and science, I’m a high needs teacher and so they gave me a $3,000 bonus, on top of that.

And so, honestly I worked in a district where I made fantastic money for out here. In Chicago that's not very much money what I made out here, but for here it's the highest paying district you could get into. So I got into it and I started teaching seventh grade science and math. And I was in a school in West Phoenix which has --a title one school high free reduced lunch …and students that experience a lot of trauma and the highest refugee population in Phoenix. There were kids from over 37 different countries, 37 different languages. Like really cool community, really really interesting community. And so, I was excited I was like yes, I could do this. Like I’m, like I’m an urban educator, I love this setting. This is what I know, this is what I do. I am not comfortable I don't think working out in the suburbs in a more elitist kind of place, so this feels okay to me. And they had a family resource Center where it felt like a Community school where they could go and I worked in the Community school in Chicago, so that was something important to me. Where you know, the Community comes for classes and they get bus passes and all the resources they need to like feel supported. And I was like Oh, this is going to be great, I can do this great.

Wow that…I was really blindsided when I got here. Because I had 34 kids in all of my classes. I taught six classes, a day I’ve never taught over five classes before. So that was exhausting. 34 kids, I’ve never had higher than 29 in Chicago, that is exhausting. I don't have time to look at all their work I don't have time to build relationships and then there was this really awful discriminatory law, the legislation here against children who are not English language speakers, English language learners, is horrific. And I was mandated to teach one of these courses for English language learners. Which is fine, however, the law here at that time-- it's been changed still not good enough-- said these kids who did not pass the English language proficiency test, had to be stuck in a cohort together, where they have to learn English for four hours a day, with this group. They don't get to leave this group, they don't get to intermingle with kids that actually speaking English, which makes zero sense, and I wasn't allowed to use materials that were in their language. And I-- my mind my mind was blown in my jaw was dropped to the floor. And I go you want me to do what? Like I have all this stuff in Spanish, I could teach science in Spanish I’ve been doing it, I worked at a dual language school, I can do this, at least for the Spanish speakers, but I had kids from…I had kids from Cambodia and Thailand and you know many multiple different languages.

And I was just appalled and I was like, why do we--why are we all going along with this? And then I found out it was the law, and I was just like, oh my goodness, are you kidding me? And I was so disgusted with Arizona politics that that was part of it right like that's part of the anger and part of the like--My soul hurt when I learned of this disgusting law. And I had to teach this, and of course I close my door and I did what I wanted right? I did what I knew work best for kids.

And so that was part of it, then I get my science materials. Well I don't have my own materials. I’m supposed to share on this rotating basis when they put them on a truck and ship them around. So, if I don't teach within this window of time, I don't get materials. I have to teach from this time to this time, all this stuff. Then it gets shipped off somewhere else. Yes. And then I opened my boxes of materials that are totally covered in dust and dirt, and I have expired chemicals from 2004, 2001. And there's actually me in the newspaper taking pictures of my stuff tweeting it out going, this is what I’m dealing with here.

And so it was like the layering and the layering and the layering and then like when I got to like where's the Union? And that was like-- that was the tip of the iceberg for me, is like there wasn't this powerful Union that I could go to. We had Union REPS, but it was really like I didn't have like a contract contract, I had a very ambiguous contract that means the principal could basically tell me what to do and it wasn't written into the contract, because the language was ambiguous that “duties as directed by principal” which meant she can tell us we had a staff meeting after school, where I don't get paid for an hour. Like that happened a lot. And I said no, I have a family. You told me on the phone when you interviewed me I was done at 345.Now you're telling me I have to stay to 445? The answer's no. I have to drive an hour, all the way back to the suburbs, because this is the only place, I can make money. So I had to drive 60 miles round trip every single day. So, you get where I’m going, the frustration and the frustration and the frustration and just the the principal looking at us going “well, we always have high class sizes that's why they can pay so much here” was just disgusting. Like this mentality that I wasn't used to I just I-- Why am I not being respected? And I just-- all of it together just drove me --drove me to be very angry about everything.

Sorry. That was a lot but that's--

00:35:15

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

No, no, it was great yeah. I feel like you just gave like a lot of great context to that.

Do you-- What was it like in terms of the relationship with other teachers? Were you all talking about this kind of stuff at that point?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Um. So. In hindsight, I just think about like what it was like. I had one really good friend who had come from somewhere else as well, and we both connected on like what is this? What what what--What is this? And, like some of the discipline policies were really punitive and I disagreed with 100% and so did she. Like tracking students daily on this tracking sheet, just like things that are very archaic and we shouldn't be doing to humans. So, I had one colleague that I can rely on. And we were we were both new, so it was good to know that I wasn't alone, and I was going, what is this? what is this, is…this isn't right, right? She's like “no it’s not right.” I’m like okay, all right. And the people who had been there longer, just go along with it because that's the way it is, it's the status quo and we just do it.

And so, I think other colleagues, like-- I went right to the Union. I was like who's a Union REP like where are these people, hey, I used to be a Union person, hey you know what can we do? And I found out that there's-- there used to be a blacklist in the district of folks who were organizers and unionists and the previous superintendent really looked down upon such things and people had gotten fired in the past which closed a lot of doors and a lot of people's mouths, right?

And so it was kind of this--- it was really hard for me, because the minute I got on campus I started agitating right, why is it like this? do you guys agree with this? are you mad about this?

And people were. They just the… the thread the common thread through everything is like well that's the way it's always been and I’m like, but doesn't have to be. You know, I just ,I tried, I tried my agitation and it actually, I actually… I actually got some wins In my second year. I mean the first year was obviously Red for Ed, but even after that, like it continued and we learned to organize and we learned to push back and we got a couple like wins, even after Red for Ed, which is really great. So it was just, you know, I came from like Union powerhouse to association, no collective bargaining rights, no really specific contract items that I could be like “we didn't get this, let's fight this” right? “This didn't happen” right? There was no-- like a spelled out --I didn't have like a Workers Bill of Rights or anything so it was just a lot different than what I was used to, and it was really hard to to transition.

00:38:11

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

So what led you to starting the first Facebook group, the Arizona Teachers United group?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

So. It actually started with… and this is a weird segue …Parkland, Florida in February, when that shooting took place. I was SO angry. And I cried to and from work every single day, listening to NPR and listening to the parents who had lost children on that day. And I got a little bit active in that movement, like…I forget what the movement was… my brain is fried. Um it was like, you know, it was all about giving us the things we need in school…Why cant I think of it… they had a great hash tag. I started become like a little bit active in this like aftermath of Parkland, Florida, and I wrote something. And it ended up getting...It went viral. I wrote about-- I just like put all of my anger at the education system on paper and ended up getting picked up by the Huffington Post and then my friend put it in a blog and it went viral. And I just talked about every-- I just like---Everything I felt about the demoralization and like not treating students like they're human. Like these poor kids have to like take guns into their hands, because they're not socially connecting with their humans and it's because of these horrific policies in education. We only look at them like data points now and there's no care and there's no humaneness --and I just went off, because I was so angry. And It got picked up. And like, I don't know if that was just like a spark of me being like I'm going to say stuff now, you know, just like it felt so empowering and I got interviewed.

And then what happened, like not even that many weeks later, was West Virginia happened. And I’m staring at West Virginia going, why is this not happening in Arizona? And I’m literally yelling, and my husband is like what are you doing? And I’m yelling and I’m so excited, and so I asked to join the West Virginia page, because I was like yes! And then Oklahoma happened, I asked to join their page, I was like yes! And then Kentucky happened, and then I joined their page and I was like yes! And all the meanwhile I’m thinking, why is nobody in Arizona… Why am I not heard a thing yet?

And so there was an Arizona Badass Teachers Facebook page where a gal named Lise Spengental posted something, she's one of the admin on the Facebook page, and she's like anyone's posted something about West Virginia like “anyone thinking what I’m thinking?” And I was like Yo me, I am! Yo, over here! Right? I didn't know anybody and only been here --I hadn't even been here for a year. And so her and I started chit chatting on the side. I… she was a long time Union Member, 20 years, and was very frustrated at the state of everything and believed that the Union didn't have any power. And that they couldn't do anything, or they wouldn’t do anything. And so, I was like ooh that's rough. Well I’m from Chicago and here's kind of what I’m thinking, and you know, I was like maybe we just need to get some more folks into this space.

And so her and I chit chatted over spring break. I didn't know her, we weren't friends, we weren't colleagues. We were just strangers sharing a common idea and we went back and forth for a while and then I was like “you know what, I’m just going to make…forget it, I’m just gonna make a page, let's just go for it. let's just go for it and that way we'll find people to have conversations with who might be feeling the same way.” So never had I intended for it to be an organizing tool or an organizing hub, or the beauty that it turned into. I wanted a space where people who were thinking what I’m thinking, could get into a space, connect and talk. Well I wasn't savvy about Facebook, as much as I am now. I didn't know the difference between private, closed, and public. And I apparently picked the wrong setting. And that meant everybody could just invite whoever they wanted, right? Now I know better. I’m, I am well versed in Facebook, that I actually teach a course on how to organize on Facebook now. So in hindsight, I learned a lot from that very, very small but giant mistake.

And what happened-- that was Friday night March 2 and West Virginia happened, you know just a little bit before that and, I didn't know, at the same time Noah Karvelis, who was one of the other leaders, had tweeted to Joe Thomas, who was the AEA president, our statewide Union President, they had a tweet conversations like four days, four days earlier about “Oh, are you seeing what's happening? Like can we get this started in Arizona?” And Joe Thomas said, like “Well why don't you start with red shirts?” Like I had no idea that conversation was going on.

So, four days later, I made this Facebook group and Noah Karvelis comes in, right? And he had already started planning the first Red for Ed day and so the page blew up. Friday night through Sunday there was over, like 1500 people on it, it just blew up like crazy, including people from the Goldwater institute, which right wing think tank, we don't want these people knowing what like…in hindsight, I didn't know about the settings. Now I know. I would have never done that.

So long story short, it was actually a good thing that this all happened because this is where that page blew up, and everyone was like “yes we're going on strike, yes strike, yes strike!,” And I was like no, you don't just go on strike like you can't just do that. It's like strategic, adequate organizing, continuous escalating. You have to build towards it. And so all these people were really loud, but the people that were the loudest were Noah Karvelis, Dylan Wegela and Derrick Harris who became some of the main leaders.

And I was not paying attention to Facebook at all that weekend, I'm out at the park with my kids, I wasn't a big Facebooker at the time, now I can't live without it. I had no idea what was going on, and this entire time when I got to it on Sunday, everyone's like “well where's the admin?” Like getting all kind of sassy, like “where's the admin, like do they know what they're doing?” And I was like, “Hello boys. Hi I’m the admin, what's going on?” So they were sending me private messages like “Let us take over the page, we've got a plan for this” And I was like “you do? I want in. Great, let's team up.” So we actually got on a call and we decided to remake the page and change the name from Teachers to Educators, so that it could be more inclusive of everybody, everybody in a school building.

And that's how it happened it's like I met this gal on the Arizona Bad's page, her and I chatted I made this page and that's where I met these other leaders, and then we made the new page that we still use to this day. That's how that happened.

00:45:20

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

So that name change was very deliberate from the beginning?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Totally.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

And so, then… Okay, so that group gets shut down and then you have the new page.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

You have the new page starting on March 4th.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Were users, like that weren't part of that, you know, group of leadership, angry about the shutdown? I mean I read some stuff about you know people were like “oh no, we were ready, like don't shut it down” And, then the new one came up, so yeah what was that dynamic? What were the conversations like?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

That's a good question, I haven't thought about that a while, I think...Because I had posted like “I’m shutting this down, like the goal is to not just go on strike, the goal is to start talking about you know actions and what you can do to get this going.” And then, once we made the other page, we put it on the old page and said “come on over here” we brought in, so we kind of tried to message and communicate our thinking. But of course, people were still mad. And I was in the background freaking out with my husband going, “we have to delete everybody on this page I’m going to get fired the Goldwater Institute is on here like I’m toast, my certificate is toast. Michael come help me.” And he's like, “I don't know how to delete people on Facebook,” I was like let's just do it, so I actually started removing people as fast as I could like and then we decided to change it, and then I stopped so…there was a transition, we can just say that.

00:46:44.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

And so then with the new one, was it like the kind of process where you made sure that people were working in in Arizona. What was that process like in terms of like…You know, public/private settings and all that?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

So, at the time, Facebook had different rules. And so, it was a closed Facebook, which doesn't exist anymore. They made us become private, I think, once you reach a certain number they automatically put you on a certain setting, and so it was closed, which meant people had to invite people to come.

And so, I remember that night, all I did all night long to like two o'clock in the morning was just approve, approve, approve, approve. And we approved like 23,000 people in like two days. Like it was insanity. And it was exciting but also terrifying right? I'm not going to hide the fear, because that's part of organizing, is this is a risk, it's a very big risk and my name is on that.

And we had a meeting right then Monday, March 4 we all gotten like a Google meet and introduced ourselves. There were nine people that said they wanted to volunteer. I can't exactly remember how every person stepped up to volunteer, I don't remember, but we ended up with nine people. And we introduce ourselves talked about like our organizing experience and then we just got to work. We're like, we need a media spokesperson, we need an actions coordinator, we need someone to do research, we're going to need someone who's good at writing, we need...we're gonna have to have someone to work with the Union, you know, etc. And so I became the action coordinator person, which was a pretty good role.

And on that night, that first meeting I said listen if we're actually going to do this we need to get at least one to two people in every school. We can't do this without the people power. Like I don't know how many site REPS the Union actually has, I know that Union density is very low, it's like one third here. And so that was my idea, and so on that first meeting we came up with the term liaison. It's like, “what do we call it? We need an intermediary person between us and them, we don't want to call it stewards or site REPS because that's what the Union does, like this is grassroots. What should we call them?” So we decided collectively on the term liaisons and built a Google form right away to have people sign up to be liaisons, to be that communicator between us and their school site. So that happened like right away.

00:49:19

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Yeah and so actually that was something that I was wondering about, I mean obviously there was a lot of organizing happening in the digital space, but what was it like in person?.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

So that was actually why we became so powerful is we didn't just rely on Facebook like Oklahoma did. We had a strategic… So it was a combination. Digital tools and then organizing like deep organizing strategies in person. And so we would have, you know, there were different events where we would use our main Facebook page for just-- It got really cluttered so we decided, and people were like mad that they couldn't post, because it was on admins only, and we decided to have a linked Facebook page for discussion, we call it the EU Discussion Hub, which is very powerful. People were mad about it at first, but we still have 14,000 people in-- still very used, like every day today. Think of COVID, everything COVID was going… you know everything.

So we got strategic. We branched off for the Discussion Hub, we branched off for liaison, liaison Facebook page, where we do live videos giving directions, giveing instructions, put links in. And then we asked the liaison through--- we built slide decks for them with instructions: like this week you're going to do X, Y Z follows directions, setup. We taught them how to map their workplaces and other organizing strategies and how to collect you know email addresses set up a texting system so that whenever we communicate it out, they could flip it. So we built an infrastructure network so that we could host 10 minute meetings. That was the liaison responsibility, and this is a brilliant strategy where we would build out agendas for them with a tool to give us feedback, like a Google form or some kind of survey, or take a picture and post it here, we need to track and see how many schools, we have doing X, Y and Z.

So the liaisons would turn and have these 10 minute meetings, “like meet me out by the flag pole 10 minute meeting, here's what's going on in the movement, what do you guys think, give us feedback go” And that was brilliant. So that we can get feedback loops and feedback loops and do them on Fridays or whenever liaison-- it like basically once a week. And then we had Red for Ed Wednesday's right? Go and take a picture in person. Gives you more opportunities. Who's wearing a red shirt, who's not wearing a red shirt? Identify who's with you, who's not, who might be opposition, etc. We didn't call it “mapping our workplace”, you said “just see how many people are wearing shirts.” We didn't use like crazy Union organizing language. Because it was it was about the movement, about getting people involved, about being happy and joyful in our spaces and not this like Labor militantism, even though that's what it was. Right, we didn't yet… kind of had to sugar coat it a little bit, because if you say like we need you to participate in militant actions, people are gonna be like what?

So we built these structures and then we had events. Like our first protest down at this radio station, we got 400 people there and like a two-day notice. That was pretty awesome. And so we have little structured tests along the way, who's with us? Okay, who can we identify as leaders? And then over time we had different in person events. And that's how we built our eight week escalation plan is we had liaisons doing workplace site organizing. Then we would have some collective protests. We had a rally where we announced the demands in late March. Over 6000 people came to that, where they ratified the demands on their phones and held up their phone when they were done. Super solidarity awesome view. Amazing experience.

And then we had regional meetings with the Union-- actually helped us organize across the whole state. So all the liaisons from all the different areas could come to a hub, meet one of us. One of us would be there with the Union and then we'd say, ok this is what your marching orders are right, like here's what you gotta do. And so we had regional organizing.

Then we spent a month on community solidarity. The whole month of April. Because, as I mentioned, we brought all the ideas from Chicago. And we spent a month going out into the communities, canvassing businesses, putting up these iconic read for ED signs that's on my wall that are--This whole place was covered in red. So we called it “paint the state Red for Ed”, not paint the state red, paint the state Red for Ed.

And so we had Community events, we asked liaisons to make a Facebook group for your district. Organize events for your district. And so people had a place and all those district pages were linked to our main page. So if we had to get a message out, we could click click click click click, I can send it up to 65 districts like that. So we had Community events where we asked people like put on your red shirts get out of the Community, here's some palm cards, informational picketing, pass out information. But then be visible and go get these markers that you can paint on your car windows, you can like chalk markers. And that was brilliant. That was one of our most creative things. And that's just me going to ace hardware wrighting Red for Ed on my car going, I think this is a good idea.

Because I kept thinking of Chicago and seeing like when I drove down the highway or drove down Lakeshore drive I could see in cars people had their Chicago teachers Union stuff. And I was like we gotta do this, we need to be more visible.

And so, week after week people had events at parking lots and parks and the minute people see red shirts they're going, what are you guys doing? oh come! And you know, it opens the door for a conversation. We paint our cars together then we all leave and march, or you know drive around and by the time that was done this entire place you could not drive anywhere without seeing like funding facts. And, of course, teachers are super creative and they're making pie charts and and bar graphs of funding over the years and, like kindergarten teachers are drawing cute little kids everywhere, and it was, it was beautiful and amazing and the most… like I’d be beeping on the highway like yo! you know? Just like the solidarity was tangible, it was like you could feel it, you know?

And then we built in walk-ins. We did three weeks of walk-ins to get back to the Community to make sure the parents knew what was going on. Most parents have no idea that Arizona's last in education funding until you tell them, they have no idea. You know, right now I guarantee they don't know that there's a massive teacher shortage, unless we tell them. And that's what organizing is, is bringing awareness right?

So we did that for three weeks and people were getting a little tired at that time. Like okay, we've done all your cute…your cute things, we've done the things, can we go on strike now? Like seriously, like we've done everything you've asked, are we going to strike? And people were getting frustrated. And we said okay, yes, if you want to go on strike, here we're going to set some goals, so we set goals we said if we can get 1000 schools walking in, that means we can get 1000 schools walking out.

So we had three weeks of walk ins and by the third week we were over 1200 schools and over 110,000 people that attended our walk ins. Because we had attendance links for every person that came. And it was incredible we went oh OK, we, I guess, we met the goal. I guess, we have to take a strike vote now, and we did. And that's the story on that.

00:56:43.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

 So in some of these events, if you could like give us some images of them. What was it like during the walk ins? Would you like wait outside and talk to the parents? Or, I guess, maybe like what was your first one like what do you remember from that?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

So I worked on, we had like a primary campus and I worked in the middle school and so we're-- had a joint campus and it was great, because we all met. The primary came out and lined up on the street, because we had to be off campus on public property. And I brought a table, and I was a little nervous, because my principal and assistant principal like, I’m not sure if they were understanding this was going to lead to a strike, I mean I knew. But I the general-- you know, I was a little like-- because they would come out and watch and I was just kinda like, huh, what are you thinking about this? But Oh well, I’m going to keep going.

And I actually-- I video-- I did a live video because we were showing people, we modeled every organizing strategy. Like, hey you're not sure how to do this, I'll do it first. I taught that. Like we were all teachers, we all know how to model strategies, that's what we do for a living, so we modeled it. And I said hey I’m out at my school, all these people are here, I’m passing out stickers, I got informational palm cards, like, I got a little table. And here's my QR code, where people are going to sign , you know the clock attendance. And I had some folks manning that table. And so the first week was exciting, we just went out with our signs. I handed out those iconic Red for Ed signs to everybody. People were sharing stickers and excited about like talking. There weren't a ton of parents that time, but by week two we had signs that said, like join us will be here next Wednesday-- or whatever day it was, I think it was Wednesday. Or Friday. I don't know, either way we invited them and the next time we had veterans in the neighborhood coming. “Veterans for teachers.” And parents were coming and our kids started wearing red shirts and joining us. And it was just, you know, organically became a Community event, which is exactly the intention.

Because we have a lot of parents that you know, have to drop their kids off go right to work, so it had to be before school, but it was great because week after week it did grow. And it was just great because then I be I--I felt like a true organizer like I’m going to help you do this, let me show you how to do this. Like you can do this, I can do it, you can do it, look at us doing it. Like let's all do this, right? Like empowerment. Go. Here's all the tools. We had a walk in instructions list, we had things you could print and once people got it, they were making their own cute flyers inviting parents. There was one district out in Chandler, I’m not sure if you had seen these pictures: they walked into a district day, all in red in an auditorium. And there were 2000 of them in this massive auditorium, all in red, walking in hand in hand. Incredible, powerful. You can't mess with that. That's power. You know, they saw the unity, so it was great and, over time, the more Community came and people just got creative and started inviting everybody with cute flyers, it was just great.

01:00:04.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Yeah, I really like that point you made about teachers being able to model, because that's what you do. And so it's yeah, it's such a good organizing skill to have.

I wanted to ask also about how the collaboration happened between you all, and the Union. Because, so they have this Day at the Capitol right? Traditionally every year. And then that year they ended up inviting nonmembers. So how did that decision, how was that made? Was that really like where the collaboration started, or was it before that?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

 So, as I mentioned, I didn't know that Noah Karvelis was actually talking to the Union. Right? Excuse me. And so I think he kind of had this relationship with the Union. And at that time I wasn't even a union member, to be frank, because my first Union meeting, they tried to tell me that to join the Union I can get good car insurance. And I really-- my soul was crushed. I tried to be like super nice about it, but really my soul was crushed, I was like Oh, my goodness, this is not good. So I didn't even join the Union until I made that Facebook page, and I made it because I thought I might need lawyer, quite frankly. In all honesty, that's that's the truth… and uh, so I didn't have a relationship with the Union, right? I'm brand new I’m, not even a Member, I don't even know who Joe Thomas is, quite frankly.

And so I think the way it happened, and I could be totally wrong because I’m not--I was not charged with the task of working with the Union, that was Kelly Fisher, who is a long 21 year member of the Union on the board of directors. That was kind of her role was to be the liaison between our two groups. And so I just remember in our third week of organizing, if I have my timeline right. We were working on grassroots liaison, right? I wasn't even thinking about the Union at that point. I just knew we needed people in spaces and that we needed to track it and identify and map the whole state. I just knew that. And then we got invited to a meeting at AEA and I was like, yeah great let's go. And I think I was pretty dismissed at that point. But that's Okay, like I’m a new person, folks that were on our team who had been Union organizers and leaders had their ear a little bit, so I just kind of observed and was there, right? And our relationship grew over time. I don't know how the Capital Day thing happened. I think they knew and-- This again is my lens from my brain--We weren't going to stop. And I believe, when they saw that we weren't going to stop and that we had organizers with organizing experience, who had been on strike before, I think it made a difference. And I think Joe Thomas actually said something really great, he said I don't care, who throws the touchdown as long as we win. We work together. And they knew that the grassroots movement had to be out in front, it couldn't be a union movement, because it would fail, because of the stigma of the Union and the the-- I don't know how to, I’m trying to be nice about it--The view some folks had about the power of the Union and what they can do, right? People did not believe the—and this is just me get gathering perspective over the years now--Is people didn't think the Union could do anything, didn’t have any power. They just had been kind of pushed to the side and and not really building any real power.

So I think they knew that we needed to drive the bus, so to speak. And that they would support us. And that's actually what happened, is many of the ideas that came out for the escalation were mine. Right? From Chicago. I even brought out my *How to Jumpstart Your Union* book and I carried it with me and I was like if you really want to see how this goes, go to page 127, you want to know how to do a strike authorization vote… And I did, I carried it with me everywhere. Because I needed it to help me remember and connect the dots of the things I had forgotten.

And so, how we got there I don't know, but what I do know is that the power of the grassroots that we had built by that time was too important to ignore. And that's important that we built that. Because you can't ignore it, then. You either jump on the bandwagon and support or you get out of the way, those are your, those are your two choices in my mind.

And so I think I think the whole West Virginia, Oklahoma, and I think our position of being forth really was important more than anybody talks about. And I always try to bring that out when folks ask, like West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, the Union did not do great things, they actually did some not so great things to try to squash the movement. And I think, by the time it came to us, I think they may have learned a lesson or two about how to work with these grassroots groups popping up. Which is good and great, and we worked together. So I just think the power of what we had built opened that door. And they should have nonmember days all the time. You want to grow your Union? Bring them in. And unfortunately they've actually gone back to Member only days, which I struggle to understand.

01:05:30

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Another one of those specific agitation type--yeah tactics, I guess, that you all were using were those protests at the radio stations when governor Doug Ducey was there, right? Were you participating in those?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

 I did.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

 So what was that like? Yeah kind of, you know--

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

I felt like I was back in Chicago. I had prepared my chants, I had-- I pulled out old chants from back in the day and I was like yep this this will work, this will work. We made some new chants so I was kind of on the megaphone, like chant master, which is a great role for me, I love it.

And it felt-- It was really incredible because it wasn't like there was one person in charge. All of us were there together going, what are we want to do? Right? And people are like well, we gotta move, we got to start a picket line, we got to start walking, we got to start-- all right great who wants to start? Great go. It was like organic leaders popping up left and right, people getting on the megaphone making a chants that went with their posters.

So it wasn't this like top down. Like, you need to meet Rebecca there. No, it was like, we're all doing this, bring what you got. You got stuff, bring some stuff, you want to chant? Do some chants, You got a megaphone? Bring the megaphone. Like it was just so righteous and awesome and really made us go, Oh, we are doing something. People are showing up. People are empowered. People are angry. And it was just it was great Those are my favorite-- it's my favorite place to be.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Did you end up coming into a confrontation with him? Or…

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

No, we actually-- We sent him-- made him a basket of these sparkly glitter apples, to like bring to him with… I forget what else we put on there. I don't-- we had like an offering to give him, but we never even got to where we needed to be so, no. He hid from us. I know they asked him about what he thought about the 400 people outside protesting, but I can't remember what… he probably brushed us off. But no, we did not meet with him, no.

01:07:49.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

So, in the chapter that you wrote, the “Educators United Online”, you stated that the walk in was, you know, one of the key moments, because it really showed that you all were united and did make him kind of changed his tune on how he viewed your movement. But can you talk a little bit about the decision from the walk ins and then his statement that for the 20% raises and then how it moved into the walkout.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Yeah I'm trying to remember. I remember when we clocked over 110,000 people and we hit all of our goals and we like made a huge deal about it. He came and said we were a political circus. Right, was that that time? There was a lot of awful things said and I’m having-- I don't remember which thing was in which part. I wish I had like a brilliant timeline.

What was the question? Sorry.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

No, no, so you said that in the the…. chapter that you wrote. You said the Walk-Ins were really key because it showed the momentum of the movement and it also culminated in that decision that, for the 20% raises right? But then you all still decided to walk out. So, I guess what I’m asking is what happened between that and the walk out?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Yes! Ok, thank you. There are so many details, I had to like grab the book and be like, did I say that? Cause I don’t remember. So I remember the 20 by 2020 plan came out and it was very controversial BECAUSE when you dug deep… okay on surf …let's go surface. Surface level it looked like we were getting, right, one of our major demands. Our first demand was a 20% increase in salary wages for certified teachers and then a sub-- another demand was competitive wages for everybody else, right? The ESPs, Paraprofessionals, everybody who impacts a child's education, bus drivers, etc.

And so 20% was wild right? Like oh my gosh he didn't even negotiate right? It looked amazing, he won the narrative on that. And everyone's like Oh, you won. And then you dive deeper and you look at the strings that are attached to it. And the strings are that there's language called “teacher of record” and what teacher of record means is I’m a homeroom teacher and I take attendance for those kids. So if I I’m a sixth grade teacher, I'm a teacher of record. If I’m a music teacher, I might not be a mute-- you're not a teacher of record. You don't have a homeroom because you're the room kids go to during their specials time, to give the other teachers time to prepare their lessons.

So only teacher, the *definition* of teacher, which he has used before in legislation, was “teacher of record.” So let's say you in your buildings that means only people who teach kindergarten first, second, third, fourth, fifth right, like classrooms, not your specials classes, were the only people who could get that raise. So it was a division tactic, right. So to divide us-- so I never saw 20%, that wouldn't happen. And the reason is, 1) he divided us and we weren't going to do that, we preached solidarity for a long time and said we're going to share that with our brothers and sisters so that everybody gets a piece of the pie. So that meant no one's getting a 20% raise. 2) reason is the the salary average they took to determine that 20% which actually was what $434 million dollars annually for these raises--I think if I have the data correct in my mind was based on the average teacher salary of $48,000. Which where I worked, I was making way above that, because that district paid on average $10,000 more than at all the surrounding districts. So there's no way I’m getting even close to 20, I think I ended up with 5.7% I think.

So those were two tactics to really, behind the scenes, not give us 20%. In front of the scenes look like you were going to get it in three years. Yep.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

So then you all called the strike vote.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Because of the division tactics. And that is not what our demand said, correct. Thank you for getting me back to the story. And that was tricky. There were some allies that were like this is a good plan, and we were like, no it's not. Like are you serious? No it's not. We're not, this is a division tactic like, it's clear as day. And so there was a little bit of struggle getting that information and education out to folks but, once we did, one more tactic that was brilliant, and this was actually spearheaded by one legislator in a district, who was on the Governing Board in Prendergast, Martin Quezada. Who built a Red for Ed resolution that could be a model for all other districts, so we support the Red for Ed movement.

So one by one, so people were-- so like imagine the tension at this time, right? We met the goal, right? Very exciting. All these people community, we got Red for Ed murals going up, we got kiosks on highway saying Red for Ed, we're like winning public support right? Everyone's sympathizing, we're stealing every media headline, you know and we're winning. And—I lost just my train of thought because I got so excited um…where… Oh, the resolution. So the one thing holding back people, and this is natural, is the fear, right, the fear of like well what if my district doesn't support this? And can we really take a strike vote? And so, how do you remove that fear and empower people than to go and put their name on that Ballot? Governing Board resolution.

So what happened--and this was brilliant and the best idea ever. Progressive districts in the city of Phoenix passed these resolutions, including mine. In mine, I had the support of my superintendent who was in my classroom telling me to go for it. Coming in, his name is Mark Islas, he was my whole supporter and was actually his dad was a copper miner and he had watched his dad give people who wanted to cross the picket line $32 checks, so that they wouldn’t be a scab. I couldn't have ended up in a better place. So we're Union-- Union siblings he and I and I. And he passed the resolution and I had the freedom to just keep going, I had no fear right, that was a good feeling. Like it didn't even matter if my principal was mad at me, didn't matter because he supported me. And the whole district supported. So the fear came away. And what we did as organizers is we started using social media graphics and saying:

here's the districts that have passed resolutions and publicly posting them, so people go, yes, my district is on there I’m free, I’m good, I’m empowered, I can do this, right? Took away the fear. I’m not to lose my license, not gonna lose my certificate, I’m not going to lose anything. Great I can do this.

And then there were districts, who were in very conservative areas who went, Why is my district, not on there? Now I’m righteously mad that you're not supporting this movement, and now I can put pressure on. If I’m you know willing to do such things. So it really proved a good tactic on multiple levels: “yes I’m supported,” “well why isn't my district on there?” Pressure the district, pressure the district, pressure the district. And so we kept updating those graphics and eventually we took the strike authorization vote. Which, without our infrastructure would have never happened because we relied on… the Union did a real heavy lifting with their Union REPS and then our liaisons where the people who got the ballots into the places, held voting, put them in boxes, brought them to the headquarters etc. So there's a lot of manpower behind that.

Did I answer the question?

01:16:24.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Yes, yes, definitely that was great. And then so yeah, can you describe the first day when you walk down?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Yeah…. I. I had no idea what to expect. I wasn't part of the operations of planning the March, which was great. Because the Union handled that and actually the National Union sent field organizers to help do all of that, and that was incredible INCREDIBLE.

My job kind of became-- I became like the hype man. I became like the “alright.

This is what we're going to do next!” Like you'll see me out there on videos like over and over and over again, like “okay here's your directions, here's what you're going to do.” So, it was great that I didn't have to be in that space. But I had no idea what to expect. I didn't know that the union's all chatted with each other and set up water stations everywhere and different unions donated different things. I didn't know that we had a Metallica style stage that costs $80,000 waiting for us. I had no idea. I knew there would be a stage and knew there'd be water stations, but I didn't understand the power behind what I was about to walk into. I didn't know I wasn't on that planning Committee, you know? I was on-- I built the cants, I built the speech and I was supposed to be on the MIC the whole time as the chant person. Because that's kind of what I morphed into is like this hype person.

So I did my job, and when I got I got down to the meeting spot, downtown, and there were so many people there, by the time I got there that I was just like whoo okay starting to sink in then we slowly…I’m sorry.

**1:18:07-01:18:25 (can this be edited out?)**

**I’m sorry my son just walked in naked. When they come home from school they take their clothes off. I’ll blur it cuz he's gonna come hold on oops. Oh sorry.**

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Alright, go ahead.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

So I get down there, and there's just red everywhere. I mean everywhere I looked I could not believe it. And I'm walking around and everyone's like hey there's Rebecca we've been watching you for weeks, can we meet you, can we take a picture? And I'm like, why? Who like what what do I do? Like it was like this weird celebrity moment and I was like Okay, you know just totally weirded out by all of it. But I realized, a lot of these people have come from really far away and weren't in the city at all the other events, and this was the first time they'd actually been able to travel, it was very important.

And so we line up and we get the banner out to hold and I remember like you know getting in position and it was so hot, it was 100 and like 10 degrees outside and I had packed a backpack full of ice like pop packs ice packs, snacks, nuts, bananas, sunscreen, sunglasses etc. And I was just like so prepared for the day you know what I mean, and I just was like holding the little sign, and it was kind of quiet and I was like, let’s get, that's it, like I’m getting—give me the megaphone. Like that's it so we started pumping people up, and it was getting crazy and it was so hot and everyone's sharing water and passing it back and we started walking and, as we were marching I kept looking behind me, and I could never see the end of the line. I had no idea that it was blocks upon blocks upon blocks until I got up on the stage and the whole thing was covered in red folks everywhere. Like the whole area for like a block or two or three like it was just crazy.

So I don't know, the feeling was very similar to Chicago with that feeling of power, unity, collectivism, solidarity. Like I just couldn't believe my eyes that we did this, like I just I couldn't believe it. I just I the moment was so amazing and then we marched and marched and marched, it took a really long time to get there, and then it was so hot, and then we got there and I saw the Metallica stage and I was like, what is happening? Like wow oh my gosh. And then all these tents up, and unions passing out stuff. It was just incredible and then I get up on the stage, and I'm on the microphone and I'm just…I'm just my heart and my soul is just pouring into this and I made all these chants and I finally get to use them and the place was like rocking you know jumping up and down.

We had the Red for Ed band, I'm sure you saw that. They played ahead of time, they were amazing. All the music teachers got up on stage and, Oh, my God they're playing you know Seven Nation Army and it was the most incredible day of my life. But we actually had to cut it short, we had great speakers, students speakers, parents speakers, advocate speakers, lots of really good chants. But it was so hot, we had to actually cut the day short, it was too hot we there were two people that had heatstroke already so.

yeah it got a little hairy, so it was… and then we had to provide… you know it wasn't like-- hey we're not done. like there's people packing the capital, people packing the inside legislature, right? the actual buildings. Another Union the smart Union, the engineers, train engineers, bought pizza for everybody. And those people stayed every-- all day long, all night long, all day long, all night long, occupying the legislature, and it was incredible. And we have to give people tasks, like homework. Alright we're not done, we need you to get back out in your Community tell them what's happening, hold a walk in, you know, go back to your communities and let the parents know what's going on, like we need to not hide from them, we have to talk to them and be in communication, because we need their continued support.

So, day after day, day after day, and we would watch the legislature, you know voting-- voting down things that we want… and and and posting videos about what's happening. So it's just about keeping people updated and updated and what they had to do next, and just this continual cycle.

01:22:53

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

To them, what happened on the last day. So I know there was that announcement that everybody should stay and camp out for the night right?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Yes.

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Yeah so what what kind of was the decision making process behind that and then how did it ultimately result?

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

So the day before that… So, not the final day… day four… was when we saw them vote down a bunch of Legislation that we needed. And then we came up with an idea, together, we had meetings every night, right? It wasn't like we just went home. We're just strategizing, talking, lots of minds in the room, listening to allies in the legislature, coming back, using that knowledge to build the next thing, it was very intense. And we had proposed amendments, our allies proposed amendments which bought us an extra day, which is very important. I can't remember… an amendment on class size, getting it to like 23 to 1 is the ratio, that was the one that sticks in my head. And I can't remember the other amendments, but we asked them to propose amendments so that people could literally watch in real time their legislators vote down the things they wanted for their classroom. And that was important for helping people with political education and understanding, like these are the people you may have voted for, look at them now. And then we can hold that and use it in the future right?

 So it was very important for people that actually see them voting down what their students needed. And that was that-- people were very angry. But it turned out-- so that bought us like one more day, and people were like really raging at that point. Like, what was the chant? No Return? No one wanted to go back until the budget was signed. Well, we had intel that they were going to sign it, and that was it. There was like, “we've pushed him as far as we could go” was the thinking. Some of us agreed with it, some of us did not. That basically the legislature was going to sign it, and be done and literally walk away, and not even be physically present anymore. So the options were really about do we stay and try this? We're already losing parents support, it's been you know, five days already. We're losing Community support because of the strain on parents. However, the teachers want to stay out, right? Like they want to go until they, they want to win. And they want to win big.

So there was this real tension, it was very tentious and very uncomfortable and very hard. And we didn't communicate enough, I don't think about what was going on. Because it was really hard, like you can't really do all that publicly, but you have to let people know. Sometimes we-- we relied on the liaison network. And we gave live updates whenever we could about okay, this is what's happening legislature, what do you guys want to do? Talk to your liaison, liaison get--What do people want to do? Send that information in. Ff you're listening on Facebook put it in the comments. Like we tried to find all these different ways to get feedback. We deployed like 12 of us down to the masses with megaphones and said, “Come meet me in the corner and tell me what you're thinking” Like super grassroots and got people into corners and said, “this is what's happening, do you want Ducey to just walk away, or do we want to be the ones claiming victory. Do you want it to be him or do you want it to be us,” because really that's what it was going to come down to is they're going to walk away. And either we're going to be sitting here standing looking like morons with nobody in the buildings to do any more legislating right, so your options are come out on top as victors or try to keep pushing, even though we know they're going to leave and they're not going to come back.

So it was really-- I hated this moment, it was really… I did not want to go back. I didn't think it was the time. Dylan was the one that was like really like we are, we should not be doing this, this is wrong. But the powers that be collectively decided it was time to go back and so when that decision came, I said I don't think that message should come from the Union, I think that needs to come from the grassroots side of things. That we need to go back and be with our classrooms. And that's how I ended up being the person who actually said that out loud in the press conference which I sort of regret now in time. But I just I didn't want it to come from the Union, like a top down thing I wanted it to come from like the person who had been doing this work for like six hours at night, this entire time till two o'clock in the morning, who was in the trenches… like I wanted it to come from us, not like from the top down sort of business model Union kind of thing. And so that's that's kind of what happened and then people were very upset.

They were very upset they were still chanting and still marching when we held that press conference and I gave that message, and it was heartbreaking and I wanted to go cry in the corner, for a long time. Because I think we should have stayed out, and figured out something else. And talk to people and had them talk about it, like Chicago gave us a day right. To look at a contract, but that was a physical tangible contract, we had to read over it, we didn't have that. It was, we need to hear from the masses in whatever way we can. There wasn't like a strike vote to go back in, right, like a go back in vote, and that was a mistake.

01:28:44

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

And so, then what happened when you got back to the classroom what was the environment like at the school.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

Um I mean it was the end of the year and the kids were mainly just like “we saw you on TV.”

You know? And So my students were like super excited. I know they they missed school, you know they missed that normalcy for those days, and they were good like glad to be back --was very weird on campus, though, like with administrators.

But I don't know, it was it was good to be back with the kids and I felt happy and proud to share that experience with my kids because I taught seventh grade, like there they watch everything they knew what I was doing they saw me out there, they saw me on TV quite often.

It was--I enjoyed sharing that moment with them and showing them that I do care in that way, and that I'll stand up for the things I believe in and I advocate and that you know, like the whole--Like I just felt like a role model at that point because I did have support from my Community, you know, it wasn't like I didn't. If I didn't, that would be a different story. But going back was very weird and then what really was great, though, is the districts found ways to pay us. So we had to make those days up, so it wasn't like we lost pay, there were some certified folks who lost paid. And we did try to build a strike fund, but it became way too overwhelming and we just couldn't get it done in time, in hindsight, I wish, we would have figured that out a lot better. But in all, nobody was fired, nobody certificate got taken away was revoked, no discipline whatsoever across the entire state and we don't even have a legal right to strike, which I think is very important.

And one other thing I just want to put this anecdote in because I think it's powerful and people should know it, is when we took the strike authorization vote, 57,000 teachers took that vote. But there are only about 20,000 Unionized members, so where did those other 37,000 come from? That's the power of what we did, and the infrastructure that said, it doesn't matter if your union or not Union your vote counts. And I don't know of any time in history that's happened in any other place. If there are other places, I would love to learn about it, but I think that's a powerful thing. Because you just hear about unions taking strike authorization votes, right, but not here, that was different, we built our own structures outside of the Union and had a strike authorization vote with no legal pathway. And I think that story needs to be told a lot more.

But anyway, the districts found ways for people to make up those days, so I had to go in over the summer to make up those days to get paid, and they tracked it and they found ways, etc.

And you know, everybody worked during the strike to get kids food and nutrition, all those things, the Community stepped up, so it was it was good to be back, but also kind of weird.

01:31:52

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

yeah so I just I’ll just ask one more question because I definitely want to be cognizant of your time here, and I know that this is something that we could you know, have an entire other conversation about but--In talking about the infrastructure that you created in the Arizona Educators United group, you do continue to use that, and how is it you know, been effective, especially with what's happened with covid?

01:32:20.

Rebecca Garelli she/her:

It's a good question, so we mainly rely we-- our liaison structure is not what it used to be, excuse me, but our digital infrastructure is. And it has proven these district pages that we created, as I mentioned, became organizing hubs during Covid right? Like I'm in my kids districts page, organizing parents in that page, to sign petitions, to come to ventilation webinars, to

speak up at governing board meetings, putting out messaging, giving out flyers and palm cards and so it has like… I’m so grateful that our infrastructure is still here, and so are many other people, because they know they have a place to talk about, you know, like when people were organizing sickouts, they had a place to talk. And it's just the power of digital organizing and just having digital spaces is super important. But also gotta watch it, right? Now, everybody knows about all that we're doing, and it's public, and you know, so there's downsides and people have caught on to some of the ways we organized and have tried to infiltrate our spaces and you know, security is an issue. So, there are some good things about it, thank goodness we have this infrastructure so that during covid we had places and ways to connect to people and our lists are really big and we can get information out. But we haven't relied on the liaison network for Covid because, as you know, there's a massive teacher shortage and a lot of those folks who are liaisons aren't even teaching anymore, there's a lot of turnover. So we'd have to basically start from scratch, which we did back in 2019, so we have like a slightly workable list, but it's all been proven useful.

01:34:06

Marcella Loprinzi Hardin (She/Her/Hers):

Well, thank you so much for your time and for sharing your story, it was really just a pleasure to talk with you.