**Fine Arts Administration with Annamarie Bollino**

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**Charlie:**  Annamarie, thanks so much for being on the show today.

**Annamarie:** Thanks for having me, Charlie.

**Charlie:** All right. So could you tell us a little bit about your background and your music education career before you went into administration?

**Annamarie:** Well, I would be happy to, so I grew up in Pennsylvania and did a lot of music events growing up and knew I always wanted to be a teacher, but I didn't really decide on music teaching until I was a junior in high school and went to West Virginia, played in the marching band, just enjoyed the whole experience, right.

Of being in music, ed. I also started an SAI chapter Sigma alpha Iota chapter. And I think that's kind of when I first began that whole leadership trajectory, right. Like to kind of where it helps lead me to where I am today. And I was the president of our collegiate NAFME chapter. And then I went right into teaching from from graduation, but.

Along the way. I think this is kind of an important part of my trajectory is I had some pretty cool internships over the summer. When I was in college, I interned with the Walt Disney company as a performer, and I also interned the Kennedy center, which kind of led me into this enthusiasm for arts administration and management and eventually kind of where I, where I am today.

And so what I came down to Stafford Virginia and had never lived in Virginia, but really wanted to be near history and the ocean and all of the greatness in Virginia. So came to Stanford. I've been here 18 years. I taught elementary general music. I worked with marching bands at the high school level.

And then in 2009, I actually went into central office and I became the arts supervisor and I supervise music, art theater In Stafford, but I also had a stint. So this is a little interesting. Had a, had a stint in the building was a assistant principal for a couple of years at an elementary school, which was a really valuable experience.

You know, I, it, wasn't exactly what I want to tell, ultimately do to become, I didn't ultimately want to become a principal, but I'm really glad I had that experience. And being back with kids is always a good thing. Right.

**Charlie:** absolutely. So for those that don't know at least in this area in Virginia, what is the role of a fine arts supervisor or fine arts coordinator?

**Annamarie:** yeah. So in some districts, the. The position is split. So sometimes there's just a person who supervises music or performing arts, and then sometimes there's a separate person for visual arts. So in my division, we have about 33 schools and I manage all of the aspects of the fine and performing arts programs.

So I helped to hire new teachers. I help coach and mentor new teachers and set them up with arts mentors. I helped to write curriculum and build those curriculum teams and guide their work. We'll also do some training on PLC work, right? So I'm working with lead teachers and teacher leaders in our school division who are going to go back to their buildings and work with their teams.

I love to think that I do the behind the scenes work. So I try to do all of the things that will help to make a teacher's life easier so they can focus on all that work that really important work in the classroom with students. So that also includes things like. Instrument repair and budgeting for new instruments and cyclical replacement and marching band uniform, you know, pay the paperwork and, and all of the vendor work.

That takes a long time. So in a way I'm a paper pusher, but I also like to think I have some visionary you know, some vision into how we want to move the program forward. And then I think another important role that I have is the building of relationships across departments and working with senior level leadership.

So my boss supervises the instruction and professional learning department and working with our high school, middle school, elementary school, we call them chiefs, but the people who supervise principals. So I'm always working with those folks and trying to improve systems and, and, you know, advocate for the arts and for teachers and for students to have what they needed in the classroom.

Whether that's time, sometimes it's staffing, sometimes it's. Financial resources. And then I do that same thing in the community. So, you know, sometimes I get calls from parents, right. Who want to know about programming or you know, have a concern about something related to curriculum. So I really do love the people aspect of my job.

I think that my job really is to build bridges and connect people. While at the same time, I'm really passionate obviously about arts education and music education, and so working to improve that so that kids have access and kids have high quality music instruction from my amazing arts teachers.

**Charlie:** Yeah, there's a lot of smaller school divisions in Virginia, particularly small and or rural divisions that don't have anyone in central office to advocate for the arts. So staff really lucky that they have you to be able to do that. What are some ways that you feel like you've been able to advocate for the teachers and your division this year?

**Annamarie:** Oh gosh. So There, I think, I hope that there are a lot of ways and you know, every things that I do, I think sometimes I'm not much of a promoter. So I think that it's hard to see it sometimes, but certainly staffing we've actually went to a different model for a middle school schedule. And so that has created a little bit of discourse, but also some opportunities for kids.

And it also ultimately resulted in more staffing because the principals and the community really wanted to offer some additional music classes. And, you know, one of my jobs is to protect. Our teachers too. Right. So protect teaching loads and that sort of thing. And so I advocated for some more staffing.

So we do have a very supportive school board, which helps, right? When you have a school board who is willing to put money into music education. And I think that that always makes my job easier. So we got some additional staffing we've also been able to get, you know, most everything that I've asked for, especially in COVID times.

We did purchase make music smart music for all of our sixth to 12th grade orchestra and band students, which was a pretty hefty price tag. And of course, all of the PPE equipment we've got bell covers, we've got masks some new instruments. So I feel like we, you know, we accessed in that first round, the cares act funding.

I access a lot of money for music education in particular, so that teachers had the resources that they needed to do the job successfully.

**Charlie:** awesome. And what ways do you feel like your job has been a challenge this year due to the pandemic?

**Annamarie:** so let me just tell you. Definitely my job is challenging. I'm not really sure that any job is more challenging right now than being a teacher. I'm just going to throw that out there. I know that there's, that's my audience, but I speak it from the heart. What, what teachers have had to do this year has just been unbelievable.

And it, I, that's the reason I do what I do, right. Because this year of all the years trying to make it easier for teachers I would say probably the most difficult thing in the pandemic is just the constant planning. And then replanning because plan a is what we've planned, but then we can't use plan a, so we have to go to plan B and then plan C and I would joke early on and I know we all did, right?

Like, well, this is the plan. At 10 45 on Monday morning, but by two o'clock, the plan could have changed four times between that. So it's just that having to pivot and be flexible so much, it does start to wear on you. And I, I think I'm not alone in that. So I would say that's probably been the biggest challenge.

And then I would say the second biggest challenge is just feeling disconnected so often, you know, especially those first months that we weren't in the building, in our offices, there there's an energy just like in your classrooms, right. There's an energy when people are in there. And so I, I felt a little disconnected at times, and that was really hard for a musician who feels connected to the community when you're performing, but then also that same community exists in workplaces too.

Right?

**Charlie:** Could you give me one second? My dog is like going crazy. Hang on. Hang on

**Annamarie:** Of course

what kind of puppy do you have?

**Charlie:** Oh, she's in a doorbell. Mut. Let me see if I can pull her up here.

Ah,

**Annamarie:** Oh, my gosh. She's beautiful.

**Charlie:** She's a little mutt and she's,

she is, she's very protective now that we have a one-year-old. So there's like someone walking around outside, and she's just barking, like crazy.

**Annamarie:** Oh, I love it. He's getting so big. I can't even believe it

**Charlie:** Yes. Oh, I just can't believe he just, he just had his one year birthday. Like I still have family members that haven't met him yet. You know,

**Annamarie:** I know.

**Charlie:** yeah. Like my older sister is in Germany and they keep trying to come over here to visit. And every time they do Germany has some like, kind of crazy lockdown.

And they're like, I don't know if we'll be able to get back into Germany if we, if we come home. So they've just kind of stayed there and that's been tough because, you know, I'm really close to my older sister and I really want her to see, you know, my son, but,

**Annamarie:** right.

Well, and I know, she wants to see her nephew,

right. I mean,

**Charlie:** Yeah.

**Annamarie:** that's hard though, to live, you know, halfway across the world, essentially when you're close family like that.

**Charlie:** And it's, it's weird trying to balance, like, you know, like your job and your family and travel restrictions, and we've just been doing a whole lot of FaceTime and, you know, it's, it's been really interesting because we FaceTime with like Noah's grandparents a lot and, and he's always very interactive over FaceTime.

And then when we see them in person, it always takes them like five or 10 minutes to adjust. And I have to wonder like what what's going through his mind. Like, man, there are a lot bigger now. Like

**Annamarie:** yeah.

Yeah. Like you can like before he was touching a screen. Right. But now he's like touching them in person, the real human.

**Charlie:** Yeah.

**Annamarie:** Yeah, I do wonder, but you bring up a really good point, right? Like not just your, you know, your kiddos that are one, two, three, but like our young babies, five, six, seven, who are learning virtually, I just wonder how it's

going to rewire their brains.

**Charlie:** yeah. You know, so I was talking with my co-teacher John about this today. We were doing Sol testing this week. Luna. Okay. So yeah, so we're doing Sol testing this week and elective teachers. We don't teach class this particular week. We're like supervising hallways and that sort of thing. But when the kids are done their testing, they go outside and, you know, we have games and, you know, like kickball and like whatever, they can walk the track.

And every year, this is usually one of my favorite times to, to go out and just, and just hang with kids and get to know them and, you know, play some games with them. And I noticed yesterday that I wasn't interacting with them as much as I normally would. I was just kind of just like supervising, but like normally I would be in there, like playing four square with them or whatever.

And, and I thought about it later that night and I was like, okay, I think what's going on is like, I can't see their face. Because everyone has her mask on. Right. So like, I can't see their face. They can't see mine. And as a result, like, I can't really, I can't read them very well. And that's a level of interactivity that I like, I really miss, but I was like, well, these mass aren't going away anytime soon.

So today I got out there and I played Foursquare for two hours, you know, with kids and it, and it was really fun, but I like, I'm just, I'm finding ways that like, I have to adapt to like speaking my emotions because I do a lot with my facial expressions, but they can't see any of that.

So like, I have to tell them exactly what I'm feeling. So like they know if I'm being sarcastic or if they know if I'm actually upset about something. Cause I can't just give them, like the teacher look, you know,

**Annamarie:** Yep. And I find myself, you know, you're smiling behind the mask where you're smirking and they're not seeing any of it. Yeah, I, I agree. And I find, so you've already noticed it talk with my hands. It's the Italian in me. Right. So I, in my body language, that's where I, you know, I'm like all over the place and I over-exaggerate my body language.

And I also talk way louder and I'm like, oh my God, like, you're you have a microphone just shut up. Like, you don't need to talk loud, but it just, those are, those are my compensating Mo moves at the current moment because I don't, I don't like it either. And I do it feel, I feel like it's a block and I feel like it dehumanizes people.

I mean, I get, it's a medical reason to have a mask, but it's really, it's hard. It, it feels like a barrier to connecting with people.

**Charlie:** Yeah. And that's probably the reason, you know, we were talking earlier about, you know, how discipline referrals have been down this year. And, you know, I do think the mass do play a role in that. Like it just like, it kind of like, everyone's just a little more isolated. You know, which might mean there's less bullying.

Sure. But it also means there's less connection to,

**Annamarie:** And

more

loneliness.

**Charlie:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And you know, and I really think about our music teacher, colleagues, who some, in some school divisions, they're not allowed to do their job right now. And I feel so very fortunate that in my division, I get to teach my classes like anybody else, but there's been some other divisions where they told the, all the elective teachers, you're not going to teach class.

We're going to put like some math kids in your room, and then we're going to livestream the math teacher to your room so we can keep our distancing and our numbers down. And then the teacher just becomes a glorified babysitter and. There's districts in Virginia who have done that, you know, and I just feel so much for that teacher.

Like not only are we going through a pandemic and all the crazy social issues with that, but they can't even do the job that they love on, on top of that. One of my friends was actually in this, in this position, in a school division neighboring school division, and he was not allowed to teach band during school hours.

They said, you can only teach band afterschool. Well, he lives in a school division. We're not allowed to, kids can get transportation to and

**Annamarie:** And they're not providing transportation home, right.

**Charlie:** Yeah, absolutely. So, so he, he switched jobs and he just accepted a new position and, you know, it's like, man, like, and he, he was doing great things there and he was, his band sounded awesome.

He was building the program like crazy. And then this happened. And I think like this year has shown me, like, I think a lot of school divisions have shown their true colors on where they stand in supporting the arts this year. Cause my division has supported us like crazy and even like one division over.

Like almost no

**Annamarie:** not so much.

**Charlie:** Yeah.

**Annamarie:** It's really creating a bigger equity gap, you know? Cause those kids don't deserve any less than what your kids are getting, but I was telling 'em and I stand by this. Right. So being an AP was not my cup of tea. And I just, and part of it is I think I'm not alone in that people like us.

We don't want to do anything else. But the music teachers and I find that trait so admirable and yet at the same time, we need people to be school board members and principals and APS and central office people and go work at DOE not in, not in the fine arts office, but in the policy office or at the governor's office so that they can write a damn executive order.

That makes sense. Like, like that's what we need. And yet we're so unwilling to do it. So there was a kid at Mason, so I'm finishing my doctorate. And one of my. Peers is finishing as well. He's up in Fairfax and we were having a sidebar actor and he is going to keep going at some point.

And I'm trying to encourage him to go into the building admin world because he's interested not because I'm trying to sway him, but we need more people doing that so that people in the next county over don't act like fools and tell the band teacher that teach math right. Or to be the glorified sorry.

I'm on my soap

box. I'm done. Yeah,

**Charlie:** that's no, no, no, that's totally fine.

Well, you mentioned being president of VMEA. So for our non Virginia people we, we have vmea and we have VBODA. Could you maybe explain like what each one is responsible for and what the differences are in those organizations?

**Annamarie:** Sure. So vmea is the Virginia music educators association. And we're the state affiliate of NAFME, which is the national association for music education. And in Virginia, we have a sections underneath VMEA that hold the interest. That's right of difference of different groups. So VBODA of course, is the band and orchestra directors association.

And so often our groups work together right? Simultaneously we all live under the same 501c3 nonprofit organization.VBODA of course has the best interest of all of the band and orchestra students and teachers in the state. And so they run their, the marching assessment. And then of course the performance assessments that happen throughout the year.

And then when I w I think probably one of the things I love most besides the student events and that. VBODA holds and we support through . I mean, we do support that financially but also the way that they recognize and celebrate the programs, right. So honor bands and then you know, different scholarships to give to students and the way that they recognize teachers it's just really special.

And then I would say, you know, that just like VBODA, we have a choral directors association. And my role in vmea is to bring, the organization's role, right. Is to bring all of those organizations?

together and advocate and support music education in general, in this state.

**Charlie:** Yeah, absolutely. And you're also on the, the NAFME council of music program leaders.

**Annamarie:** Yeah, I am. So I do really love this group. So I represent in NAFME, there are six divisions and Virginia lives in the Southern division. So with states like Florida, Georgia, Alabama, all our, our Southern division friends. And so I represent the Southern division on the council and the program leaders is.

many arts supervisors like me, but sometimes there will be lead teachers, right? A program leader isn't just a music supervisor, or, you know, it could be a lead teacher. It could be even a teacher who is a high school band director, a middle school band director, but their school, right. They don't have an art supervisor like you were talking about earlier.

And so the teacher assumed some of those responsibilities in addition to the full-time classroom load, which I can imagine, but it's, you know, our teacher leaders are just as important as our supervisors. And so we the role of the national council is to represent the stakeholder interests from the different sections.

And so I've been really lucky to be a part of a just a sensational group of people. Music supervisors from California, Massachusetts, Kansas, Washington state, Arizona, and each year the council puts on a forum. For all the program leaders.

in the nation who are interested in, in attending. We did a virtual one last year in November, and we are, we're planning another virtual forum.

That will be in November again, in fact if you're listening and you're interested, we've got proposals open. If you go to the NAFME website or just do a Google search we are accepting proposals for the forum, but anyways, it's a really great opportunity for us to talk about just like teachers right now, the PLCs, and being with one another at a conference and learning from one another.

I find that a really gratifying way to get my professional learning is by learning from my peers across the country. And of course in COVID times, it's always glaring how different. Different parts of the country are in terms of how we're open or not open. Right. So Kansas they've been back and Florida has been back all year with kids and Bakersville, California, which my dear friend, Michael is in, they just started bringing kids back last week.

Right. So it's just so interesting how we're all facing different, but similar issues.

**Charlie:** I'm glad you mentioned the conferences because that's one of the things I think I've, I've really felt this year of like, not being able to have that connection with people at our conferences at our state conference or the national conference. And you know, this just, it's just the time to be around like your people, you know, and, and recharge a little bit.

And we couldn't do the, like the traditional conferences here. So Virginia did a virtual event this year. Could you talk a little bit about how that came about and, and how it went from your perspective?

**Annamarie:** I sure will. So I, 100% concur with you, nothing beats being in person. And I missed it so very much. But. I do think that we had a wonderful virtual conference. One thing that made it so great is the people who plan it. We,VMEA has an amazing conference planning committee and we had hired an interim coordinator who really kind of just took the reins and went with it.

That's Elizabeth Keene and she is a whiz with technology too, which we needed. Right. Because we did everything virtually and we had wonderful our performance coordinator, Michael Ehrlich. We tried to coordinate some performances, even though we knew it would be a struggle, right. For many schools who weren't even back in person.

So we did try to supplement some some performances with You know, so professional ensembles, and I think we just did a heck of a job getting some diversity into our sessions, into our programming and then also having a committing to having performances, which is such a critical part of it.

That's why most people go to conferences to hear good music and see our amazing kids playing the good music. Right. But Yeah, So definitely miss it. We're still hoping to be back in Norfolk. That's the plan and that will be in November, right?

November of 21, but definitely I'm with you there felt really good about it. We, you know, of course don't ha didn't have the same number of people that we usually do, but that's pretty, that's pretty to be expected. But I think that the folks that did attend really. Felt great about the sessions.

And we built a community, right? Just like you build communities in your classroom. Our presenters built that community and then our kind of our tech people are behind the scenes. People also help to do that. Right.

**Charlie:** Yeah. I feel like at state conference, at least, at least in my friend group, there's probably like 50% who are really into going to the clinics and the other 50% just want to watch performances and socialize with their buds afterwards.

**Annamarie:** So I think that the best professional development often happens after the sessions at the bar. And I can say that because everybody on this podcast is over 18, but right. Like I have sat down with many a mentor at conference and I just come away like that is just worth its weight in gold. Right?

**Charlie:** absolutely. Absolutely. I've just built a lot of good, good relationships. Just, just hanging out in those evenings or when we were at the homestead exploring the haunted upper floor. Oh, yeah, there's, there's a top floor of the homestead. That's like, they use it as storage now, but you go up there and it looks like something out of like a murder movie, you know, you expect Jack Nicholson to like bust through the wall with an ax.

I mean it's yeah,

**Annamarie:** And I think it's so we're really reminiscing that, right, Charlie. So it is really contingent upon the elders of the organization to ensure that the, the first timers at the homestead have that experience. Don't you think?

**Charlie:** yeah,

**Annamarie:** think I had my first experience maybe like in year four or five when we were at the hunt in my teaching career.

And of course, then I had to, I had to impart right. The haunted floors on, on the younger folks as they kind of make their way through. I'm glad to know. I'm not the only one that had fun with that. Yeah.

**Charlie:** It's almost like a fraternity sorority initiation, you know?

**Annamarie:** The music teacher conference initiation,

**Charlie:** Yes, absolutely. Well, so when we have our conference later this year, God willing in person. Do we plan on having performances from middle school and high school groups while in collegiate groups?

**Annamarie:** Yes, we 100% do. So we did of course invite our performance Reeves last year. Didn't get, we invited them to put together a virtual performance, but most of those folks opted to defer and rightly so. And so right now, I think we have a wonderful slate of performances that are intending to be at conference.

And of course we are going to continue to monitor that over the summer to ensure that they'll be able to be back in school and, and have their repertoire and their program ready to go for conference. But that's the plan. We also have you know, some professional groups that we're looking at to make sure that we've got some wonderful a wonderful just mixture of music and of ensembles, but I always know it's really special to me.

Not that I don't love the professional groups and of course I think we've got the Fairfax wind symphony coming as well, because they'll be performing at Midwest too in December, which we're proud of as a state, but I just love seeing our students at conference. Right. And, and that, cause that's why we're all here, right?

Because we're all here because we love our kids and we want them to engage in music, education, and love that like we do. So that's a really, that's always really special. And I have to tell you, the other thing that I love about our student performing groups is I love it when they bring all their parents and all the school administrators, that's always my favorite part because, you know, having our school administrators there, our principals, our superintendents, it's such an important part of how we advocate and the support that our students get for their music instruction.

And then of course, you know, the support our teachers get to.

**Charlie:** Yeah. I always definitely feel like, like super heartwarming moment when the the conductors have all the teachers and administrators stand up in the audience and you can just see like the pride just like just bursting from them, you know? And it's know, it just, it just hits me right here, you know? Yeah, absolutely because yes, I mean, and that's gotta be a, you know, I've never taken a group to stay conference, but that's gotta be like a nerve-wracking thing to, to have your group play for a bunch of like super hypercritical, like band directors or orchestra or choir

but like, but like these super critical ears And, and like, you'd know, that's got to have a certain amount of pressure to it, but when they have all the parents and the, and the teachers and administrators stand up and you're like, okay, like, this is who they're really doing it for like this, you know, this is, this is what it's all about right here.

**Annamarie:** Yeah, me too. Me too. And I know, like I cannot imagine the stress and the pressure. Right. I always clap extra hard for them because you know, how much work they've put in and how much effort they've put in it's years and years. Right. Of, support from the community and extra rehearsals and private lessons and, and really finite planning right.

On the teachers long range and short term planning. But yeah, not just nothing beats that.

feeling. And I, I can imagine, right. The performance, like I always know you look at the kids' faces, right? Because I mean, usually they're playing for their parents. Right. And, and maybe their peers and how cool is that, but to, you know, to be playing for a whole bunch of people who were there, literally just for them, because of how, you know, to support them, it's to celebrate their accomplishments.

That's pretty cool.

**Charlie:** well, we talked a little bit about advocacy. I know you've been sending out quite a few emails recently. Like I CA a call to arms amongst the the music teachers for things going on at the state level. Could you talk a little bit about what is happening right now and what changes you're you're trying to see come to fruition.

**Annamarie:** so quite a few emails kind of covers it. Doesn't it, Charlie? Every time, every time I'm like, we need to send another email out. The executive director is like, okay. But you know, there. W we know that it's necessary. Right. So recently of course, one of the things that we're struggling with is, is our kids having the same spacing, physical distancing requirements that the science is saying.

And so I think that our state is very conservative and we recently did get the Virginia department of health to update their guidelines based on the national scientific research that's been conducted through, you know, NHS and CB DNA in Colorado. So that was a step in the right direction. However what's happening of course, is that the governor has executive orders address school performances, but they're not using, they're using contradictory language to what's in what we're allowed to do in our classrooms, which is really frustrating, you know, for teachers, because we're trying to figure out.

Are distancing in the classroom and, and music of course is an oral activity, right. There's so much listening involved. And when you're six feet away, well, that makes a heck of a difference then if you're 10 feet away. Right. And then of course, we've also got this other perspective, which is some of our instruments don't producethey don't emit aerosols.

Right. So early in the executive order, I think the fifth one it stated that all performers had to be 10 feet away, which definitely didn't make sense. Right? Sure. Our strengths players, but then also are in the classroom. We were allowed to be six feet apart, but now all of a sudden we just moved to the stage and we have some audience members and we have to.

Double almost double up to 10. So things don't really make a lot of sense. They're not consistent. So that's really what we're, we're trying to work to change. Right. Because we want our kids to have the appropriate performance experience and be able to celebrate what they've done this year. Right. And also we're having some of those same issues with graduation.

So I'll, I'll tell you that. In in right with our graduation being 10 feet apart, outside versus six feet or even three feet is completely different in terms of the microphone setup you need. And how kids hear one another. Cause we know what happens when you go outside. Right? So we're trying to really lobby with the governor's office and we're asking our state representatives and delegates to really take a look at the VDH guidance.

And make those positive changes to the governor's executive orders to continue opening that up for us. We are down soon as the orchestra folks can play and, and ukuleles guitars, you know, non aerosol emitting they can be six feet apart for performances, our winds and our choir singer still have to be 10 feet apart.

So we're working to decrease those a little bit more so that it can be more viable to fit students in a performance venue. And then also we want them to sound good. We want that's part of our recruitment tool, right? And our retention. We want kids to feel good about what they're doing and if they can't hear the kid 10 feet away and they're not playing together because of the.

The distancing requirements, then kids aren't feeling great about what they're doing. And I know teachers are feeling the same way. They, we, we all strive for a high quality performance, right. Even in COVID times, you know, and even if, you know, we're playing grade levels that maybe you're a little lower than what we're used to doing at this time of year, but that doesn't mean we want the quality to be any less.

And I think that we're having a hard time figuring out that Sonic sound piece with 10 feet versus six feet. So, and the other part too, is we don't know how long it's gonna last. Right. So we have to, we have to be really smart and we have to be passionate, but we also, you know, we have to keep bridges built, you know, so, you know, I, I don't want to disengage or disillusion people.

Decision makers who we're going to need later on down the road when we asked for additional things. But I also want to balance that with what we need now. Like we, we need marching band next year. Right? And if, if these, if this executive order stays into place all summer, then you know, we've got, we've got barriers that we need to figure out.

So my Virginia friends, it's a call, you know, it's a call to action. We want you to reach out. And we're, we're doing a lot of things behind the scenes. I think that's really important to know is you know, yes, we're doing letter writing and things like that, but we're also working with offices and people in offices to try to, you know, to really try to to influence the work.

**Charlie:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think advocacy right now is just so important. I mean, I, I definitely think about like, like budget, for example, you know there's going to be a lot of school divisions who are going to have a huge budget shortfall going into the next school year because maybe they live in an area or town that was particularly hit hard by all by government shutdowns and, and income is down and they're going to start looking for things to cut, you know, and, you know, I, I've definitely talked with teachers that I know at some smaller, smaller school divisions, and we've just brainstorm a lot of like advocacy ideas.

Like, Hey, like anything you can do to get your program out there right now is going to be good because when the budget hammer comes around, you know, you want to still have a program,

**Annamarie:** Right. And I think Anne and I do, I know,

it's two, three years, but I mean, I think we're going to continue to see this for. I hate to say a decade, but almost feels like, like it's going to take us a long time to recover. It just is

**Charlie:** Oh, absolutely. Yeah. I think about you know, from a, even just a numbers perspective. So typically in a normal year, I have somewhere between 85 and 95 beginning band students in sixth grade out of, out of a total of 200 kids in sixth

**Annamarie:** that's damn good.

No, like 50%.

**Charlie:** Yeah. It's really great. Now I feel great about that. And this year we were at like 65, which, which isn't terrible, little lower than normal, but we, we worked really hard to recruit kids and like we called every single fifth grader on the phone. Like we call their family and we tried to like tell them about band and answer questions and that sort of thing.

So I feel like our numbers went down a little bit. But not too much. Right. So we're, we're able to do a lot of things here. Some of my friends at, at other school divisions who usually have an equal number of beginning band students, a lot of them have like 11 kids in their room right now, you know? Because they were told they were not allowed to do recruitment activities or, or other things.

And you gotta think, man, men there's sixth grade. If you've got a sixth grade band of like, you know, 10 to 20 kids, th that's going to affect the program for the next seven years, you know?

**Annamarie:** Especially if you don't have access points, like if

sixth grade is your only access point. So we've changed that. So in this new middle school schedule, we have tried to build in a beginner class for like seventh and eighth graders, or sometimes the teachers will put set seventh grade beginners in the sixth grade class.

It's still in the infancy and the schedule is still not perfect, but. We, you know, we've never been able to have those access points for kids. So even that is a step in the right direction. And I told my people this year, I'm like, look at, if you get an eighth grader and they want to play something and they have to go in an intermediate or an advanced level class, figure it out.

Like it's a body. Come on.

**Charlie:** oh, absolutely. And I know a lot of school divisions are floating. The idea of doing like a beginning seventh grade, beginning 8th grade band. And actually I do have experience doing that. So my very first middle school band gig the school was structured that way. So we had our sixth grade being band.

And then in seventh grade we had advanced band and then we had seventh grade, beginning band. And I've never seen that before until I got that job. And I was like, man, I how's this going to go. Like, cause in eighth grade there was only one eighth grade band. So the kids who've been playing since sixth grade and the kids who started in seventh grade go into the same eighth grade band.

And I was like, man, I don't know how this is going to work. But what I found was the kids that started in seventh grade progressed way faster than a first year, sixth grader. And, and they were totally fine by the time they got to eighth grade. And I think like, maybe part of it is they knew they were a little behind, like their friends who had been doing it for a year already.

They put a little bit of extra work in, but by the time I got to eighth grade, I couldn't tell the difference who started in sixth and who

**Annamarie:** So it's interesting. Did you start in cause you're a percussionist, right?

I mean, how could I tell? Right. But

**Charlie:** With the giant marimba behind me, right? Yeah.

**Annamarie:** And I like a thousand mallets of that are all like in ROYGBIV

**Charlie:** Yeah.

**Annamarie:** did you start in sixth grade?

**Charlie:** So I have a little bit of a complicated history in sixth grade. I wanted to start percussion, but my band director said I'm only going to take two people on percussion. So I had, so I had to start clarinet, which no offense to clarinet players out there. It just, wasn't my first choice. I really want to do percussion.

So I started on clarinet. I did that until seventh grade and it really wasn't feeling it. And the director was like, well, we need someone to play oboe. So I was like, well, sure. So so I switched playing, oboe and I played oboe until ninth grade. And then in ninth grade, you know, due to marching band, I got to actually join the drum line.

Cause there was no marching oboes. Oh, well now there are, now there's a bunch of people that March oboes but that's another story. So I joined the drum line and I loved it. And then I just kind of slowly switched over to percussion throughout, you know, throughout high school and kind of laid the oboe down.

And I mean I played, I played oboe in the concert band in college just to kind of keep the skills up a little bit.

**Annamarie:** You got to JMU.

**Charlie:** no, I went to Radford.

**Annamarie:** Sorry. No offense meant.

**Charlie:** no that's okay. I get that a lot living in the greater Harrisonburg area.

**Annamarie:** I know, but I try not to do that. I don't know why. I don't know why I thought you were duke. So

**Charlie:** for grad school. So I guess I can start telling people yes to that

**Annamarie:** yes, because you're going to go be a principal, right. Or an art supervisor.

**Charlie:** so, well, that's what I want to do. I want your job essentially. I mean, I don't, I don't know if I'd want to be a principal, although I know that a lot of times you have to do that before you become a supervisor and in some divisions, it kind of depends. But I don't know, like, I, I really like advocating for the arts, so I think that would be really cool to be in a position where you could do that.

I know we need good people in, in the principal role. I think

**Annamarie:** it may not be your jam. It doesn't have to be your jam, Charlie.

**Charlie:** Yeah. So I'm not, yeah, I'm not sure. I mean, well, we'll see what the future holds. We'll see. I'm having an absolute blast in the classroom right now. This is a year 14 for me, and I'm still having a really good time. And so my assistant principal it was actually the former band director at my school, Alan Kirkdorffer

and I remember asking him, you know, when he, he went into ministration and the job came open, I was like, Hey, like why, why are you moving out of the position? I was just wanted to make sure there wasn't something like hideously wrong, you know? It's like, why don't you move out a position? And he was like, you know, I just got really tired of hearing hot cross buns.

**Annamarie:** that's true story. I mean, I get it right.

**Charlie:** And it's more complicated than that, but I thought that was a really funny way to respond to my question.

**Annamarie:** That's funny. Yeah. And it's funny cause one of the questions and you can totally ask me this one, but it's, you know, like. How was leaving the classroom different and like, do you miss it? Like people when I, when I was leaving or when I first left people would be like, did you miss it? And I want to tell you,

like I knew it was not my end game. I had an end game. So, so I actually had, there was a job that was my unicorn job. And. I interviewed applied, got the job. And then I realized it was not my unicorn and I didn't take it.

And sometimes that happens. And you know, so what I've learned, I w I've just learned that along the way. Sometimes you don't get the first job right out of school that you want. Right. Sometimes you gotta do the other thing for a couple years. And, but that doesn't mean that it's not a part of your path.

Right. And that you shouldn't learn and grow from those experiences, how make your, make your worst mistakes right there so that you can go, you know, do whatever it is you want to do. But

Yeah,

I never, so yeah, people would really ask me that at first and it gets annoying after awhile. Like, it really did.

I'm like, well, cause you know, you know, because if you say, oh, of course I wanted to leave the classroom. People think you hate kids. And it's not really about that. You know, like I loved being around kids, like what you, like, you love your job, but I just wanted something and I don't even want to say the word more.

It's not that that wasn't fulfilling, but it, I, I did, I wanted to do other things, you know, and I wanted to make a bigger impact on more people, right. By getting, by buying the tubas. So all those kids could play or making sure that those instruments get repaired and cleaned every year for the next kid.

Somebody's got to do that. Right. So might as well be me.

**Charlie:**  so I did a podcast episode interviewing a couple of band directors who became principals. And I asked them, I was like, why, why would you want to do that? And they both said the exact same thing. They said, I just wanted to increase the impact that I had in the school. You know? So it wasn't, it wasn't like, you know, I, I hate being in the classroom, you know, it was, it was like just a truly heartfelt, like, I feel like I was having an impact in my room and I wanted, it just increased the number of people who I could impact with my decision-making and my service.

And I thought that was a really cool way of looking at it.

**Annamarie:** Yeah. And that is like, you know, I think about that. I would, I would be, you know, serving 6,600 kids in my school every year, but now it's 30,000. Right. And so you just make, you just have different arms. And I also do love working with adults. I think that adult learners are really special and and they need different things, right? Sometimes they don't need anything or sometimes they just need a person to listen and, and give them a you got this, like, you know, and I've learned over the years too, when I, when a teacher calls me and needs advice

I used to go to a place where I think, how can I fix this for them? Right. Like how can I call the principal or do whatever. And now I come from a place of, what do you need from me? Do you need me to coach you? Do you need me to literally call your principal? Or do you want me to give you the strategies to handle on your own?

Right. And teachers are in different places with that too. Right? So sometimes they don't know what they need, but a veteran teacher does, right. A veteran teacher usually knows or we'll figure it out together. So I do, I love that part about working with adults, just like kids.

**Charlie:** thinking about thinking about that and thinking about advocacy. Everyone wanted to ask this question earlier. So I'm glad we're coming back to it. How do you think that teachers can best advocate for their program right now in the climate that we're in? What are some things or some strategies you could give them to advocate for what they're doing?

**Annamarie:** absolutely. So I think the first thing that we recognize is that advocacy is not a one size fits all. It's not, it's not a cookie cutter. What works in Stafford. Isn't going to work in cave Springs, right. Or gloves, you know, it's not going to work in Roanoke because those communities are different. The values are different.

The perception of music or band might be different. So, but I think there are, you know, three or four really important things. The first thing is that relationships are critical. And you know, I can't tell, I, I know you're laughing because you've heard it before because it's the truth. You, and sometimes you.

You have to plant seeds and you're building relationships based on non-musical things, because at some point, like, right, you're making deposits because at some point you're going to need to make a withdrawal. And I, I, I take that language from the infamous and the, and the brilliant Dr. Steve king and John Brewington.

Right. But it's that idea that if you, you have to build relationships, you have to build bridges between you and other people, whether that's your school board members or your principal, or your supervisor at central office, or your superintendent, your parents notice that there are just so many people, right?

There's so many stakeholder groups too. And so those relationships are going to be critical in anything that you do. I would also argue that the relationships that you have with your peers are very important with your colleagues, because, you know, I was an elementary teacher for several years and I taught my own standards.

I taught my own curriculum and I, and I integrated other content areas. Not because I was forced to, but because I know it, I knew it was what was best for kids. Right. But sometimes I would get that grade level teacher who comes to me five minutes before she needs something. Right. And she says, you know, I need a recording of blog.

Well, that was before digital music, my friend. And so I'd have to pull out the CV and, you know, find her what she needed. And, and that silly deposit made a difference a week, a month, a year down the road, right. When I was advocating for an extra five minutes of music class a week for kids. Right. Or whatever it was.

So those deposits are really important. I think two is always when you're advocating, yes. You want to speak articulately and passionately, but you also want to recognize that. Sometimes you're not going to get everything you need and you have to find common ground. So, you know, understanding where your audience, where your the person that you're advocating to is coming from, whether that's you know, the issues with the schedule, which is that's a typical band problem.

And I would say it's a typical music problem, especially the middle school. I just feel like the middle school schedule is, is so fraught with issues across the country, across the state. You know the way I know that in Stafford, for many years, we double blocked math and literacy. So kids got 90 minutes of each, every day, and we're finally undoing that.

But you know, coming at those big issues from places of perspective, so that you're understanding what it is they think they need. Right. So. in my division, they thought that more time meant better results on tests. Right. And so if you know that, then you can tailor your argument. You can tailor your persuasive story, your S you know your discussion around those points, right.

To show them the way that building background knowledge is important. For kids to have a wide variety of experiences in the sciences and social studies and history and the arts and or language and PE, right. Because building background knowledge is a way that we actually make readers to right.

Who, who are understanding and have lived experiences, or at least background knowledge about what they're reading. Sorry. That was a totally got on my soap box, but But anyways, making sure, you know, the perspective of those people that you're trying to persuade is really important. The other I think the other big tool here is to make your program visible.

So the excitement that you generate for your program and your students and your parents being your best advocates there's something to be said for that. So anytime that you have the opportunity to go into the community and perform anytime that you have the opportunity to ask for a small group or the jazz band to play during lunch, like you gotta think of all those little things that might make your program more visible for your stakeholders playing at school board meetings you know, If we're, if you're lucky enough to, to have your school board, you know, members, kids in your program, then sometimes there's a lot of good PR that can come from that.

Also, I know that I know I'm going to shout out to the Sneed brothers down in Powhattan. Cause I know some things that they do really brilliantly are bringing in special guests to conduct, right? So representatives or delegates or community members who are really engaged in civic action or the mayor, or hope high profile folks bringing them in and making them feel a part of your community.

If your principal plays an instrument, right. Inviting them to come play. I mean the kids get a kick out of that, right. Because they have that shared experience with the principal. So any time that you can. Really promote your programs that way and bring people into your program. I think it just builds excitement and you're making those deposits really and building those bridges with the people who make decisions.

**Charlie:** One thing I started doing this year just because I'm like, I have to, I have to advocate to everybody whenever we do one of those, like virtual performance videos, I normally send it to, you know, all the parents and all the students. But this year I've sent it to all the faculty members, all the administrators, all the school board members and all the local papers and news outlets.

So we've been featured in the news, I think two or three times this year, just because I emailed them like, Hey, we're doing this. Like just thought you should know. And they're like, let's come interview you. And I'm like, sweet. Like, you know, and like, Just just sending them. Like, I would have never thought before this year, I'm going to try to get the paper to do something, you know, for, you know, on, on our program,

**Annamarie:** totally. That's so brilliant. I think they're so happy to do it right, because you know, there's so much negativity in the world and sadness, and really there is really nothing more happy than beginning sixth grade band kids playing hot cross buns.

**Charlie:** yeah, it was just, and it's really great for the kids and the parents to see that their hard work. Is is, you know, like what it's doing, especially right now, when team experiences are so few and far between, it's like, Hey, you know, we may be like, last semester we were all virtual, but we still did these performance videos.

And it's like, you know, we can't be together, but this is something that we can do right now. It was just really powerful. This is, yeah. It was really fun to do that. Well,

you've been very generous with your time. I do have a final three questions that I like to ask everybody, but before we get to that, do you feel like there's anything we didn't hit or any other topics you want to talk about?

**Annamarie:**  The idea of leadership is something that's been really interesting to me. And I, I love talking to collegiate students about, you know, being a leader because here's the thing that I think is special.

So, okay. So I was elected as the vmea president. Okay. Big deal. Right. So that doesn't really change the essence of who I am as a human. It just allows me another opportunity to just serve our profession, to serve our amazing teachers and our kids. And I do try to lead by action. Right. So I try and lead by example.

Right. So I try to make sure that when I'm talking to people that I'm building my own bridges and I'm doing that with kindness, but Okay. So I, so I have a position and I, and I guess I have a title. Right. But I think it's so important for people to know that when you're an advocate and, and when you're, when you're making things happen, you're a leader too, and you don't need a title to, to do really positive, really impactful things in your community at the state level.

You know, when you send an email to your state legislator, you're a leader. Dammit. You know, and so I just, if, anytime I talk to people, I just want them to feel inspired to go do, do the work that they are passionate about and to lead in that manner, whether they have, you know, a state title or whether they're the arts supervisor or whether they're just the awesome classroom teacher.

And they've been doing that for 30 years, you know,

**Charlie:** Yeah. I've been thinking a lot about leadership recently because I've been taking the foundations of leadership in school administration classes, you know, and one of the really powerful videos that we watched this week is the instructor asks us, they're like, who, who has a direct impact on the student's education?

And we'd like, discuss it in our groups. And I was like, okay. And so everyone's like, okay, well, definitely like the teachers and maybe the library and all this sort of thing. And then he, like, he showed us his videos, very powerful video. It followed a kid from like the bus stop all the way through their day until they got home.

And they did this scenario twice. They did it once where like every adult that they ran into was like, Very dismissive and like kind of like grouchy towards them from like the cafeteria person to the secretary, to the bus driver. And the kid just was just having like the most awful day. And then they like replayed the whole scenario of like every single person believing they can make an impact on that kid.

And like how much of a difference it made in the kid's day. I know I'm doing a terrible job of describing this, but, you know, and the instructor is, was he's like, look like, yes, the classroom teachers teach the content knowledge, but like everyone who is involved has a direct impact on the children, either in a positive or negative way.

Like everybody has an impact. Everyone that person interacts with has an impact. So I think what you were saying definitely reminds me of that. You know, as far as leadership goes, like leadership doesn't necessarily have to be the principal,

**Annamarie:** no, and I think it's really powerful. So if you ever get the chance to do this shadow kid for a day I have a lot of principal friends and they make it a point every year to shadow students in their schools. Sometimes they are not the kids, not aware that, you know, the principals moving with them first class, the class, and sometimes they are, they go and they sit and they do the kids' schedule the whole day.

And in such an eyeopening experience. And I think too that, you know, I, we have not talked about equity and diversity and so many of the big issues we're trying to tackle right. In the, in society and in our schools. But, you know,

I think that I comes back to me to what you're talking about. There's a really powerful vignette that I read recently in a, in a coaching book about A coach who walked with it w shadowed a student and literally, like he had one adult interaction, but it was an ELL student actually, which is just horrific.

It's horrific that any student would only have one adult interaction, but no adults talk to him really throughout the whole day. And I just think that you're right, every, every human that you come into contact with, you have an opportunity to make a, a positive impact. And I think that's why we become teachers.

Right. I really do so go forth and make, be that positive impact.

**Charlie:** Alright I think that brings us to our final three questions. So question number one, do you have a mentor? Shout out.

**Annamarie:** oh my gosh. I have to tell You I'm not sure that I could just say one. Gosh,

**Charlie:** throw a couple out. If you want to throw a

**Annamarie:** I know, right. I could just start listing so I'll tell you, like, I shouted out Dr. King earlier. John Brewington earlier, of course And just some wonderful people early on in my career as a teacher who I just adore to this day.

And then I'm sure there's a person that I used to work with at the Kennedy center. Her name is Kathy Levin, and Kathy really started me on that arts management kind of kick. And every time I need, I need some advice on a life change, right. I do often go to her to get her perspective. So, but here's, I will say this too.

So this is a long-term answer. So as I get older in my career I recently read that people of a certain age should have a reverse mentor. So I I'm going to give a little. Shout out

to my girl, Sochi Melendez who is a teacher in prince William, because I had asked her recently if she'd help be my reverse mentor so that I could say hip on Instagram and social.

So I think that you're never too old to have a mentor

**Charlie:** Do you have that Tik TOK account

**Annamarie:** I do not, but my husband and I watch a lot of tiktok but I think that, I think what's important too, is that I have a lot of different mentors. So don't think that you only have to have one mentor. I have a lot of different mentors who I go to for different things.

**Charlie:** Fabulous. Okay. Number two, do you have, well, I normally say, do you have a favorite beginning band piece, but given your background, do you have a favorite piece of music, choir, or band at any level?

**Annamarie:** Okay, Charlie, I I've listened to your podcasts, but man, these are hard questions. So I love anything Mahler and I really love the De Mejj of Lord of the rings symphony.

**Charlie:** Ah, yes.

**Annamarie:** have to tell you I've never watched the movie, but I just, Yeah. And I'm a brass player. So that probably is why those make sense.

**Charlie:** Yeah. Mean the, the music that's in the movies is, is good. You know, it's, it's good. Generic, you know, Hollywood stuff, but yeah, I mean this, the sweet, oh, it's so

**Annamarie:** so

**Charlie:** it's been awhile. I think the last time I heard it was when I was playing it in college, actually. So I should really go listen to that

**Annamarie:** I think I'm going to do that this evening when we're finished.

**Charlie:** Yes. It might be how I allow myself to sleep tonight. It's just so good. Okay. And then our final question is name a band director? Who's crushing it right now,

or it could be choir or general music given, given your background, but name, name, a teacher who is crushing it right now.

**Annamarie:**  I have no idea how to answer that question.

**Charlie:** Do you think everyone within your division will think you're playing favorites?

**Annamarie:** oh yes I do. I wasn't even, I can't even take someone in my division. No, I am. I am. Okay. So I am going to go with someone in my division at the risk at the risk of alienating, all of my other fabulous teachers. I'm going to give a shout out to Brian Washington. So Brian has been in Stafford for about 15 years, and last week I got to hear live music again because he and his colleague, Christine Rushmore who's a choir director helps to bring the Quantico brass band down to his school.

And they performed outside for all of the eighth graders. And it was the most joyful part of my year. I think. I mean, just truly, I just was crying and the kids were digging it and the administrators were out there and, you know, the Quantico brass band was just phenomenal, you know, musicianship, but. You know, like he went the extra mile to get those kids a live in school performance in, in a year when it's hard to do anything.

Right. And there were a lot of hoops to jump through and protocols to jump through. So today I'm going to give a shout out to Brian Washington and his colleague, Christine

**Charlie:** all right. Well, thank you so much for coming on the show today.

**Annamarie:** Thanks for having me. I really appreciate it. I love the work that you do. And I just love the work of band directors. I think that I think there's no more fun job than teaching kids, how to make music and I'm just honored to serve.