

The RISD Podcast Transcript

Episode 1

With us.

Listen, it's the

Welcome to the first ever episode of The RISD Podcast. Dr. Goodson, welcome.

Hi. Thank you for welcoming me to the first ever episode.

This is so exciting. My name is Tabitha Branum and I'm the superintendent in Richardson ISD co-hosting The RISD podcast. With me is the one, the only Dr. HR, also known as Chris Goodson.

Yes. Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources. And I'm so happy to be co-hosting with you cuz this is really cool. Like, we have never done anything like this before.

Dr. Goodson in this first episode of the RISD podcast, we have a great lineup.

I Can't wait.

It's going to be amazing. We are going to be focusing on Hispanic Heritage Month, connecting with some individuals involved with our mariachi program at Berkner High School.

Excellent.

And then we have an opportunity to learn from two of our principals of the year. As an October we celebrate principal appreciation month.

Excellent.

So this is just like the first episode where we have a chance to begin to sprinkle in with our community how special this district is and why we are the very best district in the state of Texas.

Today's gonna be awesome. I can't wait for people, people to, is get to meet our guests today.

It's gonna be a great, great day. This is so cool. And can I tell you where this started? Where this idea came From?

Why are we doing this?

Yeah. This idea came from, because as you know, in the spring when I was asked to serve as

the interim superintendent mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I launched our series called Keeping Tabs. And it was kind of a video message to me. Yes.

I watched every single one of Them.

Well, thank you. I hope I may have a quiz for you later to make sure you really watch to understand. Um, but in our keeping tabs, there was so many things that I wanted to celebrate and showcase. Mm. That they were getting really, really long.

Were you making movies at that point?

Point? I was like making movies. Like they were little mini movies that could have been, I'm sure quality enough to be on Netflix. But our strategy and engagement team said, these are probably too long and you're gonna start losing some viewerships. And I said, I get that, but how do I still make sure everyone knows so Much to talk about There have so much to talk about. Dr. Benson. Right? Yes. We Have 37,311 students. We have 2,700 teachers. We have almost 6,000 employees.

6,000.

There's a lot to talk about in Richardson Issd. And I wanted to showcase and celebrate all of it. So what was the idea? The idea was let's have have an RISD podcast. I think it's awesome And here we are today. First one, First one, first one. So let's first start off talking a little bit about who we are because while you and I know each other very well, Yes, we do believe it or not, even though I think you're probably one of the most, you know, positive, most, you know.

Oh, You're very kind.

Yeah. Um, in the community. And I think everyone knows you, but there may be a few people who are new and may not know you. So tell us a little bit about you.

Well, thank you. I am Chris Goodson. This is my 30th year in Richardson ISD

Well, you are an elder.

I am feeling like an elder. Thank you for that. But, um, I'm feeling seasoned.

That's a good i's Use that word it's good word. Seasoned. Yes.

But I started my entire career here in Richardson ISD. I actually did my student teaching at Hamilton Park PaceSetter Magnet Go Bobcats. And I taught there for a few years. And then I was the assistant principal at RISD Academy. And then after that I was principal of Spring Valley Elementary. I was principal of Jess Har Elementary, and then I became one of the three elementary executive directors. So I got to work with a cluster of schools. It was awesome. One

of my favorite jobs. I was fortunate to be selected as the assistant superintendent of elementary for three years. And then for the last, oh, let's see, six or seven years, I have been the assistant superintendent of human resources. And so I'm kind of all in on the RISD thing. Uh, we live in the district. My lovely wife Kelly and I live in the district. We have three amazing kids. James graduated from Richardson High School two years ago. I have a senior this year, believe it or not.

So I can't believe that David is a senior.

And then my daughter, Winnie is a sophomore. And so everything about our experience, um, my experience with this district has just been phenomenal. And, um, I think it's really great to have an opportunity like this to connect with a bigger audience Absolutely. To keep people connected with how many wonderful things are happening all the way around.

I love that. And, uh, you were one of the reasons when I first joined the RSD team, why I stayed. Um, Oh, I know. You may not know that and I hate to give you that much credit, but, but I Get a raise Or something for that. Yeah, you might get a raise. Okay. Um, I was, uh, I I'm in 25. You're 25 of my education.

I Was gonna say, I thought you were trying to say you were 25 years old and I was gonna Have to I have Look, 25. We're gonna Have to edit this podcast.

<laugh>. We might have to. Yes. I have 25 years of experience and I started out in junior high as a junior high history teacher. Bless you. Oh, I loved it. I loved our junior high students. They're the best because they, you can still have these amazing mature conversations with them mm-hmm. <affirmative> about content, but they still wanna hug you and they still need your affirmation. And it's just they're the best age. Wow. They're the best age. Um, and then I had some experiences in central office, and then I was fortunate enough to be a principal, a high school principal. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> loved every minute of it. Wow. Um, I loved, I loved the experience of Friday night football games. I loved the experiences of graduation day, night lights, Friday nightlight is just the best. It's the best. And then, um, nine years ago I joined Richardson ISD as the assistant superintendent of secondary. And that's where we really, that's where we met. Had the opportunity to connect. That's, And I think your story just then of spending your journey and having your roots here in RISD, we were so like-minded in terms of our belief and our commitment around education. I'm like, if he's been here that long, this is a place that I think I can settle my roots into. After serving as the assistant superintendent for secondary, I was blessed enough to move into the deputy superintendent role. Then in December I became the interim superintendent. And then after a nine longest month interview, interview, ever. Longest interview process ever. <laugh>. But it was all worth it. Yes. Um, I was named about six weeks ago, um, the six weeks, It's been six weeks. It's been six weeks. I am this the, now the Superintendent Richards and I Yes, you are the 20th. It's just hard to believe it's, I'm the 20th superintendent. Like you, I have lots of kids. You do have kids. I do have lot. You have more kids than I do. I have, my oldest son is a PE teacher at White Rock Elementary. Awesome. Um, and do you know what it's like when you get to hear from your son, like all the

things that are going well, and also when he tells you from a teacher's perspective, Mom, here's how you could get better. <laugh>. Okay. Yes. And he loves telling me that. Thank you. Valued employees. <laugh>. Thank you. Valued employee. Yes. Your paycheck, your first paycheck on October 20th. Then I have a, my second son graduated in December from Texas A and M University. All right. And he is there working on his master's program in, um, healthcare administration. He hopes someday to be the next Ken Hutchenrider. That is impressive. I've told Mr. Hutchenrider he needs to watch out because Cade is coming for his job. Wow. Um, and then Caris is a junior at Pierce. I still can't believe that. I have one more first day of school. Unbelievable with her. And then, um, our little man Yeah. Is in second grade at Spring Creek Elementary. And so it's amazing. And then, um, I've shared with the community, my parents live with us and Right. So even my dad, um, they all call him Mr. Bob at Greenwood Hills <laugh>. He is our campus technology assistant. And he loves it. That's amazing. Husband. I don't get to talk about my husband very much. That's a nice guy. Chad's a great guy. Should talk about him. He's also an educator. Okay. He, um, works as the Chief Technology officer at Region 10. So he, he was an assistant superintendent in Arlington and he was in leadership in Cobell with me. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, when we were young in our careers. And so just having him as an educator, and he understands our world and Right. He knows when I wanna talk about it. And he knows when <laugh>, we can't talk about it. Don't wanna talk about it at all. Don't wanna talk about it. So it's great. So thank you for agreeing to co-host with me and I am so sorry. Share this experience again.

This is gonna be fun.

It's gonna be fun. It's been some, we, we've had, you know, a couple of years where there have been some real challenges mm-hmm. <affirmative>, but what I never wanna lose sight on is all of the great things that are happening across the district. And this is just one more platform to share that.

Love it.

Goodson, did you hear that jingle that launched the RISD podcast?

I think I, I, I wanted to sing it like right along with him. That was so cool.

I love that jingle. And it, I think it needs to be like my walk-in song every morning. You have a Song, I have a theme song now. Yes, we have a theme song, but I wanna give a big shout out to Kelly Moss, assistant choir director at Lake Highlands High School, who composed that. She orchestrated that and she performed that jingle for us.

She is super talented.

We love Kelly Moss and thank you, Thank you for making that possible. We also have a lot of other celebrations happening across the district. Did you know that we have nine National Merit semi-finalists this year. 9, 9 3 from Burtner, three from R Hs, and three from JJ Pierce.

That is amazing. Those are some really smart students.

They are some amazing scholars. And we are so proud of them. This is the first part of the process. Okay. They now have a second application process and we will find out if they are all finalists. Um, all Fingers Crossed finger, all nine of them. I believe all nine of them will be named finalists in the spring. So just big shout out to all of those nine amazing students. Dr. Goodson, the other day we had an opportunity to be at MST Elementary for a special recognition. Can you tell everyone about it?

MST was recognized as a national Apple Distinguished School That is so incredible.

And there are less than 400 mm-hmm. <affirmative> campuses across the entire United States, The entire nation, Less than 30 in the state of Texas that receives this recognition.

And MST is one of Them.

Dr. Bolack, her leadership, um, her entire, um, team there at school. Every teacher, um, that her community, her parents, um, this is kind of a shared goal that they had for MST as well. And so we lift them up and celebrate them.

Am I right? It's not just having one or two teachers who do a really good job with technology, right?

No. This, this application process is so rigorous. It is. They really evaluate every single teacher. Are they really designing learning experiences using technology that leads to outcomes for students mm-hmm. <affirmative>, not just, are we doing fun entertainment things with technology, but are we really learning as a result of the technology? Wow. MST is now a showcase school. Unbelievable. It's amazing. Congratulations. Um, also as a district, I think one of the things that makes us so special is that why we celebrate and we lift up our athletic, uh, department. Right. We also really invest and commit to great outcomes in our fine arts department. Um, and Jeff Bradford mm-hmm. <affirmative>, he leads our fine arts department. Myron StanNet leads our visual arts department. Yes. And did you know that we were recently named less than 4% of all districts as a district of distinction for the visual arts?

Less than 4% of all districts in Texas.

Do you know how many, Do you know how many districts we have in the state of Texas?

Over Over 10 for sure. Over a thousand. I bet.

Yeah. Almost 1200 school districts. And we are one of 4% that received way to the visual arts district. Myron and his team. Team, Yes. Myron. And, and every one of our fine arts teachers, we just, we celebrate them and thank them for their incredible, um, hard work. Also, want to give

a shout out to Lauren Bellone, who is an innovative teacher at RHS, who was recently named as a tech titan of the future.

I'm so glad I have a student at Richardson High School. Right. They, maybe they'll have her in a class one day.

<laugh>. Absolutely. I think all of our students would wanna have Ms. Balone as a teacher, a tech titan of the future. And, and those are teachers who are recognized for their ability to make difficult subjects like math and science mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative> be very meaningful. And where students never have to, you know, did you ever wonder in high school, like, why am I having to learn this every Day? Well, Miss Balone, students don't wonder that because she really helps them answer that question. Here is why we're learning this. And so we lift up Miss Balone and congratulations. We thank the Titans for recognizing our teachers as well.

Tab some friends want to connect with you. So listen in. It's the RISD Dr. Goodson. I am excited to welcome our very first guest to The RISD Podcast. As you know, October is Hispanic Heritage Month. It is. And I am so proud of Berkner High School, as they are our first high school that last year launched a mariachi program. They did, they launched a mariachi program. And in just less than a year, really less than a year, this program has gone from just recruiting students to be a part of it, to now having a robust group of students who are performing across the district. They're being invited to events to perform. They are that good? They're that good. Okay. They're that good. Like they will, when you hear them, they will blow you away. And so, in honor of, uh, National Hispanic Heritage Month, we invited two amazing ram uh, family members to the podcast to share their experience. We have our mariachi director, Lydia Villareal with us, and then we also have one of our student performers. Leo Camacho, welcome to the RSD podcast. Yes.

Hello. Thanks for having us. We're so glad you're here. This is awesome.

First, why don't you all start off a little bit, Leo, why don't we start with you. Tell us a little bit about you, who you are, what grade you're in, and why you love mariachi.

I go to Berkner. I'm in 11th grade. I come from a Mexican heritage. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So I love all mariachi stuff like that. Like yeah. That Los Martos, all that. That's, that's me. You know, I love doing stuff like that. So when I heard that Berk was gonna do, um, mariachi band, I was like, I gotta do it. I love instruments and all that, like music and stuff. I was like, if it's coming to Berkner, I mean, might as well.

So it, you had this opportunity to bring your culture and your experiences and match it with a passion of yours, which is music. Yeah. That's a pretty incredible thing. Miss Villareal, tell us a little bit for the community who you are, um, why you're involved in Mechi, and maybe if you could provide for the audience, like what is Mariachi? If, if I'm not familiar with that style of music, tell us a little bit about how it differentiates itself, maybe from another genre of music.

Yeah. So Mariachi is not just a musician or an instrumentalist. They're instrumentalists, vocalists and performers. Like, it's all the, all of that all in one, right? You have to, you're singing while you're playing your instrument. Sometimes if you're doing a solo, you won't be playing your instrument. Um, but there's <laugh> you're usually playing and singing, and then you are incorporating the audience into your performance. Right? You want it all to be together. It's not just we're gonna stand here and perform for you. It's, it's a, we are all doing this together. You are a part of our experience. And so I think that really separates mariachi from other performances. So there are different instruments, right? There's the gi that on, which is the big base one has the the rounded belly. Yes. And there is a, a smaller one called the Vila, which looks like the gi that on, but it's, uh, a little baby version of it. It's a small version of it, Yes. <laugh>. And then there's the guitars, trumpet, flute, violin. We, we have flutes and Rs, uh, just to be more inclusive.

I Love that.

And so, a little bit about me. I did, I grew up in our ISD so I went to Big Springs Apollo Berkner. So I'm, I'm back home. Home. That's awesome.

We have an RSD alum in the house. There's nothing better. Well, we are so glad you came back home.

I, I love it. You know, it's, uh, not gonna lie. It's not what I had in mind. Like, I had no idea <laugh>, that's where life was gonna lead me. Um, but it did, and I did it at ut. So I went to the University of Texas in Austin, and I did mariachi there. It was something Mariachi's just something I grew up with and one of my brothers actually did it when he went to college. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. I wanna do that <laugh>. That's just Fun.

Yeah. Yeah.

So I did. And I knew immediately, you know, that that was a passion of mine and something that I want to bring to others. It's such a joy.

Well, we can't thank you enough and celebrate you enough for being willing to kind of be a pioneer in Richardson isd. Absolutely. And bringing Mariachi, you know, as part of, of what we are and who we are in Richardson isd. So thank you for your leadership. Um, how many students are involved right now in our mariachi program?

There's 20 in the class, and then we have about five that couldn't fit it into their schedule for this year. Who will pretty regularly try to come to our after school events that we <laugh> hop in.

They'll like, do some stuff. They'll be like, Can I have Blake? Can I join in? And it's like, Oh, well I don't know the music. Yeah.

<laugh>. I just wanna be a part of it though.

I Just wanna be a part of it. Yeah. Even if I have to come after school, I wanna be a part of it. Something. Leo, tell us, what instrument do you play and, um, what is your favorite part of being a part of the mariachi band?

Oh, well, I play the guitar. Um, my favorite part is definitely like, kind of hanging out with people. Like, definitely at first it was really like, it was kind of awkward. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> because, well, first, me personally, I joined in late cuz I came in about two, what was it, two weeks after y'all started? Cause uh, I got quarantined, so I didn't really get to join in like, Oh, I'm so sorry. So it was, it was kind of crazy because I didn't know how to play guitar. I never knew how to play guitar going in.

Really.

Did you play any instrument before?

I played instruments? Yeah. I played sax.

Okay.

But never the Guitar, never, never guitar. So I missed out on all the learning process of the guitar. So like all the chords and how to hold the guitar, stuff like that. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So when I came in, it was really like, Okay, here's a guitar. These are the chords, here's the music. So you were starting from scratch. I, I, I kind of like wasn't, I wasn't self type because I had Ms. V to like, ask questions and stuff. Okay. But it was definitely like, it was a challenge once I really started getting like going, it was comfortable and it was easy. And especially like with like, all the people in there, we were all kind of like, in the same mindset. We would share the same experiences. It was really comfortable getting to know them and becoming friends with them.

I love that. Wow. I had an opportunity to recently hear you all play and perform. It was for our new teachers that we welcome to RISD. And the energy from your group was infectious. It really was? Like, everyone got up and they were, they were dancing and they were clapping and, um, it was just something like, it just brought you in.

Ah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Que con What is it about the genre of mariachi that you think is so inclusive and allows, even if maybe, I dunno the language, or maybe I haven't had prior experience listening to the genre of music, I'm still drawn to it. What, what do you think is it that makes it special?

That's nice to hear then <laugh>, if you felt that. Um, because that, that is something that, that's a big part of it, right? If they're just standing there completely still mm-hmm. <affirmative> and

pretty straight faced Right. Then, then you, I don't, I don't think you would feel that drawn into it and, and all of that. So I think it's, it's part of that beauty aspect of it that really draws in the audience.

You're Like truly putting on a performance. Yes. Like, I felt like you're, you're telling a story through the music you're putting on a performance. Um, as well as then you just get to listen to beautiful music, which is, it's just such a gift. It's such a gift.

Right. And not everyone speaks Spanish or understands it. Right. So we'll go through the lyrics and, Okay, so what, what is this song? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, what is, what is this song about? What are we telling the audience?

Yeah. What's the message? What's the story that You're telling?

Yeah. Which, yeah, a lot of them are love songs. Right. So this, this semester especially has been a lot of, um, you're either in love or you're faking being in love <laugh>.

Right? Yeah. Make us feel like you make us feel your emotion. I love that. Leah, what's your current, um, what's the current, uh, song that you love performing the most?

Oh, performing Uhhuh. Okay. Well, I've got two answers.

Okay. I love that.

We Wanna hear both.

Yes, we Do.

I got two answers. So performing, I'd probably say, say Little Linda. I love say Linda. It's just, I don't know. It has something to do with the core changes and like the vocals. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. It's just, it's so good. I love doing it. Learning. We lit. We just got this like, last class with, uh, Mr. Jones gave us a laona. Oh man. I love Laona <laugh>. Like, it's like one of my favorite mariachi songs. So when he said, Let, let's do, let's do La Yona. I was, I was so excited seeing all like, therum patterns, it, like, I was really like, I was feeling it.

What's the story of this song or what's the message of this song?

La Yona. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Well, the story of Laona is, it's like a, it's a folk tale about a woman who had lost her children. And so she would go around like, I think it was a river looking for her children, like asking where her children were. And so Laona is basically a song about that folk tale.

Okay. Do you have a solo in either one of those?

I too, Maybe towards it.

I'm just, I'm advocating for my friend here. I think Leo needs a solo.

Um, one of the things that strikes me when I watch the Mechi Group perform is even how what you're wearing is reflective of the tone and of the, the, the genre of music. Can you share a little bit about, um, you know, kind of how you decide what are the mariachi performers are gonna wear? Um, is it a part of the, is it part of the Hispanic tradition or can you just share a little bit about even just the, the look of the mariachi group?

Yeah. So a very typical mariachi will wear, uh, they have the soreto and the whole, it's called a th and there are the three pieces that I, his, which, um, you know, the woman would typically be wearing the skirt. Um, men would wear pants. And then there's the, the under part, the vest. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And then there's the whole, they call it a chatal outfit. And it has the embroidery and it is just, it's beautiful. Right. Has it's, Yeah. <laugh>.

Its so cool.

I think I'm very traditional in this sense. And I like the darker colors. Yes. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> right now, they wear all black. And then we did go ahead and buy what's called the mono, which is like the bow tie. Yes. Essentially looks like the big bow tie. Right. Um, and that, that moo in itself is just very, Oh, that's a mariachi. Right. Like, you know, looking at that, Oh, mo mariachi.

I recently learned, and I didn't know this until, um, this spring, that there's actually a statewide competition for mariachi performers. And there are high school groups that come together and believe it or not, like they, they, it, it's just like our marching band has a competition, or our choir or our drill teams. Well, they have that same kind of environment for mariachi. And so is this someday maybe a goal for our mariachi group to go and compete in San Antonio as well?

That is definitely a goal. Uh, so to get there, you have to perform at Uyl. Okay. Which happens at the end of January. And then if you go as a varsity group and earn, uh, what they call it sweepstakes, all ones from the judges, then you are invited to go play at the end of February, I think is when that is where their state competition is. And yeah. I was, I was able to go last year. I think you went mm-hmm. <affirmative> last year too, ma'am. Yes. And its just, it's a whole experience.

Only Imagine what that was like. It truly will blow you away to be immersed in an environment where really students' passion for music, students' heritage, their experiences, they, they really are combined into one room. And to have kids talking about mariachi together. Right. Um, and just to, like it was, I was blown away just by their, their enthusiasm and, and their love for what they do in that as a school district. You know, one of the things that um, is, is a mission of mine is, is an imperative, is how do we ensure every student is connected in some way. Right. It helps them be at school every day. It helps them find out who they are. It helps them find their

strengths and their talents. And I think providing experiences like mariachi is one more way to help kids connect. Um, Leo, if, if you had to speak to everyone who's listening today and, and a part of our RSD community, what would you want them to know? If, if, if they asked a question, Well, we have band. Why, you know, why can't they just join band? Or why aren't they just in choir? Why is providing an experience like mariachi important to you? And, and to the other students who want to be a part of this?

You'll know when you're watching a good mariachi band, when you see one, you can listen to the music. Right. But it won't be the same as going somewhere to see a live performance. Live performance. Yeah. And it's even, it's a, it's a completely different thing performing in it. Especially since like, you're with your friends and you'll, like, you'll be doing all this stuff in the background. Like, you'll know what you're doing when you're doing it. Just fun. It's like something to do. I don't wanna play guitar.

Yeah. Fight. You just get to, we all have things that we love to do. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> when we're not working or, and so when you get to explore that, um, and you get to learn and grow thanks to amazing educators like Miss V, it's, it's phenomenal.

I wanna go back to something you mentioned, Well, both of you mentioned earlier, the real impact of mariachi is it's beyond just the music. It's beyond the performance. It's the emotion and the feeling that's attached to those stories and the experiences that go with that. And then for you to be able to keep that connection to your heritage makes it even stronger. And so I think what, what I've kind of heard you say is that's, that's why you are even more connected now. You learn to play an instrument that you didn't even know how to play. Who does that? I mean, like a couple would take me a full year to learn how to play the guitar that well. But you, you had this strong connection, uh, not just the music, but everything attached to that.

We just so lift you both up. We celebrate you. Um, it is an honor as the superintendent in this district to continue to find the resources and do what we can do to support you. We want to see this program grow. We wanna see it thrive. It's a mission that we have across the entire district. Um, so that you can have peers at all four high schools where you're coming together and you are showcasing this talent. And, um, please know that all of our Richardson, ISD community loves you. on this month of national Hispanic Heritage Month, 38% of Richardson ISD is Hispanic. and this is just one way that we can make sure that our students feel seen, they feel valued. That educators have the opportunity to bring their expertise, to bring their passion and connect it with kids. And you all are pioneers in this. You are our first group and we celebrate you. We thank you. And, um, please know, we're always here to support you in any way. When is the next time maybe that the community could have an opportunity to see you perform live?

So our next after school performance will be our fall concert. Our fall concert is November 9th, 7:00 PM at Berkner High School in the auditorium.

I will be there November 9th. Are you gonna be there? Put on your calendar, Dr. Goodson. Let's put it on our calendar.

It'll Be a great night. Will be a high concert. Yes. With our jazz band. Jazz band.

But that, And both We're gonna see a huge performance then in both groups. That's gonna be awesome.

Be A fun night. I love seeing our culture being appreciated by all the students. So thank you for your support, both of you all, all of Richardson ISD.

Well, we cannot wait to be there. And I know many that are listening are gonna have an opportunity to come see you live and in person as well. Thank you both also for being our very first guest. Yes. Um, on the Richardson ISD Podcast. We love you. Thank you both so much and have a great rest of your day. Great. Thanks for having us.

Thanks Guys.

Dr. Goodson.

Yes, Ma'am.

Yes. What else? We are celebrating in the fabulous month of October.

What is it? Cause I, I feel like we're celebrating a lot, but you know what? We can always celebrate more.

We are gonna celebrate more because October is national Principal appreciation month. Oh, It's a big month. You were a principal, right?

A long time ago.

Tell Me what, where were you a principal?

I was principal of Spring Valley Elementary, and then I was principal of just Har Elementary.

That's amazing. I was a principal. I was a high school principal. Uhhuh, I was a principal at Coppell High School, and then also opened up a school, New Tech High at Coppell. And I loved every minute of leading a campus.

You Know, one thing, I wasn't what? I was never a principal of the year.

Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah. It might be on my resume. Did You You Were I was. Wow. Sorry about that. Okay. But guess what, what? It's not about us. You're right. We have two RISD principals of the year. No, We do. They are here today to share their experiences, their knowledge, their wisdom with the R S D community. I have with us our elementary 2122 principal of the year, Dr.

Charmaine Curtis. And we also have our secondary 21, 22, uh, principal of the year. Mr. Chris Choat, welcome to The RISD Podcast.

Thank You. Thank you.

Congratulations.

Thank You very much. Thanks.

Why don't we start off with both of you telling us a little bit about who you are, um, how long you have been in the district, how long you have been a principal, and maybe a little insight into why you wanted to be a principal.

First of all, my father is a principal. He is in year 48, a physical education teacher in Oklahoma City. So, um, that was just my life. And, um, I went into education, started, uh, in 2002, was a middle school science teacher for 10 years, teaching sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. Had the most amazing principal, um, Mr. William Woods, who really just inspired me, um, in the role of an administrator and really pushed me and gave me a lot of opportunities to, um, lead. And, um, in 2012, I finally had that breakthrough where I was able to participate, um, as a, um, basically an administrator fellow in Dallas, ISD. And in 2013, I took over my very first school. Um, and I've been at Richardson for five years, and I have spent the last 10 years as a campus, uh, principal.

Love that. Thank you for sharing your experience. 48 years.

48.

Unbelievable. He's been an educator for 48 years.

And he still, Yes, he retired at 43. He stayed out for two years mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And he's back in for another five.

Well, unbelievable. We celebrate your dad. Seriously. That's amazing. That's amazing. Mr. Choat, tell us about your experience.

Oh, thanks. That is amazing. 48 years. My name is Chris Choat, principal of Richardson High School. I've been at Richardson High School for 12 years. I started there as a teacher and a coach, um, and then was fortunate to move up as an assistant principal. And then spent a year at Lake Highlands High School as the associate principal. Um, and then was fortunate enough to get to go back home to Richardson High School. And I'm in my sixth year as principal. And before that I spent 14 years as a teacher and a coach out of college. I kinda, my parents weren't in education. I was kind of influenced by some friends from high school. And we kinda all wanted to be, uh, high school coaches. So we went to the same university and coached together. And while I was there, the assistant principal at a school we were at in East Texas went on maternity leave and the principal asked me to fill in. And during that six weeks I was

doing it. I knew that my career was about to change and that's why that was, it convinced me to get into the administrative side of it, but very fortunate to be in this district. And RHS specifically, I live in the community, have three kids right next door at West Junior High. And there's truly no other place that I would wanna be.

I love that. Thank you for sharing that story, and thank you for loving your eagles so much. <laugh>, both of you. Why don't you share with the community, um, a little bit about, I know sometimes, you know, a parent, maybe even sometimes our teachers, they think they know what a day in the life of a principal looks like. But unless you're living in it, sometimes you can't really imagine. And so maybe you could provide a little insight for everyone around what do your days look like?

Each day is very different and there is a challenge that could, um, come up every single day. But a typical day for me, um, looks like arriving at school about six 30 and getting into it asap, checking coverage, making sure that if we have people out, we have coverage. Um, at seven 15, I am there to greet my students off the bus. And, uh, we chat in the morning before we release them to class. Um, restate expectations. Um, I am on duty, um, at seven, at seven 30 and helping to monitor kids, getting where they need to be, Um, walking the classrooms, saying good morning at 7 45. I'm on, on announcements. And, um, just getting our day started, um, continuing to walk classrooms 8 0 5, we do an administrator huddle as administrators, as well as our I lt. And for some days that may be the only time we get to meet mm-hmm. <affirmative> as a group. So we have a little script that we follow. We'll have about one minute that we just share what we're grateful for, what our day looks like, and any need for collaboration. And then we hit the ground running. That could be a plc, that could be a classroom observation, that could be a parent meeting. It could be just a variety of things. And so you start with a schedule, and that schedule is oftentimes interrupted just because things happen mm-hmm. <affirmative>, Um, and, um, but you adjust and, you know, to follow with observations, being visible in the cafeteria, supporting in the hallway, Just whatever we need to do. We are everywhere. I just about try to be everywhere and just supporting everyone. And then at the end of the day, at Car line, my dismissal location is car line rain, sleet, snow, ice or outside ensuring that kids get home safely.

How many students do you support at the Thurgood Marshall?

We have about 520 right now.

And how many staff members do you have?

Total is about 83.

83. And so when I think about the number of humans every day mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And then on top of that, you have the parents, um, in the community that you serve. When I think about the amount of humans that come in and out of your building every day, that responsibility that you have, and I have been to Thurgood Marshall several times, and one thing I can say

about Dr. Curtis is you're never in your office. Right. Um, that presence, that visibility, your connection with your kids so real, um, when they welcome you into the classroom, when they see you in the hallway mm-hmm. <affirmative>, that relationship is real. And you, you can tell that it's only been built because of the fact that you are at the car line greeting them in the morning or, you know, at the bus or, or at the end of the day. And so that every day, I mean, every day is an expected day, but your commitment to those relationships with kids is everything.

Well, and I, I know the, the regular conversations that you have with your administrative team and your I It that alignment is what, uh, keeps that maintains that united aligned focus for, for the day. You know, so that regardless of where anyone is stationed or supporting classrooms or cafeteria, they are all united with this is our plan, this is how we are going to support the kids or the staff for the day.

That's important. If I can chime in, I just think it's important as a leader that you're modeling the expectations mm-hmm. <affirmative> Yes. That you expect, You know, I remember my very first principal interview, um, the teacher on the interview panel said, Hey, so how do you get people to do what you want them to do? And I said, I model. And I said, I don't ask people to do anything I'm not willing to do. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So that's the very first thing. So no one complains about dismissal or morning duty because Gus guess what? The principal's on duty every day.

That is the epitome of being a servant leader. And that's, I think what, what both of you do so very well. Now, when we transition from an elementary campus, <laugh> to the size of the magnitude of a high school, I know as a high school principal, we used to always use the analogy of it's like seven 11, you're open 24 7. Um, there are always things that are, you know, events that you're hosting, students that are traveling, competing community events that are being hosted at your school. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So, Mr. Choat, tell us a little bit about a day in the life of a high school principal.

There's a similarity that, um, you didn't mention lunch because lunch is not included in my daily schedule either. <laugh>. Um, I try to start every day with about a 30 minute walk at my mind around the day and everything that's going on. But every day starts with a message to my administrative team. Need to know mm-hmm. <affirmative>, what's happening, what's what's coming today that's big. Just so that we can make sure we're all on the same page. Very first thing we do on campus is go to our morning duties. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, we do have four entry points, a lot of students coming in, so we need to make sure that we're all aligned. And for me, that's my number one priority is student and staff safety. So making sure that my administrative team is all there because they too are busy and oftentimes get pulled away from their normal, uh, duties. So if we need to adjust, we do that within the day. There's certain meetings that's scheduled on my calendar that are consistent every week on Mondays, I meet with my administrative team. Um, right after I meet with them, I have our instructional coaches come in. We meet weekly, uh, Wednesdays I meet with my department heads, and then on Fridays we have meetings with our learning community principals and Mr. Evans, our area

superintendent. So those things very rarely get changed because they're very important that all of those people I mentioned are on the same page mm-hmm. <affirmative> about what's going on.

Yeah. Yeah. I hear both of you talk about consistency. Yeah.

Uh, get in classrooms and I don't have time to get in classrooms. It's important just passing periods that I go to a different hall every time and just let teachers see me just to be visible. Yeah. Like you said, modeling the behavior and for the kids too, I would imagine. Yeah. For the kids too, so that they'll, you know, I'm not just a voice that's always doing what they need to do on the PA or something like that so that they can see me, but that really getting out and seeing the kids, talking to the teachers really re-energizes me. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Because oftentimes you can deal with things that are not so fun and, you know, problems being reactive to things, but can always go back to there's a lot of great things happening. There's a lot of kids that are doing extraordinary things, and I have to intentionally get out and see those things because that's what keeps me Going.

And how many students do you have at rhs? How many Eagles We have?

I just checked the other day.

We have 2000 Eight hundred and eight, twenty eight hundred students every day. And how many staff members?

Uh, right at two 50 with professional and support staff. So there's a Lot.

Yeah. You're running, it's like a little city that you're running in terms of the scope of activities, staff members, uh, the budget, all of those aspects. Um, and, and again, oftentimes our high schools are like the hub of the community. Yeah, absolutely. That liaison between the community and students and events and all of that. And so I love that. I'm, as principals of the year, I, I hear some common things that are uniting you around what you believe it means to be a high performing, high impact principal. Um, if you had to share, why is it that you think you are identified as the principal of the year? What is it about you, um, your, whether it's your, your mission as a principal, your, um, the thing that fuels you as a principal? What makes you special? What makes you so good? It's okay to brag on yourself. I know, I know you're not good at it, but brag on yourselves for a minute.

I think it goes back to the calling on my life, and I have to be very honest with you. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I never saw myself as a principal when I was a teacher trying to get into administration, I just thought of assistant principal. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, it's gonna be, that's just naturally the next role. My pathway was not necessarily that. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I spent one year out of the classroom and, um, then the next year I took a campus that was ranked 1 43 outta 1 45. And, um, so I say that I have what's put in me. And, um, the calling on my life has really enabled me to do things that, um, appear difficult and can be difficult for some.

But, uh, it's just kind of who I am and who I was, what I was made to, to do mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And, um, so why principal of the year? I'm 100% grateful for the recognition, but there are so many people around me that make my work possible. Like I, yes, I'm the principal, but I cannot teach every classroom. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I cannot be everywhere doing everything. And I have such a great supportive staff around me that makes this work possible. So I, I'm just privileged to be able to lead and to be able to be at my school because I love my school and I love what we're doing for kids at Thurgood Marshall.

And, um, in a minute, Mr. Chad, I'm gonna ask you that same question, but, um, and I know it's sometimes difficult for us to just see like, Okay, as a leader, what am I great at? And, um, because it is, it's always a team thing. We don't, I don't think any one of us around this table, um, whether we're a principal in your current role leading HR or even as a superintendent, I know I, I'm only able to do what I'm doing because I have the most amazing group of principals and cabinet and everyone around me that is exemplary at everything that they do. But I wanna just share as someone who gets to see you lead, I think was some of the unique gifts that you have, is the ability for students to see what in themselves, what they may not think possible. And you instilled this belief and this expectation. Every staff member knows that they have the ability to make a difference today. Like every child, every day like that is what's something I say all the time. And those aren't just words for you. You and your team live that out. You see it in evidence of map growth scores. You see that in your star scores. You see that in just the behavior and the way that students interact with one another and the way that they interact with the staff. And while yes, that is every staff member implementing that, that is you creating a culture and an environment where everyone says, Yes, that's, I wanna be a part of that and I'm gonna help bring that to life for my kids. So that just, I celebrate you as a, as a principal and hope that Yes, while it's a team effort, you also recognize that that's a gift. That's a gift that you can bring that to your 500 kids.

Thank You. Thank you so much.

Mr. Choat, tell us what makes you special.

How I hire? Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, I, I mean, and I agree with everything that y'all said. It's about the people around you. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and not only hiring those people, but learning their strengths, um, and putting people in place that, that play to their strengths, um, is definitely something that is necessary. But I I, I will tell you the driving question for me every day is I want every one of our teachers, when they pull up to the building, I want them to be excited about being there. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And I tell them, If you're not excited about showing up to work, your first stop needs to be my office cuz I need to hear about it.

Right. Um, and And your kids feed off of that. Absolutely. They know when you're not excited to Be there.

Yes. And I tell 'em that. I go, I we're, Look, we're in this for kids. We wanna make sure our kids are safe. We wanna make sure they have a good learning environment. But I know without a

doubt, happy teachers, people who love coming in the building. Right. The kids are gonna benefit from that. That really drives it. Because if you don't have that focus with a school our size, you, you can just, it becomes unorganized and you can lose sight. That for me is, I feel like a strength of mine because I can, I connect with our staff members mm-hmm. <affirmative> open door policy and their happiness is really important to me. Cause I know that it, it impacts the whole school.

I've had a chance to watch you lead since I joined the RSD family almost nine years ago now. And I, one of the things that really makes me see you as a leader, and, and I value you so much, is you have that great balance of understanding systems and operations and processes, but also understanding strong instruction. And this is what our students need. This is what that bell to bell tier one instruction needs to look like with also creating a culture where all students can feel a part of the school environment where all staff feel seen. And that's hard when you have 2,800 mm-hmm. <affirmative> students who all are coming with different interests and passions and different reasons of why they're even coming to school. And you have, I think, a really unique ability to bring all three of those components of the principalship together in a way that yields success and yields outcomes for kids. And I think we would be remiss if we didn't just really take a moment to focus on the fact that because of your leadership, you are yielding phenomenal outcomes for students in the end. That's, as a school district, what we're responsible for, our community should hold us accountable for student outcomes. And you are a big part of making that happen.

I I was just gonna say, as a current parent of two Richardson High School students, I see firsthand the culture that you have built at Richardson High School and the feeling that they have when they go to school every day, they like going to school <laugh>. And that's not easy for a couple of teenagers. Yeah. Uh, we, I, I think we would all agree, but they are proud to be a part of not just that community, but the other communities that are within Richardson High School. So whether it is a magnet program or the Golden Eagle Band or some other group, they are excited and happy to go to be a part of that every single day. And so just as a parent, thank you for what you do, because it does, you, you see the tone that is set by the teachers and by the administrative team. Uh, you see it at home. And so just thank you for that. And then I also wanted to say thank you as well, because what you've done is, I think we have goals for what we want to have happen sometimes, but you changed the dynamics of not just having a goal for excellence. You have an expectation for excellence for the students that walk through your doors. And for that, that is a totally different message. It's the difference of, I might get there and I hope I get there, as opposed to, No, this is where we're going. This is what you will attain when you walk through the doors of Thurgood Marshall. And so again, just compliments to you and your team, but really, it, it can't happen without strong leadership. And that's exactly what you bring.

And if anyone hasn't had a chance to go to an RHS pep rally, <laugh>, at least sometime in your experience as a community member, you need absolutely to either, I don't care what learning community you're in, you need to go see. I thought I had been a part, I thought I had led some really good pep rallies. It is nothing like an RHS pep rally.

And The principal might have on a fun shirt too.

I'm just saying he might, School spirit matters. It does matter.

Do the splits, any, any one of those?

I I may have been on stage where Mr. Choat was doing the splits with me. I'm just saying, Wow. May have. I would love to hear from you. Um, how do you keep growing? Um, again, being a principal, a lot of the time you are addressing issues that pop up in the day. You are trying to be proactive in growing your teachers, being there for your students and your parents. So how do you fill your cup? How do you continue to grow, um, in the skillset of being a leader?

For me, I have a good group of former principals and current principals , and it goes back to iron sharpening iron. And we are great collaborators. And that this is, these are principals across many districts and we talk about like, what's working, what's not working, what are you doing, what the resources are you using, et cetera. And that has to be one of the biggest ways that I grow as, as a professional. In addition to, of course, being very selective about what conferences, et cetera. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, we will, we will attend. Um, but I also grow so much with my teachers and through classroom observations and, um, I mean, we have such a dynamic group of people and everyone is value added in their own way. But as a leader, like instructionally, it, it, it's just amazing to be able to go see greatness in this classroom mm-hmm. <affirmative> and take this to this classroom to help this particular, um, person grow. I'm pretty much done with school. I'm don't wanna get any more degrees. I I'm done with that. But, um, every opportunity and every training for me is an opportunity to take a nugget that will make you better. Um, you know, some of it may be information I, I might already know I have heard, but it's about narrowing down to that one nugget that will be value added to you.

Love that.

Yeah. And for me, it's realizing that I don't know everything when I first started as a principal, I am not afraid to reach out and ask questions to them, the district does an amazing job of having support in place for us, and I get on the phone and call a lot of those people. Um, so for me it's utilizing the strengths of the people that you all have in place to support us and not being afraid to utilize that mm-hmm. <affirmative>, but Um, like she said, the people in my building are, are pretty amazing. And I'm, that's why we have those regular meetings because we're constantly collaborating. There's some people in my building that just amazed me on a daily basis with their knowledge. Um, and they teach me as much as I can teach them. And, um, I tell that to our teachers, You are in your classroom. You are the expert, you are the professional. We're learning from you. Um, so like you said, the walkthroughs and getting to see some of the amazing things happening mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, is every day, every time you do that, you pick something up. But I'm honest with our staff too, that I don't know all the answers. I don't know everything. None. I can tell you, I'm gonna give you my, all right. I'm gonna learn from you and I'm gonna reach out. So I think just the teachers knowing that, you know, I'm just being

humble. Be thankful for the job that you have. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and utilize everyone in that building and collaborate with them. And if you do that, you're gonna see the success. You're gonna improve yourself, and you're gonna see people around you improve.

Uh, I love that both of you model lifelong learning. Um, and that we don't, just because we have a title on our badge doesn't mean that we can't continue to learn and grow. Part of, you know, our message is every child, every day, every teacher, every day, every leader, every day. And we all have an opportunity to end the day better than when we walked in. And, and you all model that. The last question I just have for you all is, again, there are a lot of people listening that wanna thank a principal. We lift up our teachers and we always wanna celebrate our teachers because ultimately they're the ones every day in front of the students having that most direct impact. But you are also a big part of what makes education happen and, and what makes growth happen. So, on behalf of your peers, this is your opportunity to tell the community what is the best way that our community can show appreciation for principals during this important month of principal appreciation month.

Just emailing, email a principal, um, and let 'em know that you're thankful for what they do. Um, just like we talk to our teachers about that, our parents need to hear from you when things are going great and when you need support from them in both of those settings. And I would say that's the same thing for principals. We're human. Um, we, the student success and our community success is important to us. And I think we're like anybody else when we get affirmation that what we're doing is, you know, Dr. Goodson, just like you said, how your, your boys came to school, they enjoyed it. They're in the band. Those are the things. Just hearing that is all I need because I know what we're doing is working.

So I think that that's a really important point to make that sometimes, especially as our students move into secondary, oftentimes an outreach that we may have as a parent or community member is when we're concerned about something or maybe we're frustrated. So making sure we also send that communication that says, Hey, these are the things that you're doing really well. Yeah. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Um, we all need to hear that no matter what our role is, we all need to hear that the long hours. Cuz it's long hours, right? Yes, it is. <laugh> the long hours that we were, we were at a football game and you're there until 10 o'clock at night, making sure it's a safe and fun environment for your students. But to hear like, thank you in that we appreciate what you're doing. That matters a lot. Dr. Curtis. What's, what's another way we can celebrate our principals ?

Um, just piggybacking on what he says, you know, just a simple thank you. And, um, you know, I honestly believe the principal is probably one of the most underrecognized individual in education and we carry a load every day. Mm-hmm. <affirmative> like people just don't understand on any given day, um, that load is, is big. And, um, the one thing I I would just say is always seek to understand a person's heart. And when you know that that person that's leading that campus is there because they want to be, and they always have the very best intentions, it may not always be what you want, or it may not always be the outcome that you want, but know that they're always having that holistic view mm-hmm. <affirmative>, um, and trying to make the

best decisions that are in the best interest of students. So keep that in mind when we're interacting with people at the campus because really they're there because they care. They love kids. And we as principals, we, we lead with our hearts.

I love that. I, I think it's important for our community to know that oftentimes our principals, you know, they're, they're the first ones at the building. They're oftentimes the last one at the building. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, they are many times missing their own event, family, and, you know, and experiences because they love their campus so much and wanna be there to see our students thrive and to see, you know, support our coaches success. And, um, and so I think to, to see and make sure that our principals know that they're valued, the weight of leading a campus is real. Whether it's student outcomes, whether it is ensuring student behaviors and student discipline, um, safety, school safety, I mean, all those things I get engagement, all of it. It's weighty. Um, and our principals, they only do it because they love kids. Because they love kids. So I want you to know on behalf of our entire Richardson Issd family, we see you, we celebrate you, we lift you up. We are here to, um, be that source of fuel whenever you need it. Um, and I think just even featuring you on our first edition of the, the RSD podcast is one way that we can remind everyone just how important the principal role is. Um, because we, we couldn't, we couldn't do it without your leadership. So thank you all. We celebrate you and let's have the best 2223 school year, You guys.

Thank you very much.

Roger Goodson. I know we just had a chance to talk with two of our principals of the year and really help the community know how they could lift our, all of our up across the District.

So awesome. Yes.

But I also wanna remind our community how important it is to thank a teacher.

Oh, please. Absolutely.

I know on behalf of the Braham family, I wanna thank all of Cares teachers. I wanna lift up Kaons second grade teacher, Miss Fulbright at Spring Creek Elementary. She's so incredible. And I think what our principal said, um, for principals and what they need to hear, the same is true for Teachers, for every teacher.

Yes.

So what I'm gonna ask everyone to do is if you can go to the rsd.org website mm-hmm. <affirmative>, there is a link for Think a Teacher and there's a quick Google form that you can fill out. And there are multiple ways where you as a community member or as a parent can thank a teacher whether, So all I have to do is go to the website, click on that link and I can thank a teacher And you can thank a teacher and you can thank a teacher maybe by, um, volunteering to help with a breakfast celebration. Okay.

Or you could volunteer to write notes, Even if it's just to send a note to the teacher saying thank you.

Even If it's just a note to say thank you. But there are lots of different ways and ideas that we give to you mm-hmm. <affirmative> to help us lift up the profession of teachers.

And I can tell you the goods and family will be doing that today because we are very thankful for all of the teachers at Richardson High School for David and Winnie.

Yes. Thank you. And so thank you all of our SD for helping us lift up our teaching profession. Can you believe Dr. Goodson? Are we done? I think we might be done.

I We. How do you feel?

I feel Great.

I feel like we totally nailed that.

I feel like the first, The first episode Episode, like it was amazing.

I I can't wait for the next one.

No, not That we can't always get better cause we can Always get Better. Well of course you can always get Better.

You can definitely improve we together. But I'm proud of you cuz you did a great job for the first one.

We did a great job for this first episode, episode we did. And I think everyone who's going to tune into this and learn alongside us, um, to understand all the things that we have going on around Richardson ISS D and help us celebrate everyone. Um, next episode.

What's Coming up next time?

Today we had a chance to focus on some fine arts and even do some celebrations of fine arts. Yes. You would not believe the level of success of some of our student athletes in Richardson Issd. Oh. And next month, you, Dr. Goodson, are gonna have the chance to sit across from the number one ranked basketball player in the entire nation for his class. Number one, number one ESPN ranked player in any position across the entire nation. We're gonna have a chance to talk to him and some fellow, um, peers across the district that are performing at the highest of levels in their respective sports.

I'm Totally getting their Autographs.

Me too. I'm excited. I can't wait. If we're able to say we knew them when Yes. We knew them when. Well, on behalf of Dr. Goodson and myself, thank you for tuning into this first episode of the R S D podcast. And I am going to leave you with this message, every child, every day, that is who we are and what we believe in Richardson, ISD. And thank you for being a part of our family.