

Melissa: Hi everybody. Welcome to Season 2 of Edventures, the Collaborative for Inclusive Education's podcast. My name is Melissa Katz and I have the honor of leading the Collaborative, as well as hosting its podcast this season. We have a really great episode in store for you today to kick off this season. I am joined today by the Collaborative's new Inclusive Education specialist, Ellie Grose. Welcome Ellie!

Ellie: Welcome. Thank you so much for having me Melissa. I am tickled to be here. Hi everyone.

Melissa: So Ellie, our podcast's name is EdVenture and I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about your EdVenture and how you ended up here with us at the Collaborative.

Ellie: EdVenture is absolutely what it has been and, boy, do I have one. Man, I would love to tell you about my EdVenture. I started in special education. Specifically, I started in early identification straight out of college, having studied child and family psychology and special education, where my large focus is, so I jumped right into specialized focus. I worked in the private sector for just a moment with language based disability students. And then was introduced to somebody that was moving to New York and said "Hey, you're a lifer in education. Do you know what a charter school is?" And I know this is very real this year because we are celebrating 25 years of charters in NYC. Yay! But it's actually my 22nd year in education and about my 20th in charter work specifically. I up and moved to NYC in the early 2000s and started working for an amazing brand new charter school in West Harlem. I taught middle and high school. Eventually, got to teach some elementary and just really ran the gamut in terms of supporting students with anything they might need. But really had a wonderful time doing that—teaching. So I had about 8 years in specialized instruction in the city and then moved into administration. I've worked in a couple of different states so I know all about federal legality and a lot of state-based legality, but happy to say that my charter—my love for charters brought me back to New York City in 2014. Since then I have been an administrator, manager, director, and have just seen amazing innovation happen in New York City's public charter schools. Really excited to keep seeing that happen in this current position. That's my EdVenture in a nutshell.

Melissa: Thank you for sharing that, Ellie. And I'm so excited that our schools get to experience your expertise—your 20 years of expertise in this work. And I guess that brings me to my next question. So, it's interesting listening to season 1 of the podcast. It really feels like a time capsule. It was happening largely 2020-2021. We were in the pandemic, and now in 2023, and some ways on the other side. I'm wondering, as we go into school year 23-24, in this post-pandemic world, what are opportunities that you think our schools have right now? What are you hoping that we see in classrooms when we're in the field? Or what are you hoping to support?

Ellie: I'm so hopeful to see some of the amazing innovations I know came out of the pandemic last and stick in our school buildings in terms of instruction for students with diverse needs. One thing I know that gave me a real rattle and gave many school educators and administrators a real rattle during covid and pandemic times is just systems needing to change. Right? So I'd love to see the codification or the making sticky of really tight systems for things like

compliance, things like educational innovation, or differentiation within the tier 1 or the whole-class classroom, such that some of our new students to the city, new students to education, or students that have just missed things in the past few years, are able to benefit from some of the incredibly creativity our educations manifested over the course of the past few years. And, on that note, one of the things I think we've really suffered over the course of the past two years is a sustainability, a retention of teaching staff, and so I'm very hopeful that some of the resources we have put together as a collaborative team are there to support both beginning and really educated educators—those that have stuck around. I'm hopeful that they are able to garner incredibly pertinent and relative and informative and accurate resources from what we have spent so much time organizing for them. And that they're able to also mentor and guide some of the newer educators in the sector to those resources as well.

Melissa: For sure. I'm nodding. The podcast is not a visual form, but I'm nodding the whole time you're talking, Ellie. Certainly, we see first hand the folks who are leaving the classroom, leaving education. It's a really, I understand, it's a really hard time to be in education. I know I mentioned that season 1 is a bit of a time capsule in terms of educators during the pandemic and I think something that comes across throughout that season is this idea that we need to give ourselves grace in this work and to allow time for self-care. I hope that kind of lesson learned still carries into this new post-pandemic era. People say "we're back to normal." I don't know how much we talked about that pre-pandemic and I hope that we continue to talk about it post-pandemic. So would love to know, you're 20 years in this work, what keeps you in this work, and how do you take care of yourself?

Ellie: Well, I gotta tell you, the two are gonna go hand in hand. Thanks for asking. This is a great question. And you're so right. Really, that is the thing we do need to think about. What lessons can we take from this? One of them is that mindfulness, right? Like how to take care of oneself such that we can perpetuate the work that we do each and every day. I mean, we're not showing up for ourselves; we're showing up for our students. But we can't show up for our students if we don't take care of ourselves. One thing that has always kept me in this work is the people and so I think if we talk about networks of support systems—The Collaborative for Inclusive Education being but one of those networks. I really rely on the people that have been there for me in times of need. And I hope that as educators, we continue to rely on each other in this continued reopening process. Because you're so right, Melissa, it just is one of the biggest lessons. If we don't take care of ourselves, we're not able to take care of others and if we all work together to do that then I think we can make incredible gains and progress. So leaning on the ones that you love and leaning on the ones that you can support, taking opportunity to do so, and asking for help—really great things to do. I'm learning those things more and more everyday, but I encourage all to do that with me.

Melissa: My last question to you—now that we're on a new platform, we're able to play pretty much any song you would want as the outro music to this episode. So, feels like a high-stakes question, but what song do you want us to play as we close out here?

Ellie: Let me say this—this is incredibly high stakes. And I've put some thought into this so I'm glad that you've asked. I now get to reveal the song that I know I need to have somebody singing in their head today. If they listen to this podcast, they should walk away singing it. Let's go with Stevie Wonder's "You are the sunshine of my life". There's a lot of language in that song that really matters to me and I hope it speaks to you, everybody.

Melissa: I did not know you were gonna serenade us the title of that song, but I love that you did and I love that song and I love that people get to hear it and hopefully it does stay in their heads and the lyrics speak to them. I totally agree with you. I'm so excited to work with you more closely, Ellie.

Ellie: Likewise.

Melissa: And for our schools to work with you. So welcome to the team.

Ellie: Thank you.

Melissa: And thanks for joining me on today's episode.

Ellie: Thank you for having me. I'm so excited. Thank you so much.

Melissa: Thanks for listening everybody. Catch you on the next episode. Bye.