

Meka Pace: [00:00:00] We may have started it, and we may have set the foundation for what it looks like, but, now, you're understanding that every high school student should be afforded this opportunity to practice a job that they might be interested in.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:16] Welcome to Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. This is Annalies Corbin, chief goddess of the PAST Foundation and your host.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:26] We hear frequently that the global education system is broken. In fact, we spend billions of dollars trying to fix something that's actually not broken at all but rather irrelevant. It's obsolete. A hundred years ago, it functioned fine. So, let's talk about how we reimagine, rethink, and redesign our educational system.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:50] So, welcome to Learning Unboxed. This is Annalies Corbin, your host And I'm very excited today because we are going to talk about the value of internships. This is a topic that in my travels all over the country and around the world, I get asked this question all the time. Schools, and communities, business, and industry are thinking about it. It's top of mind.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:12] So, with that, our guest today, I'm excited to say are Meka Pace, who is the Executive Director and Superintendent of the Metro Schools, as a network. And this network includes Metro Early College High School, Metro Middle School, and the Metro Institute of Technology.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:32] And I've known Meka for a long time now. What? I think since 2006. And in the time that I've known her, one of things I love about Meka is that she's worn many hats, and she wears them well. She's been an intervention coordinator. She's a teacher, Dean of Students, Assistant Principal, and, now, superintendent of a whole school network. So, we're excited to have you here, Meka. Thank you.

Meka Pace: [00:01:54] Thank you. Excited to be here.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:55] And joining Meka today is Vanessa Jester with Turner Construction. She's Workforce Development Manager. And Turner Construction is a partner with Metro, a partner in the community of Columbus. And she spent a lot of her time working around focusing on building and maintaining relationships with industry partners and community-based organizations and entities. So, welcome, Vanessa. We're glad to have you as well.

Vanessa Jester: [00:02:22] Thank you. Glad to be here today.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:23] Excellent. Thank you, ladies. So, just a little bit of context for our listeners, we've had a number of episodes for those of you that have been listening to all of them in order or otherwise. So, you're familiar, generally, with the Metro and Metro Schools because almost every single interview we've done makes reference to Metro because it's the keystone in our community as it relates to STEM. So, it comes up over and over again.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:48] But Meka, I think it would be really, really helpful for our listeners for you to, sort of, set the tone, if you will, about Metro today because our listeners have heard a lot about the origin story, and things, and interactions with business, and industry, and partners over the years. But tell us about Metro right this moment.

Meka Pace: [00:03:06] Sure. So, as you said, you've heard Metro is the first STEM school. Well, yes, but we are so much more than that right now. I think we have just really embraced the definition of STEM in a different way: strategies that engage mind. So, we are looking to take any student that's interested in coming in our environment, giving them an experience that allows them to close gaps where they might have had in learning to accelerate where they're ready. And then, to have an authentic internship experience somewhere in an area of interest.

Meka Pace: [00:03:41] For us, we have just really tried to make sure that we are growing those opportunities for students. And creating two new schools has done that,

but, really, trying to make sure that students that come to us have as many opportunities that we can provide possible.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:01] Yeah, that experience is everything. It's the stuff that kids remember. I had a conversation yesterday, and at the heart of it, it boiled down to there are a lot of things that we don't remember about growing up, but those magical moments that become life altering, they're with us forever. And a lot of that happens when we're young, and it almost never happens in an individual classroom, but in a more expansive environment. So, we appreciate that very much.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:32] So, Vanessa, very briefly, as we start to sort of roll into this conversation, tell me why Turner Construction is so intrigued and interested in what Metro brings to our community from a business and industry lens.

Vanessa Jester: [00:04:46] Well, from a business in industry lens, what Metro brings is innovation. They bring students that are curious. They are willing to work with industry partners to say, "What is it that you need? And how can we develop a curriculum that's tailored to your business needs?" And we were really looking at innovative ways to get back into the community, get back into, not at the college level, but pre-college. How do we change the branding? How do we get the message out there that we need STEM in our industry, in engineering, in construction management? Because in the area of STEM, that's not the first choice.

Vanessa Jester: [00:05:29] And so, partnering with Metro allowed us to get in with the students, do presentations, and then really expand our relationship to allow them to come out to our job sites, to have more engaging relationships, so that they can see what our industry is all about. So, we're really excited about the partnership.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:49] Because kids don't know.

Vanessa Jester: [00:05:51] They don't know.

Annalies Corbin: [00:05:51] And that's what I see every day. Certainly, at PAST, we encounter this over and over again. Kids have no idea. They don't know what they don't know, obviously, right. But they also don't understand how expansive 90% of the career opportunities or industries that out there are. They think it's one thing. And the reality is it's many, many, many things. And so, that's where the value of the way the internship and the partnership, I think, really, really works.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:15] And so, Meka, internships at Metro are not job shadowing. They're very well developed, very, very meaningful. So, as we start the conversation about the ins and outs, the way the partnership works, sort of set the stage for us. Internship at Metro is what?

Meka Pace: [00:06:32] So, it's a real authentic job, right. We want students to be a part of a learning team. So, they are going out into businesses. They become part of a work group where they are responsible for a portion of a job. And they're held accountable to that. Whether it's part of a research study, or whether they are working at Facebook with Turner Construction, they have specific tasks that they're responsible for. And in conversing with their mentors, making sure they're on track, they will be held to the same standard.

Meka Pace: [00:07:07] And so, real authentic experiences for our students. That's what an internship should be. It should be practice for something that you're interested in. Far too often, I think, kids think they know what they want to do. They spend lots of time and lots of money in college studying about what they want to do but never had an opportunity to really try it before studying. And so, that's what this opportunity is. It's the opportunity to connect with the businesses, try it, decide whether, "Yes, I want to further my education in this field or seek a job in this field," or "I'm glad I got through that, and that's not what I want to do."

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:47] And there's as much value in that piece of experience as the student that just comes away saying, "Hey, I love it. I can't wait to do this." And we certainly hear that from the students all the time in the Innovation Lab is that they're moving around, and "What are you working on?" and we get them to sort of tell us. And

you can tell that kids, they all start those internships excited, most of them. Most of them.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:10] And you can sort of tell as you talk to them week after week or just that sort of check in as you're walking by, "Hey, how's that going?" The ones that are like, "I'm really loving this." The ones that are finding out, "This might not be for me." And the value because they'll get to the point where they can even articulate for you why that's not a great fit. And that is so powerful.

Meka Pace: [00:08:29] I think that exposure as well, far too often, you ask kids who are interested in the medical field, you still get the standard answer.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:37] Absolutely.

Meka Pace: [00:08:38] I mean, in 2019, still, "I want to be a doctor," "I want to be a nurse," or maybe an optometrist. But they don't know the expanse of careers that are out there. And so, when you actually are in the field, having those conversations with the folks that are doing the jobs every single day to say, "Well, this is really what I'm interested in. Are there any other segues or connections that I might be able to do?" or "Can I blend these two fields that I'm really interested in into a career at your company?" You don't know that until you get there, and you see what's going on, and you ask those questions.

Annalies Corbin: [00:09:13] Yeah. And I think that for you, Vanessa, how does Turner then approach this problem? How do you help? How do you deconstruct what the field of construction and everything it is to the point that students can wrap their minds, their hands, their brains, their souls, sort of, around what that might be for them? How do you do that?

Vanessa Jester: [00:09:33] So, we hosted our very first intern last year with Metro Schools. And part of the process was really getting -- we started going, and we did a Lunch and Learn. So, through the Lunch and Learn, we did a broad presentation on

what it is in our industry. So, that gave the students a broad perspective of the various positions that we recruit for.

Vanessa Jester: [00:09:53] And then, when we decided to host and intern a student, we did an onboarding process. So, what do you want to get from this experience? So, it's not a general internship where we've already had a notion of what we wanted to deliver and give him that message. We asked him, "What do you want to walk away from this experience?"

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:14] Fabulous.

Vanessa Jester: [00:10:15] "And what can we provide you with to help you make a decision on your post-secondary choice?" And so, Matthew gave us a lot of feedback. We went back, and we designed a program that he was working directly with the field superintendent. He actually had position responsibilities that he came back and contributed to that project. And he was assigned to various field engineers, project managers that gave him exposure on the job. So, that kind of broke it down for him the various positions, what they do. And at the time, he was kind of interested in construction management but not totally all in.

Annalies Corbin: [00:10:59] So, Vanessa, you talked about the student, Matthew, actually doing some research, doing some work, and creating the paper that you've been using. So, tell us a little bit about what that was, and how you're using it today as, and how does it inform what you're doing.

Vanessa Jester: [00:11:14] So, he interviewed the trade partners to ask why is it that you came into the industry, and what made you choose electrician, carpentry, whatever trade they selected to come into our industry.

Vanessa Jester: [00:11:28] And then, he also talked about what is the best way to connect with the younger generation. And what we found out was our approach was not what, most of it, this generation is using. He said, through his research, it was YouTube. So, we're now in the process-

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:50] Absolutely

Vanessa Jester: [00:11:50] ... of feeding messaging and branding to reach out through YouTube. Yes. So, that is one of the techniques that we're using. Also, Matthew, was a bit of a corrective action for us. What can we do for our next-

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:05] Perfect, yeah.

Vanessa Jester: [00:12:05] ... intern to provide more hands-on experience. So, we did use a lot of them, his feedback. He completed a questionnaire for us. And so, we are utilizing that. We did have a more in-depth onboard for this next intern that we have coming from another local high school. So, he was very engaging. He hosted staff meetings. He hosted a full staff meeting, did a presentation-

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:29] I know Matthew. I'm not surprised. And I love that

Vanessa Jester: [00:12:29] ... on his capstone. also, when he completed his senior year internship, Turner did hire him back in the summer.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:40] That's spectacular.

Vanessa Jester: [00:12:42] So, he completed his summer before he interned into his construction management career.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:48] So, it was a win.

Vanessa Jester: [00:12:49] It was a win-win.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:50] It's a win, wow.

Vanessa Jester: [00:12:50] At Kent State. And so, yes. And he is going to return to us this summer.

Annalies Corbin: [00:12:55] That's spectacular. And that just gives me chills, right, in the sense that that is exactly what you want to have happen for these kids. So, Meka, from that sort of internship, and almost all of the internships at Metro, the students participate are that immersive.

Meka Pace: [00:13:10] Oh yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:13:10] I've talked to so many kids, and I've gone to several of the sites with you guys over the years. And there's no question in my mind the kids are just fully immersed in what's happening there. And so, what's the student feedback sort of? I mean, obviously, there's great success that comes from that because stories like Matthew's are somewhat the norm with the kids at Metro. But, really, what are the kids telling you from a student to an administrator, sort of, standpoint as it relates to the program and the value of it for them? What do you hear?

Meka Pace: [00:13:42] So, I think they love it. I mean, that's really the general sense that we get from them. As we said, they don't always see the value in it, especially if they're not having a good experience. But when they can complete that experience, they're able to come back and articulate what they did learn from it and why it was a valuable experience for them, even if they've decided not to go into the field in which they interned. I think they do see it as practices, like, "It's practice for the work that I want to do, or I thought I want to do."

Meka Pace: [00:14:11] I mean, when Vanessa said from Matthew's internship that they were creating, the way that they were reaching out to this next generation was not the way that they thought. Would Turner have gotten to that eventually? Probably. But I think having someone who was in that age group that they're trying to attract to say, "If you're running TV commercials, like we watch everything on Netflix or YouTube, like, how valuable is that?"

Meka Pace: [00:14:38] And then, the ownership that he got to experience, I think that's what our kids feel, like. "I was really a value. And guess what, I did so well that they've

asked me to come back." That's the norm for us. We have kids that continue in their internships through the summer, even when they do choose to go to college, still continuing in that same internship location.

Annalies Corbin: [00:14:59] You do. And it's one of the things that I've always found absolutely remarkable. And part of that is about the community connection. So, one of the reasons that's successful here, because it's not successful everywhere, in part, we have a big vibrant community, we have many business and industry partners, we have multiple institutions of post-secondary options, we have trade schools. So, we have a community that has many options for students.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:25] So, I think we have to recognize for our listeners upfront that this community is conducive to that, but the success of that to actually happen is not the city or the community where you live, it's the partners that are in play, and the lessons that they learn from those experiences.

Annalies Corbin: [00:15:40] So, Vanessa, I would assume that you learned not just from Matthew but from the experience of having Matthew. And it certainly informed what you've done moving forward. But what was hard? Because as we get into the nuts and bolts of this, that's what folks in other communities want to know. What was hard about making that work? I mean, where were the stumbles or the things that you fully recognized, "I want to do them differently," or "This worked so well, we want to bring that back"?

Vanessa Jester: [00:16:04] Well, the part that worked so well, let's start there, was that Matthew came in from Metro very hungry. The Metro school produces very innovative students, pick students that are engaging, and they are out-of-the-box thinkers. So, that, from the start, was very beneficial for Turner because innovation is key in everything that we do. So, the student was very prepared when they came into the internship.

Vanessa Jester: [00:16:33] One of the walkaways from the internship is that when you engage with the student, make sure that you are giving projects that are challenging because what you find is the students can complete a project.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:53] These kids could.

Vanessa Jester: [00:16:54] Yeah. Very impressed by the Metro students. And so, once that was identified very early, our project engineers we're extremely excited. So, they stepped up the game.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:07] Good.

Vanessa Jester: [00:17:07] So, Matthew was very interactive in, actually, day-to-day deliverables that was part of our project. So, it wasn't just he was out there sitting over here. Matthew, actually, within the field, he had deliverables that he had to bring back to the project engineers. He had his own laptop. He had everything. He was engaged just like a day-to-day staffer. So, I think one of the key walkways is don't underestimate a student.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:35] Exactly. And we see that all the time.

Vanessa Jester: [00:17:36] Don't underestimate a student.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:36] Everybody does, right?

Vanessa Jester: [00:17:37] Yes, yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:37] Oftentimes, that's the sort of, I think, one of the first experiences that our industry partners have.

Vanessa Jester: [00:17:46] Yeah. And we quickly identified that we were like, "Okay. That's a done deal." And we stepped it up. And Matthew has been a team player ever since, so.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:55] So, how do you translate that experience? So, it's not just Metro School that you're now going to be doing this internship program. You built and

developed it in partnership with Metro, but, ideally, as many of the industry partners of Metro, expand those programs into others.

Vanessa Jester: [00:18:13] So, we are hosting another intern. And, actually, she is starting this coming Tuesday. But it's key that you onboard and develop a curriculum and an internship that is tailored to that school and that student. So, her expectations were totally different from Matthew's expectations. So, when we did her onboarding, and there's a series of questions that we gave to our new intern, which we learned from our internship with-

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:42] Previously

Meka Pace: [00:18:43] ... Matthew, let's do a more expansive questionnaire prior to coming, so that we can do a more targeted internship. So, her goals are a little different. And so, we did target and create her internship to match what her walkaway goals are. The timing is a little different than Matthew's. And so, she has a different objective. And so, we developed the program to deliver what it is that she definitely wants.

Annalies Corbin: [00:19:10] So, Meka, when you start a conversation with Turner Construction or another new partner, so walk us through just a little bit, what's the onboarding between the school and the business and industry partner before the student even comes into the equation? Because the groundwork that you lay as a partnership is really critical to the student's experience and success. So, what's that look like?

Meka Pace: [00:19:35] So, I think, no matter who the partner is, there has to be a mutually-beneficial relationship that we establish, right. It can't just be Metro needs internship applications for our students. We have to get back to, "You have a need in your business. And guess what, we have students that can fulfill that need."

Meka Pace: [00:19:59] I also think we also have to allow them to understand that though our students are not in college or even the age of 18, because that's one of the barriers that we commonly see, that our students are equipped to do the work that they

are presenting to them. So, walking them through what our curriculum looks like, walking them through what mastery is, so that students can do the jobs that they're presenting today. They've gone through all of the math courses, they've gone through their English classes. And, certainly, if it's so nitty-gritty into a particular field, they may not have the vocabulary to understand, and there's some supports that are necessary there.

Meka Pace: [00:20:46] But really matching the skills of the student to the internship placement. We try very hard to do that. And so, I do think, though, coming back to it, like any partnership that's interested, it's about how can we help each other out and make sure that you're getting some value out of this relationship as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:08] Right. So, it just comes back to that idea of just being upfront about what your needs are, "I'm going to get this. You're going to get this. This is what I need. This is what you need," right. And right from the get go, sort of, set that.

Meka Pace: [00:21:18] Yeah, and not letting the typical barriers stop us. I know that lots of places have this age 18 cuff, right. And I keep saying, "Well, where is that written in policy? Where is that? And if you push hard enough, sometimes, they'll say, "It's not really written. It's just always been that way." It's my personal goal when that's come up to push and to continue to push because I do think that we have 16-year-olds who are ready for some of the work that's out there. So, yeah, not accepting the no.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:50] Yes, absolutely. And, also, helping folks, to your point, to really sort of think about where boundaries came from to begin with because that's certainly one that is artificial. And I get that question all the time when I'm asked about internships, and I use the example of Metro frequently. And there is this artificial notion that that is, in fact, the rule, and those boundaries were just created. Those boundaries, even if they're real, can be uncreated. They can be changed, right. Because I'm sure that you had to sort of walk through that as well in the construction field. So, how is it that the Matthew and the new intern that's getting ready to start is going to be able to be all over your company all over sites? Matthew was out in the field.

Vanessa Jester: [00:22:34] Matthew was out on the field, and Matthew was 18. And so, that is one of the boundaries that, unfortunately, in the field of construction, if they're going to be out in the field that we do have to adhere to. However, internships that are in our Turner office or not directly on this site on a day-to-day basis, we can definitely host in those type of internships in the office.

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:58] So, you find the workarounds that are meaningful, so you can continue on with the work that you want to do together?

Vanessa Jester: [00:23:03] Exactly, exactly.

Meka Pace: [00:23:04] We're still working on Turner with that 18.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:06] Yeah, we're still working on

Meka Pace: [00:23:08] We're still working on it.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:08] Yeah, but you're going to get it on to Meka.

Vanessa Jester: [00:23:11] I am, I am.

Annalies Corbin: [00:23:11] I have complete faith on that, as a matter of fact. Let's talk a little bit about how we get kids broadly to see the breadth and depth of career opportunity. So, one of things you said, Vanessa, very early on in our conversation is it's not just about the fact that we're going to build something. This industry, as a whole, has so many different components to it. So, the reality of it is, how do we get a student intrigued who maybe wants to go down the road of marketing, or maybe wants to go down the road of engineering, or maybe wants to go down the road of electrical processing, or maybe somebody as a technical writer, right? And how do we help students generally understand how diverse career opportunity truly is in almost any industry? And so, how do you think about those things? And I'll just let either one of you jump in because it's tough. That's a complex question. We wrestle with it every day, but it's a really, really important one.

Meka Pace: [00:24:08] So, I think it goes back to exposure and education. The more that we can put diverse careers in front of the students for them to ask those questions, for them to see and experience, the more knowledge they gain about the different careers. I think, on our end, as an educational institution, right, we also have to educate our our parents. And that's a tough one because when you say construction to them, there is a mindset, and there's an image that comes with that.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:38] As with manufacturing, right?

Meka Pace: [00:24:40] It is.

Annalies Corbin: [00:24:40] We have the same problem with the kids in the manufacturing pathways, yeah.

Meka Pace: [00:24:43] It is. And so, getting them to understand the changes that have occurred and the breadth of opportunity and jobs. You can be an engineer and worked for Turner Construction. You can work in CAD and work at Turner Construction. There are all of these different facets of it that parents don't know about. And so, we also have to -- we find ourselves having to educate them as well because they're the ones that, ultimately, are convincing the kids about college pathways or career pathways as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:13] And it was a tough lift. And then, some industries, it's a harder lift than others because there's so much that's misunderstood.

Vanessa Jester: [00:25:20] Well, for construction, it's a total rebranding of what we do. And so, that is why Turner felt it very beneficial or important to hire a person directly in a workforce position, so that there is someone totally dedicated to that. So, I am in the schools, at least, once - sometimes, two times a week - delivering that message from A to Z, all of the opportunities that we have in our industry.

Vanessa Jester: [00:25:48] We participate in various expos. Actually, tomorrow, we'll be at the STEM Expo with our team out there educating and giving different

demonstrations, so that the youth know that there are various options. So, that is what I do on a continual basis out there, trying to change the perception, and what do we have to offer in our industry. And, actually, outside of construction, that's what's needed. It's a full all-out marketing effort to say, "This is what's out there."

Meka Pace: [00:26:22] I think our first interaction with Turner was a couple of engineers that came in, and they looked like they were 20 something, and they came in to work with the middle school students on some design that they were doing. And when they had the title, Turner Construction, kind of got the looks, we said, "Yeah, they work in the construction field." But even for our middle school students, it was a new experience for them as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:46] It was. Yeah. No, absolutely. We had Turner Construction at the Innovation Lab last summer working with our workforce development pilot with kids in foster care. And it was a wonderful experience because folks from Turner doing many different types of jobs came in and had lunch with our kids. It was as simple as that, but that was really meaningful because the kids had the opportunity to see people who look and sound like them, who have similar experiences to them that they could identify, having some one-on-one opportunity. And those are very diverse groups of students.

Vanessa Jester: [00:27:19] That was a very nice day. I was actually there. I brought the Turner team out. And I was just sharing with Meka one of the individuals in the audience that -- I mean at the lunch that day just graduated yesterday from [crosstalk].

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:33] Yes, all right.

Vanessa Jester: [00:27:33] So, yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:33] Congratulations. So, it was very exciting.

Vanessa Jester: [00:27:37] Very exciting. And he was there taking pictures, very interactive and engaged with the engineers that he could relate to. And when he saw that, it was something that he immediately gravitated and said, "I can do that."

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:52] He did.

Vanessa Jester: [00:27:53] "That can be me."

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:53] And for, at least, two weeks after this lunch -- and again, something very, very simple, but, to your point, it's because the students understand all the different careers. And what I loved about that experience is the people that came with you that day to talk about what they did, it was a really diverse group of job sets. And so, the kids could see, "Wow, it's not just nails and hammers," what I might think of traditionally in construction, or it's not just backhoes, it's welding, it's engineering, it's marketing. It's a great thing. And for two weeks, he talked nonstop about, "But maybe I could do X, or maybe I could do Y." He would go through the litany of things that he heard. And with the staff talking about, "Well, what do you think about that?" and asking questions. It's good.

Meka Pace: [00:28:37] That is wonderful.

Vanessa Jester: [00:28:37] Another part of the luncheon was they didn't only talk about construction. They went down a path of personal commitment and personal challenges that they could really relate to. So, it was really a dialogue than a presentation.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:56] And it was great because in this case, these kids bounced around a lot. It's an unfortunate circumstance of kids in foster care, but it was one of the realities of it. And so, the other thing that was nice about it is they had multiple interactions, right. And so, it didn't feel quite so bouncing around for the summer. So, that was really good.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:13] So, Meka, what happens next with this type of internship partnerships? And how do you then leverage what's happened with Turner (A), a to

have more kids participate, and it's a work in progress, and difficult to meet all those different pieces, but how does it become something that, ultimately, impacts a large group of students? How do you scale? How do you scale internship?

Meka Pace: [00:29:40] So, I think we have -- I'll take you back to the work that we were doing with Howard Green. All of the internship placements that we have secured kind of get housed somewhere. And then, for the summer, other kids in other districts get to use them, right. And so, I think once you establish that particular relationship, all it takes is that one yes, and you get that trusting relationship that says, "Hey, I'm going to give it a chance," then you can use that experience to the next company to say, "So-and-so took this intern. They can write something. They can email. They had a wonderful experience with that. Would you be willing to give it a try?"

Meka Pace: [00:30:22] And so, at times it feels like it's company-by-company-by-company that we each has to go and build that opportunity for the students, but we're finding here in the last couple of years that we have companies that are actually now starting to come to us because they've heard about this internship that a kid did with a friend, or they've heard that Metro had interns at Turner, or at OSU, Wexler, or wherever they might have been. And so, they're now coming to us and saying, "Hey, we have an internship already established at our company. Would you be interested in sending kids there?" And I'm like, "Yes, that is the land that we've been looking for," because that's where you see that mutual relationship coming.

Meka Pace: [00:31:07] We're able to help each other out, and that's really how you scale it. It's not just the one-off Metro school that's experiencing this. We may have started it, and we may have set the foundation for what it looks like, but, now, you're understanding that every high school student should be afforded this opportunity to practice a job that they might be interested in. So, we're trying to pull in more kids from other districts, as well as those companies are also, now, going to those districts and saying, "Hey, we've got these internships. Do you have any kids that might be interested in participating?" whether it's a summer internship or whether it's something that's part of the school year.

Annalies Corbin: [00:31:46] Right, right. And we see more and more kids able because of that great experience with those partners, as Mika alluded to earlier, who are going back for that summer like Matthew did or even going back after they graduated because they did an internship. I know that we have one of the Metro kids that worked and did a summer programming last summer who's not coming back to us this summer because his internship offered him a position in the summer, and that-

Meka Pace: [00:32:17] Nice.

Annalies Corbin: [00:32:17] And that's the win, right? That's a huge win. So, Vanessa, how does scale look for Turner Construction? How is it that you -- because, ultimately -- I want to be really cautious here for our listeners, right. Scale does not mean tons and tons of kids coming through all the time. Be really careful about what skill means, right. And so, it's going to be different for everyone. And the reality of it is, oftentimes, scale means consistency, and opportunity, and working with schools or others. So, roughly, what do you think for -- in the short term, what does that look like for Turner? What's manageable? Because I think that's the other thing that the industry partners want to know, what's manageable?

Vanessa Jester: [00:32:58] Well, for Turner, and as it should be for any other industry partner, is what can we manage to make that bad internship meaningful?

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:08] Exactly.

Vanessa Jester: [00:33:08] Because we don't want to say, "Oh, let's set at doing five next year," and then the outcome is not very meaningful to the intern at all. And how can we really engage with that intern and make them prepared for the workforce, give them the experience that they value? So, for Turner, we've identified that we're going to do, at least, two per year. And then, that way, we can really engage with the student and provide the wraparound services that they need because, truly, when it is their first interaction with an employer, you have to have the time dedicated to that student, so that they have a valuable and meaningful experience because they come in at different levels.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:52] They do.

Vanessa Jester: [00:33:53] They will come in at different levels as you reach out to the various schools, and school districts, and things of that nature. Also, from a Turner perspective, we value the experience so much that our General Manager and Vice President, Brian Mooney, did a call to action at the State of STEM.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:12] Yeah, I was there.

Vanessa Jester: [00:34:13] So, it's a call to action to say, "Hey, this isn't just a Turner initiative. We need for our corporate partners to step up, onboard these bright young students, so that they can be exposed to what your industry does because it's not just the construction need. It's a full industry need across the board on all industries." So, we would like to be a leader, carry the torch, get some good interns that can be examples for Metro, so that we can say, "This is how it's done. And this is how we expand." Also, Meka didn't mention that they are very intentful about formulating. They have a business advisory board.

Meka Pace: [00:34:57] Yeah. That's actually what I was going to say. All right, yeah.

Vanessa Jester: [00:34:59] You can take it from here. And so, it's very focused on how do we make this work.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:04] So, leave us with that Meka.

Meka Pace: [00:35:06] So, the Business Advisory Committee really pulls together just from construction to some of electrical firms. Just, really, I think we took who was interested. So, even State Auto is on there. Chase is on there. But really, I think, we have the last couple of months tried to focus on what are the kids bringing to the table, and then what prospective mentees need to also be bringing to the table because it's great to have the companies engaged, but it's not the company that's hosting the kid. It's actually an adult who's there who is going to be responsible for that student while

they're in that environment. And so, how do you decide who the mentees are -- I'm sorry, the mentors are? How do you train them? What do they need to know and be able to do in order to host these students?

Meka Pace: [00:35:58] And so, having that protocol kind of take some of the scariness out of those. One of the big things I said was, "I'm going to have a kid following me around all day? I don't like it." "No, no. That's not what this is about." So, helping to develop that protocol for them, and then future companies. It's been great. I mean, Turner has done a great job in leading this task, this force for us. And so, we are just really excited about this new wave of internship opportunities for our students.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:30] That's wonderful. And the students benefit so much, as well as our community. So, ladies, thank you so very much for taking time out of your day to join us, have this conversation, and I appreciate it very much.

Vanessa Jester: [00:36:42] Thank you for the opportunity.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:43] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:36:46] Thank you for joining us for Learning Unboxed, a conversation about teaching, learning, and the future of work. I want to thank my guests and encourage you all to be part of the conversation. Meet me on social media, @AnnaliesCorbin, and join me next time as we stand up, step back, and lean in to reimagine education.