



Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:00:00] More than 50% are graduating with honors, not just from high school. They've taken college classes. So, they're graduating with honors from high school with college credits. And so, that's just a major accomplishment. It's just to see their parents, and then they're just so proud of what they've done, and that they have this drive to continue on, and become who they want to be.

Annalies Corbin: [00:00:25] 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: [00:00:36] 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: [00:01:00] Welcome to today's episode of Learning Unboxed. We are going to have a conversation today with four guests from Alaska. Here today to talk with us about Middle College Programs, and why middle college is so important, so effective, and what we need to know as others contemplate the possibility of launching middle colleges of their own.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:24] So, I'm very excited today to welcome our guests. With us today is Dr. Claudia Lampman, who is the Vice Provost of Student Success and a Professor of Psychology at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Universe of Alaska Anchorage is the host institution, if you will, for the Alaska Middle College efforts across the state. So, we're very excited to have Claudia.

Annalies Corbin: [00:01:48] Joining Claudia today is, also, Luke Almon, who is the principal of the Anchorage Middle College School. Also, former English teacher and all-around individual involved in the day-to-day operations tied to the Anchorage Middle College effort.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:07] Also joining us is Greg Giauque, who's a principal teacher of the Mat-Su Middle College Program, which is just outside of Anchorage and is the longest-running Middle College in the Alaska effort.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:22] And finally, joining us today is Holly Martinson. Dr. Martinson is an Assistant Professor at the WWAMI School of Medical Education and the Chair of the Middle College Programs within the UAA effort and system. And so, I want to thank all of you for joining us today. So, welcome.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:02:40] Thank you.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:02:41] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:02:41] Excellent. As we get started here today, Claudia, I would like to start with you if we could. So, could you give our listeners, who are coming from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and opportunities, the 70,000-foot overview of what the heck is a middle college and why does UAA want to be part of this effort.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:03:06] Sure, yes. I'm coming from a faculty background at the University of Alaska Anchorage. And, now, Vice Provost for Student Success. I can tell you that at UAA, we have a long history of having secondary students commingle on our campus. We've had hundreds of them every year. And I've taught many, many of them in the 27 years I've been at UAA very successfully.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:03:34] So, the Middle College Program here formalized that process. And as far as student success goes, I can think of almost no better students success initiative for members of our community than something like a Middle College, where students are able to get their feet wet, get a jumpstart on their college education, with the promise of almost up to two years of a college credit while they're still in high school, at no cost to them.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:04:13] There really is no better initiative, I think, for the generation of students who are coming into college now. These are one of the most financially-needy generations in history, in terms of their ability to pay for college, and their families' ability to pay for college. So, this is an amazing opportunity for students who are ready to take that step when they're in 11th or 12th grade. And from all accounts, they are performing really, really well. So, this is a win for the university, and it's a win for our community.

Annalies Corbin: [00:04:52] Right. And it's a different experience, a little bit than an early college effort. And for many of our listeners, we talk frequently about some early college component, but there are some key differences between a middle college and an early college. And Greg, if we could turn to you quickly because the Mat-Su Middle College, when it wasn't originally called the Mat-Su Middle College School, but could you give us just a very brief overview of how that program started and when? And then, we're going to circle back around and talk a little bit about the differences between the middle college and early college experience. So, Greg, how did this first effort in Alaska come to be?

Greg Giauque: [00:05:41] So, originally, the middle college concept was born through the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Gene Stone, nine years ago. And his vision was to allow students, not only to take college classes, but to fully integrate in college. And the program began on the Eagle River campus. Basically, a small community campus where students were on campus, fully-integrated in classes. And if there were classes that weren't offered on that campus, they could take them elsewhere. But the importance was having them in that location, and building a little bit of an effort into community with the students, as well as having some smaller class sizes, smaller staff.

Greg Giauque: [00:06:27] As the program evolved over time, we put in place some of the, I guess, checks, and balances, and policies to help the students become more successful, that we'll talk about a little bit later.

Annalies Corbin: [00:06:41] Right. And so, the other thing with a middle college is -- and so, Luke, you can also jump in on this as well, but from that K12 perspective, these ultimately get set up as

schools. So, they're degree-granting. So, when your students leave either the Anchorage School District or, in this case, the Mat-Su School District,

actually, what does their diplomas say? Because that's one of the questions that I get all the time so. So, what's on that diploma?

Luke Almon: [00:07:10] Ours will simply say Alaska Middle College School, and it has been a little bit confusing for some people, and they seem to get hung up on the word "middle" and somehow misconstrue it with middle school. So, we do a little bit of explaining that it's actually a legitimate college credit that they're leaving with. And so, yeah, ours just says Alaska Middle College School.

Annalies Corbin: [00:07:33] And so, they've earned the high school diploma from the school district, in the case, Luke, of your district, Anchorage School District, represented by the structure of that middle college program. But then, they also walk away with actual credits, in this case, from the University of Alaska Anchorage tied to that. Correct?

Luke Almon: [00:07:54] Correct. And just the way Alaska State law works, if they're receiving a degree, or they've got enough academic credits to be the equivalent of a degree, they apply for that after graduation because they have to have obtained a diploma before they can receive a degree.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:10] Correct. So, they have to have that high school diploma in hand before a post-secondary. The State of Alaska is allowed to issue them that credential. Correct?

Greg Giauque: [00:08:19] Correct. And we have about 15 students right now who could, theoretically, get their associates if they wanted to if they weren't continuing toward a bachelors.

Annalies Corbin: [00:08:27] Right. So, Holly, let's turn to you really quickly and help us set the stage because as Greg indicated, about six to eight years ago, as what became the Mat-Su Middle College School got started, and then within a few years an effort took hold in and around neighboring districts to expand the idea of middle college. And that's really that space where then, UAA, as that postsecondary institution, has to come in and

start thinking about leveraging coordinating, I guess, maybe is the best way to think about this, and maybe that's indicative of the title that you hear you have within the university setting as chair of the middle college programs at UAA. So, what's the university's role as the convener in this effort.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:09:18] So, as somebody who's stepped in about two years ago, I was really -- I was a first-generation college student. I was really interested in helping students find ways, so that they could easily transition high school into college. And so, I became involved in the middle college program to help bridge that transition and encourage more students to enroll in the middle college program.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:09:41] And, also, from the university perspective, how we could expand the middle college program to, not just Mat-Su and the Anchorage School District, but other school districts that we are connected with in and around Alaska. The University of Alaska Anchorage has multiple community campuses located throughout South Central Alaska. And so, our goal was to engage those community campuses and their local school districts on thinking about developing middle college programs. And one of the first middle college programs for colleges and school districts that we started to engage was Kodiak. And that's Kodiak College and Kodiak Island Borough School District.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:10:24] And so, that was one of the parts of my role was to look at how we could expand these programs and really provide more opportunities for students that maybe never thought that they would be going to college, or like me as a first generation college student, not really sure how or what I would be doing. And so, I think the middle college really provides that structure and helps decrease the cost and time for students to attain their degree. And so, really providing them with more opportunities and to feel like they can complete college, rather than just thinking of college as, possibly, this barrier that they don't know how to overcome.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:06] And that's a big deal for the university system as a whole. So, Claudia, as we think about the work that Holly and her team are engaged in, having conversations in other communities about bringing middle college on, from the

university perspective, there has been lots and lots of chatter internally, as there always are. As I travel the world having these conversations or engaged in these projects, we see a lot of the same things that happen. And so, it's not uncommon at the post-secondary level for faculty, at the beginning of these conversations, to be a little bit concerned.

Annalies Corbin: [00:11:48] To your point, you've had high school students in and on the campus at University Alaska Anchorage for decades successfully. So, as an institution, it's not a huge lift. But, sometimes, culturally, as it relates to the institution of our practitioners, it can be a bit of a lift. And I know that our listeners would appreciate hearing from you a little bit about, how do you engage your faculty to say, "Let's do this thing, so that you can, then, be successful in the local school district and community"?

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:12:21] Sure, yeah. I think there, definitely, are some growing pains when an institution first starts a formal program. I think one of the things that really helped with some of those growing pains, those sort of grumbles from faculty about whether or not a student who is 16 years old is emotionally ready to be in college and socially ready to be in college.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:12:52] And one of the things that I do think helped our faculty here was showing them the data that we really have had high school students successfully taking courses on our college all along for the entire 27 years I've been at UAA, and that they have successfully taught those students previously. It just wasn't as part of a formal program. So, I think that that really did help faculty to see, "Oh, yes, I've had these students in my classes all along. I just didn't know it."

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:13:27] I think the issue of social and emotional maturity, one of the other things that really helped there is to talk about how high school students are performing in courses. And from the data that I've seen from middle college students and high school students who have been at the University of Alaska Anchorage previously, these students are not just doing okay. They're doing better than the average student. They're performing better. They have higher GPAs.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:14:00] And part of that might be because they are coming in more prepared than the average student at UAA. Whatever the case, I think having those conversations with faculty helped. It helped them to hear that students are being successful in college classroom, and that they are performing academically where they need to be, and that they really haven't been a lot of cases where a student's emotional or social maturity has been an issue.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:14:36] I think it'll take some time to have the program on the campus for several years or more for that stuff to, sort of, go away and for faculty to realize that these are just UAA students, and they have every right to be here and deserve to be here if they are academically ready to be in courses, which they are. And I think it will sort itself out over time. But, I think, actually, the transition has been fairly smooth, given that this is still a really young program on the Anchorage

campus. And I think, the few bumps in the road that we experienced early on were expected and fairly normal under the circumstances.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:15:39] And just as an anecdote, I remember, we held a panel discussion that that Luke, and Holly, and Annalies, you participated in on campus for faculty and others on campus to learn about middle college. And I remember one of the faculty members saying, "Oh well. I had a student crying in the hallway," or something like that. And the truth is in 27 years of teaching, I've had a lot of students-

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:06] Exactly, there's a lot.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:16:06] ... crying in school. So, I think, there just, sometimes, needs to be that reality check. But overall, I think, it's going well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:16:18] Yeah. And I think that just for the sake of helping our listeners, one of the things that's really intriguing to me, and for full transparency, I have been involved in working with all of you and helping out with some of the scale of the existing Alaska Middle College Program over the last year or so, which has given me the opportunity to really look inside and see what you, as Alaska, have been doing and what the attributes of the success of the program are because, back to Claudia's point, it has been very successful. And the data is actually demonstrating that these students are doing well and that they are, in fact, succeeding.

Annalies Corbin: [00:17:01] And part of that, Greg, I want to turn to you, having been involved in a program that's been around and has had numerous classes of students complete the middle college program over the years, it's not just that it's good that the students are holding their own, in many respects, the students are outperforming freshmen in many ways. And so, part of that, I would argue is tied to the support structure that you put in and around these students. Can you speak to that just for a moment, Greg, in terms of why you think your students are being successful?

Greg Giauque: [00:17:37] We really strive to improve all the time, and we have a scaffold support structure. We start with an orientation week. We're always looking to improve and make orientation week relevant. And then, we have seminar courses that students are enrolled in for this first time in either Math or we're English. And then, we have an academic preparation policy that we follow. We're not afraid to let students fail, but we also will react accordingly if that happens and help them climb out of that failure and see success again.

Greg Giauque: [00:18:17] And I really think that that is -- I think that's the big difference. When a student fails, and they're on their own, and they're living on their own for the first time, you know what, it's a hard reality to face. And if there's not somebody there helping them through that, they give up, and they move on in a different direction. Our students, we see that, we let them fail, let them get a little dirty, we dusted off, and we send them back down the track. And I really believe that that's why our students are as successful as they are.

Annalies Corbin: [00:18:49] Right. And so, Luke being in the big district, if you will, in Alaska, in Anchorage, so I assume you see some of the same things. It's a newer program, but it's steep in the foundations of existing program. And so, can you speak just a little bit about the student support? And in a large district, how do you ensure maximum number of students opt in or, at least, have the option to opt in? Because that's one of the big national conversations that happens about all of these early-access programs is, how do we ensure (A), that they're equitable, that we're providing opportunity for students, and that it's not just our natural high-flyers because our natural high-flyers are predisposed to want to do these things, but how do we get to those other students? How do we accomplish that?

Luke Almon: [00:19:38] So, one thing we did in the early spring was send an email to every single high school sophomore, and junior, and their parents in the entire Anchorage School District. And so, theoretically, as long as the student had an email address or a parent had an email address on file, they were given my contact information, a brief overview of the program, the web links. They would need to fill out an application if they wanted to, as well as kind of a timeline for when that's needed to be done. That seemed to work pretty well this year, especially in terms of just clarifying what the middle college program is based on what the perception might have been.

Luke Almon: [00:20:18] And then, we've also visited counseling department meetings. So, all counseling department chairs in the Anchorage School District meet monthly, and they're really our liaisons in each larger building within the Anchorage School District. So, all eight of the department chairs would be present. We have ongoing conversations with them. We also reach out to them by email proactively when we know we have application deadlines coming up to see who they might have in mind because they're, oftentimes, the chief recommender as part of our application process.

Luke Almon: [00:20:53] And then, kind of the next steps is we're trying to get out into the community in some more non-traditional environments where we can share that information. We did have an opportunity at a local church, for instance, that was just hosting an event about training and education, broadly speaking. And so, we sent information to that about just kind of our school profile, what we offer, what it looks like to try to reach those different communities. And in the past, we've also worked with other just community agencies that often deal with kids who might be first-generation college students, and then encourage them to apply as well.

Annalies Corbin: [00:21:31] All right. And so, then, as you think about from the university perspective, Holly, growing the programs, one of the things that you've been

working on is ensuring that as these students come to middle college from Anchorage, from Mat-Su eventually, from Kodiak, or some of the other community campus locations and affiliated school districts, how do you think about, as an institution, helping these students find their way?

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:00] Because as a parent, for example, and I'm a parent of a student in an early college, very similar, part of my interest, and I assume the interests of lots of parents out there who encouraging or supporting students to go into these programs is, "Hey, this is really awesome because," as Claudia pointed out, "it's two years are up to two years of college that are taken care of."

Annalies Corbin: [00:22:23] So, it's one thing to sort of balance the parental aspiration, "Hey, let's get this paid for." And it's another to balance the student's creativity, their passion, really helping students find the appropriate path. And so, some of the work that you're engaged with university is figuring out how we create these multiple pathways of student experience opportunity and impact. So, how do you do that from a university perspective to ensure that these students coming from Anchorage or Mat-Su have programs to experience?

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:22:56] I think that that's a very, very good question. So, I think, as a 16-year-old walking into a college class, they might not necessarily know exactly where they want to go, or what they want to do, or what career field they want to go into. They may have discovered in eighth grade that they really like science, kind of like I did, and that was something that they knew they want to do. But from my experience, I know students have to be engaged and sort of explore before they actually know where they want to go.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:23:30] And so, one of the things that we want to do with the middle college program is help those students explore and kind of identify areas that they'd be really interested in.

And, I think, colleges across the United States are really looking at developing ways to have students, sort of, experience what it would be like or talk to somebody who's in a particular career field, so that they have kind of an understanding of what they would be going into, what would this look like. So, instead of

graduating from college and finding out, let's figure that out earlier, sort of, the first year that you're in there.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:24:05] And so, some of the ideas that we've been playing around with are looking at incorporating into the middle college's career exploration and understanding how the academic knowledge that you're learning in your classroom can, then, be exchanged for the career setting. And all this information that we're going to be gaining over these four years, you'll eventually be using in your career. And so, having that early understanding, I think, is really important for students.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:24:34] And so, some of the ideas that we've been talking about is engaging with alumni. So, people that have actually gone through these programs, and engaging with them, and talking to them about how they're using their knowledge, and sort of what was your experience like going through college. So, I think that's something that really helped me is talking to people and learning from their past experiences.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:24:55] So, that's one of the things that we're looking at with students, but also just having the opportunity for students to kind of explore earlier on and look at different career pathways and big topics like health, and engineering, and education. And there's so many different areas. Like in health, there's hundreds of different programs, and opportunities, and different career paths that students can go into. So, they need to really have that understanding or a time to dive deep into what would this look like or what would I be doing. And so, those are some of the kind of programs that we're interested in developing at all the middle college sites in Alaska.

Annalies Corbin: [00:25:35] And that's certainly one of the things that I see consistently is that when provided the opportunity for students to try things that they not just never had the experience or the exposure to but didn't even know existed is a powerful experience for students. And it does, in fact, impact the way they think about their next opportunity or their next piece of their journey in life.

Annalies Corbin: [00:26:00] I was very fortunate when I was on the ground a few weeks ago in Alaska to talk with a few of the students at the Mat-Su Middle College School. And, consistently, the students that I was chatting with - and Greg could certainly echo this - they are the greatest ambassadors for this program. One, those kids talked about how they gained so much experience and exposure just from having participated. And I assume, Greg, that you see that consistently by natural default. These are the kids that have opted in. They want to be there. But you're also fostering experience along the way by pushing these kids outside of their traditional comfort zone. I did hear the kids talk about that a little bit. So, how do you ensure that, Greg, as you move kids successfully through this program?

Greg Giauque: [00:26:56] Totally. Every student's different. And, sometimes, it's just a bit of a challenge. And I will say one thing, we consistently encourage us to put themselves out there. And we also let them know that, at any point in time, if they decide that the program is not what they wanted or not what they expected that they're able to return back to their home high school.

Greg Giauque: [00:27:20] And having that safety net is really an important piece for students to be willing to go ahead and step out in this role and take on the challenges of a college experience. Knowing that, "You know what, if I don't quite make it or if I'm not quite ready," that they're able to go

back to their home high school. We see that quite frequently in a very small percentage, maybe 4%, %3% of our student population. Overwhelmingly, 70% of our population increases the amount of credits that they can take over a semester.

Annalies Corbin: [00:27:58] Yeah. And we see that consistently nationally as well that the students who actually stick, so to speak, for a whole host of reasons, that that experience is one that is a powerful one.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:09] Claudia, as the university wrestles with scope and scale, because that is exactly what's happened as the Anchorage program moved on to main campus at the university, and suddenly, now, you have this swell of students that are not just on the periphery at the satellite campuses, this middle college idea, but now

actually on main campus, quite frankly, in everybody's face, so to speak. How do you think about university thought and positioning as it relates to ensuring that these students are successful as they move through the program? That's one piece of my question.

Annalies Corbin: [00:28:49] And the second piece of the question is, how do we ensure that multiple students through a variety of experiences can benefit from Middle College? There's this perceived notion that it's only for the highest achievers, which is not the case, and that it's only really high-structured, academic pathways, that it's not about career tech, it's not about the arts, that it's not about micro credentialing or micro majors, it's about these big full-blown things. And the reality is middle college can be all of those things in one form or another. So, how do you address those concerns from the outside?

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:29:29] Yeah. Okay. So, there was a lot in that question.

Annalies Corbin: [00:29:31] Sorry. I get really excited sometimes.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:29:33] A couple of things that came to mind is we really need to have excellent advising on the university side and counseling on the high school side that work together to make sure that we're customizing this experience for each student.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:29:53] So, one of the things we've been spending a lot of time on the UAA campus doing is working out our first-year academic pathways for students. And the University of Alaska Anchorage is interesting in that we, in the state, don't have a community college system. So, students come to us at every possible level of preparation. And our middle college students, yes, they're testing into either Writing or Math at the college level, but they are coming to us, like all of our students, at different levels of preparation and with different levels of interest.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:30:28] And I think one of the greatest opportunities of the middle college program is that we can sit the student down and talk to them and their

families about, "What are your goals right now? And what are your goals in the future?" And customize a plan for them that will help them meet their high school requirements but, also, start to explore for their future. And being on a large campus in Anchorage, that gives students even more opportunities to explore because we offer a thousand different undergraduate sections every semester, courses, every semester. So, there's a lot to choose from, everything ranging from a pathway in Industry and Technical Education, to Business, to Engineering, to Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:31:18] So, there's every possibility here. And I think our job is to provide advising, well-coordinated academic advising, well-coordinated with the high school counseling to

make sure that the student is checking their boxes for high school but, also, getting to explore at the college level.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:31:42] And as the parent of two students who took advantage of early college, my son and daughter both started here at our university when they were 15 years old, one of the things that that opened up for them is the possibility of double majoring, even triple majoring, or minoring, getting some of those micro credentials because when you start college early, you can get some of those basic requirements out of the way, and then open yourself up to more possibilities.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:32:21] And I think the student today, that's more important than ever to be able to work on different kinds of levels of credentialing. Picking up a minor, or picking up a certificate, an occupational endorsement along the way is something that can help them get a job while they're in school.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:32:45] And I think getting that head start on college while you're still in high school, figuring out how to do the work before you're 100% immersed in that world, will allow you to learn how to juggle well and learn how to expose yourself to lots of different opportunities that might not be there if you only have the funding, basically, for one four-year degree. So, I think it's really an amazing program, as long as we provide students with the best advice that we can give them about what those options are and how to explore those options through the middle college.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:36] Right. And just to be clear for our listeners, the structure in Alaska is that the collegiate credit in middle college is paid for and funded by the school districts, the K12 district. Is that correct, Luke and Greg? Either one of you can jump in here.

Greg Giauque: [00:33:57] Yes.

Annalies Corbin: [00:33:58] Yeah. And that's-

Greg Giauque: [00:33:58] It's important.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:00] And that's a big deal, right? That's the short answer, right? It is convoluted, and it's complex. There's lots of negotiation going on. And we don't need to get into the weeds of that. But the reality of it is that from a financial standpoint, from the family perspective, it's value-add, in that sense.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:34:18] Absolutely.

Greg Giauque: [00:34:19] Absolutely.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:19] Yeah. Luke, how do you -- one of the one of the questions that I get all the time is about the difference between early college and middle college. And it's a very gray area to explain the difference. The short version difference of the two of them is that an early college is restructure to the entire school or school district tied to it is changing where and how students earn high school credits, so that the majority of students can earn collegiate credit before they leave there. That's the basic definition of early college.

Annalies Corbin: [00:34:51] A middle college a little bit different in the sense that the district itself doesn't necessarily have to restructure, but there's still an expectation or responsibility of the district's part to ensure students' readiness as it relates to middle college.

Annalies Corbin: [00:35:05] So, coming out of the big district in the state, so how is the school district thinking about and managing that opportunity expectation? Maybe that's the best way to put it. How do you ensure student readiness across a broad diverse group of students rather than just your natural high-flyers? How do you do that?

Luke Almon: [00:35:27] Right. I think what we've tried to do thus far is to define what preparation actually looks like, both academically and socially, for a student who would be interested in coming here because we know it's a balance of those two sets of traits that will make them successful. And so, just based on kind of some internal analysis, we can give students as early, really, as 7th or 8th grade an idea of what the Math and Writing pathway should kind of look like, within reason of what the Anchorage School District offers. I think it's just early awareness about what needs to get done before they get here is probably a motivating factor in and of itself.

Luke Almon: [00:36:12] I think one area that certainly could probably use a little bit of work is just the kind of writing preparation students are getting. I mean, coming out of a writing and teaching background, I know that many high school English courses are heavily focused on literature. And I mean that I think is traditional for a lot of high schools. And while there is writing with that, it's not exactly the type of writing that most students are going to have to do in that first composition course once they get here.

Luke Almon: [00:36:41] And, of course, our advisory teachers on the English and the Humanities side are able to kind of teach directly to that course and give the kids the kind of support they need to be able to develop that skill, but that's just kind of one area where I think reaching back for middle school. And then, as they're transitioning into high school, making sure that writing is kind of a primary focus within the English, History, and other Humanities courses is a real key to them being successful in those early classes, especially that are reading and writing-heavy.

Annalies Corbin: [00:37:12] And we see that consistently across post-secondary and post-secondary experience and the same applies. Greg, I know that you spend your teacher time within the back to middle college school in the Math and Science space and see a lot of similar experiences and opportunities with a student. But those are

those foundational skills that are going to ensure that they're successful both in college and in career. So-

Greg Giauque: [00:37:37] One thing, I think, that in the State that we can do a little better job on is K-20 curricular alignment. For students who are wanting a middle college experience, Luke touched on the academic writing. We see that. That's our biggest hurdle. And then, our second hurdle, interestingly enough, is the physical sciences, chemistry in particular, as a prerequisite for certain courses.

Greg Giauque: [00:38:02] And as a sophomore in our district, it's not necessarily a prerequisite to have had chemistry. So, some of those things. Those are some of those challenges that we face. As well as certain courses that don't necessarily have a curricular pairing, so that they're getting both high school and college credit for it. And with a small staff, Luke faces it as well, we're challenged, at times, to meet graduation requirements, as well as giving those students as much choice on the college side as possible.

Annalies Corbin: [00:38:35] Yeah. And so, just for clarification for our listeners, in Alaska, you participate in dual enrollment, concurrent enrollment, just college courses, just high school courses. And so, there's a variety of ways that students have access to and need to, to be able to fulfill the variety requirements to get you from point A to point B.

Greg Giauque: [00:38:57] Yeah, absolutely. And for your listeners, our school district is the size of the State of Delaware. We have schools that are K12 with 40 kids. And then, we have our larger comprehensive high schools with over a thousand. So, we are very diverse in that. And to have one policy that meets everyone's needs is a challenge. So, when that happens, of course, we have policies, and we have curriculum that is a little more broad, and open, and which, at times, for our students who are incoming into college, they can challenge a bit depending on where they've come from.

Annalies Corbin: [00:39:38] Right. And it is. And it's a very complex thing to wrestle with in the single largest state in our union. Geography is real in Alaska. It's real

everywhere, but I don't think that people truly understand the meaning of geography until you you get to Alaska. And to your point, you recognize that you have such a broad diversity of opportunity, experience, culture. The state is so incredibly diverse. And so, you're wrestling with a lot of things.

Annalies Corbin: [00:40:15] Being mindful of everybody's time, just very quickly, as we do a final wrap here. Holly, so for folks out there thinking about doing this, young faculty new at their universities, and someone says, "Hey, we're thinking about doing this middle college thing," what's your best advice?

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:40:35] My advice is that you have to be passionate. For me, this is a passion of mine is to make students successful and to allow them to become whoever they want to be. And I think, by having this college experience, students really get a step up early in high school. And then, knowing that they're capable of completing a college class will encourage them to make the transition and go to college because they understand what a college course is, they understand the value in college, and they understand how it's to help them become more successful in whatever they want to do.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:41:13] So, I think having that passion of helping students. I mean, working in a school district or at a university, I think, we're all passionate about helping students. But, really, these students can transform their lives by having this experience. And so, I think that this is an extremely valuable program for any school district that wants to take on this challenge. There are a lot of people out there that have done it for you, so you can learn. But there's also -- every school district, and every college, and community college is unique.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:41:48] And so, understanding and getting support from within and, also, establishing a partnership. I think that's, really, the big component is establishing a partnership that's going to be successful between a school district and a college. And I think that partnership is really what drives the program because it's not just a school district, it's not just the college, it's really working together to help the students become successful.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:42:15] So, I think anybody should do it. And it's very valuable and knowing that these students are going to be successful. And that going to this honor ceremony last Friday, more than 50% are graduating with honors, not just from high school, but they've taken college classes. So, they're graduating from honors from high school with college credit. And so, that's just a major accomplishment. It's just to see their parents, and then they're just so proud of what they've done, and that they have this drive to continue on and become who they want to be.

Annalies Corbin: [00:42:51] It's a great life experience regardless of what they do with it, right. So, Luke, from you, any last thoughts that you would leave with folks contemplating doing this?

Luke Almon: [00:43:00] Yeah, I think I'd echo what Holly said about just coordination and good partnership because, I think, in the early stages, you really do have to figure out what classes are students going to be taking, how are those going to count on a college transcript and high school transcript because it's probably rarely perfect that the college offerings are just automatically going to fill graduation requirements. And any state is going to have some idiosyncrasies. I mean, ours happen to be Alaska Studies and some others that kids would normally take early in their high school career but not all have. And so, every kid is not approaching from equivalent backgrounds.

Luke Almon: [00:43:37] And then, the other part, I think, for universities is that it's -- I mean, my understanding of it is it's just a good investment because you have kids coming to the university who have just a little bit of additional support, so that by the time they're released by their school district support, they're much more confident, and also much more likely to get through their four-year degree because they've seen it early and not been completely cast off without any support to get them through those, especially the first six weeks they're here, it's really important it is.

Annalies Corbin: [00:44:09] It is. There is nothing like a freshman, absolutely, a freshmen experience. Greg, what would you add to that?

Greg Giauque: [00:44:14] I would say don't be afraid to do it. And I think there's one thing I love about my job is there's never a dull moment, lots of decisions. The challenge of making two systems work together is like nothing else in the world. And you work with amazing people, and you get to see a different aspect of the world. And, ultimately, it's what's best for kids. And every day, when I come to work, I'm excited. So, yeah, I'm doing good things where students, it's nice, as a high school teacher, they bring me chocolates once in a while

Annalies Corbin: [00:44:51] It does. It makes it makes a wonderful, right? So, Claudia, we're going to close with you because you're wrangling all of this. And so, just to be really clear, for our listeners, University of Alaska Anchorage's middle college endeavor is multiple partnerships. So, as we close, thinking about this partnership pieces, multiple school districts, looking to scale, that's a complex endeavor. So, what do you leave our listeners with?

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:45:26] Wow, yeah. So, I think that the answer to a lot of questions that I get asked is really important, intentional communication and messaging is key. And I think that, oftentimes, these things just sort of pop up and happen on campus. And, sometimes, that's just the way it is. But I think that it's really, really important to pay attention to the relationship, not just between the K12 partner and the university partner, but involving key people on campus in the decision making and creation of these programs, I think, can avoid some potential problems down the line.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:46:17] So, having some faculty members, staff members from both sides involved in the decision making and planning, and just really strong communication and problem solving because there will be problems. I think, you just need to be prepared to troubleshoot. But this is a truly worthwhile endeavor. This is a student success initiative that help all involved. It's beneficial to our students, it's beneficial to our community. It's beneficial to the university, and to the K12 partner. So, I think it's a it's a super worthwhile endeavor.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:47:03] I'd encourage people to go after it. We do know K12 and higher ed, there is a bit of a disconnect, as others have mentioned in terms of

preparation. And I think this helps us start to bridge that, and to talk to one another, and work with one another, so that we are doing the best for all of our students, not just the ones who can do middle college. Those partnerships are absolutely key to the students' success in our communities.

Annalies Corbin: [00:47:37] It definitely forces partnerships, and institutions, and systems to think about how they align or they realign. And so, for that, that alone, it's a very valuable endeavor. So, I want to thank all of you very much for making time in your day to share your experience about middle college with all of us.

Annalies Corbin: [00:48:00] For our listeners, we will post resources as always associated with the podcast. So, if you have questions or want to reach out, please join us in the conversation. We look forward to more. So, thank you so much.

Dr. Claudia Lampman: [00:48:13] My pleasure.

Dr. Holly Martinson: [00:48:14] Thank you.

Luke Almon: [00:48:15] Thank you.

Annalies Corbin: [00:48:20] 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.