

Ep #391: How School Pulse is Keeping Students Safe Year-Round with Iuri Melo



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Angela Kelly

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A quick heads-up before we begin: This episode discusses sensitive topics, including crisis situations. Please listen with care.

Hello, Empowered Principals. Welcome to episode 391.

Welcome to *The Empowered Principal® Podcast*, a not so typical educational resource that will teach you how to gain control of your career and get emotionally fit to lead your school and your life with joy by refining your most powerful tool, your mind. Here's your host certified life coach Angela Kelly.

Angela Kelly: Well, hello, my empowered principals. Happy Tuesday and welcome to this week's podcast. I have a very special guest with me today. You're going to love this conversation. I am so eager to share this with you and to discuss this topic with you. This is not a service that I knew was on the planet, which is why I love podcasting so much. I meet people through the podcast and we get to collaborate and connect and then we get to share all of the greatness with you.

So, today with me, I have Iuri Melo. He is the founder of School Pulse. We met via the podcast. I think they found the podcast. They reached out and here we are. We had the best meet and greet. It was just this week, but I feel like we're already connected. We are already coming up with ideas to collaborate because this is about how we can best serve you and your students. So, Iuri, welcome to the podcast.

Iuri Melo: Man, I am so happy. I'm hyped. I'm ready to go.

Angela: Yeah, let's do this. Let's do this. I know, I'm hyped too.

Iuri: Of course, let's go.

Angela: All right. So, I'm going to turn it over to you. Could you please introduce yourself to the listeners and tell them a little bit about who you are and what you do in the field of education.

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Iuri: Yeah, I love it. So yeah, my name is Iuri Melo. I'm a licensed clinical social worker. Really first thing, I'm a married man. I'm a father. I've got five incredible kids and two of them out of the house, actually in education themselves, one in special ed and then the other one in elementary education and a senior that's about to graduate, another one that's just out of high school as well, and then a 14-year-old girl who just absolutely loves to torment us and make fun of us. It's really fun.

But as a social worker, my work experience has been in therapy. I've had a private clinic for the last 20 years. I still have it. I still do work there, but the last seven years have really been spent developing what I feel is just the most extraordinary kind of student wellness service in the country. All the way from providing schools with email campaigns, text-based support, restorative practice, student success activities. Our goal is to just enhance the protective factors of students, but also to just help students make awesome decisions that will bring joy to them.

And we'll, I'm sure we'll talk a little bit more about this too, but we're really just functioning under this wonderful assumption that when we're happier, right? When we feel better, when we're more optimistic and hopeful, we're just smarter. We really are. We make better decisions, we're smarter, we're more creative, we retain information better, our scores improve. And so our goal is to just do that, you know, whether it's in small ways or kind of as a nice system that schools can implement effortlessly. Anyways, that's probably more than you want to know right away, but I love what we do. If you want, I'll actually share a little bit about how school pulse came to be.

We really started about seven years ago down here in my community. So I'm in Southern Utah, about an hour and 45 minutes away from Las Vegas. You guys are probably familiar with that. It's this really beautiful high desert oasis style place, like just surrounded by national parks that are just world renowned. And honestly, the best way I can describe St. George, which is where I live, is just this really idyllic place. Like, it's just gorgeous. It's

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beautiful. And we have about five high schools in my community and in 2017, we had seven students that died by suicide in our community. And it was like a shock.

And I think as other principals and administrators or even superintendents have noticed, right, it sometimes, unfortunately, right, there's this kind of momentum. And once it begins, it kind of rolls and it actually rolled throughout the entire state. I mean, we had a school up towards Salt Lake City, I mean, they had like six or seven suicides just in one school. It was an odd year.

Angela: So painful.

Iuri: Yeah. And one of the local principals here who is a good friend of mine, because I had published a couple of books and had done some kind of assemblies at schools and other events, and so he reached out to me. He had lost two students to suicide. And in fact, my kids were going to that school at that time. He reached out to me and just said, man, I feel like all I really have at my disposal are just reactive tools. Like I don't feel like I have anything that's proactively going out to the student trying to mitigate, trying to protect, trying to find a way to improve the wellness of students. In fact, I just feel like we're just kind of waiting for crisis to happen and then we just become very reactive, right?

Angela: Yes.

Iuri: And there's value in that too, right? This is not to say that there isn't, but I think often times we're quick to go to the crisis management instead of that earlier, right, upstream type prevention. And that was really the beginning. We kind of started these conversations. Later on, I roped in my good friend who was software engineer genius. And he suggested, hey, why don't we start to proactively engage with students via text? Because, you know, we were talking about, should we create some new resources? Like what should we do?

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And that was kind of how we started. It was totally innovative and we started to reach out towards students. Later on, we added real live support. So we were proactively engaged students via text and then providing live professionals and trained para-professionals. And the outcomes, I was telling you, Angela, like I'm telling you, they're just like Nobel Prize winning conversations all the way from wonderful things, right? Students just enjoying life and doing well and being successful. And of course, students who are struggling, right?

Their parents are in the midst of a divorce. They've lost a loved one or they're actively self-harming or dealing with suicidal ideation or with school shootings. I mean, all of those things or reporting physical or sexual assault, like those are things that we've just been involved in and have successfully been able to connect those lovely students to parents, to professionals at the school. It's just awesome. So that's probably more than you want, but that's a little bit about me and we love what we do. We love what we do.

Angela: Yes. It feels like a gift from the heavens. I know as a former school leader, our children, our students, their safety and mental and emotional well-being, their psychological well-being is always of top of mind. And it's on our watch that we ensure their safety, whether it's physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, socially. And we also know that with a school of 300, 500, 1,000, 2,000, multiple thousands of students, that one person or a small team of administrators cannot with 100% certainty, and no one can, but we can't guarantee that we are always on top of everything or even know to be on top of everything.

And unfortunately, students will take matters into their own hands at times when they feel that desperation and they feel hopeless and they don't feel there's an out. And I'm just curious to know how this came about for you. So that when you're thinking like, there's all of these tragedies happening within our student population here right here in our community where my

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own children attend school and we're the goal is to stop, you know, to deter, to prevent as many unfortunate situations like this as possible. So how did that go from the tragedies into this incredible service that you're now providing for schools?

Iuri: Yeah, I'm really glad you said it and I think even putting those numbers as you were talking about like in a school of a thousand, so this school that where we kind of initially began, right, about 1200 students. I mean, they've gone up and down a little bit. But even if you were to look at, I mean, at the most recent CDC data, I mean, like we're talking like one in three, and this is actually girls, like one in three girls last year seriously considered suicide last year. I mean, so if you were to put that within that thousand number, like that percentage, right? Close to 30%. And then you've got about 60% of students who reported feeling persistently sad throughout the year. And these numbers are like 60% increase, right? I think post COVID numbers.

But and then of course, we can talk about like rates of anxiety. I mean, who have kind of gone through the, I think the book *Anxious Generation*, I think has done a really wonderful job, I think, kind of looking at that topic and looking at some of the causation behind that. Fabulous book. If your principals haven't had a chance to read it, I think you'll find it highly valuable, not just within the confines of your school, but even in your personal homes as well. I've certainly benefited from it as well.

But really, that's really where it came to be. Like we wanted to, and I think our original focus when we first started, right, was to do two things. Number one, is we wanted to proactively engage students and deliver, right, at their doorstep, right, where they were over text. Like it's not a, it's not an application, some a place where there would be less barrier, like no usernames, no passwords, students literally just opt into their service simply by just scanning that, right? I mean, they scan that and literally a message shows up on their text that just says, hey, welcome to school pulse. And at that time, that student is literally connected to a team of

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professionals for 365 days a year from 8:00 AM to midnight, through the school, through the summer, after school.

And our job, I think initially, we were really focused kind of on that suicide prevention, right? Trying to address the risk, right? The risk of the incredible fallout, right? In a community, in a school community. And of course, like you said to the principals, like I remember meeting with this principal and he was just like in anguish, not just because he had lost two students, but then the pressure from the community was tremendous for him and parents, you know, trying to figure out like, you know, who knew about it, who saw it, who had heard about it, like why didn't we do more, right?

And so we really became as that kind of small service really targeting individual students, but then as we became, as we started to get to know principals, superintendents and other members of the administration throughout the country, we realized that we could actually, in addition to providing that live support to individual students, we actually expanded that service actually to include parents as well.

We are definitely believers in developing parents as well, but also providing some really awesome school-based tools. Once again, and this part is really important, it kind of speaks to our overall philosophy of just being, I know that our eyes naturally turn towards the risk factors, right? How depressed kids are, how anxious they are, how antisocial they are, how they're less involved, they're they feel like they don't care.

There's kind of this general malaise that I actually had a conversation with a counselor yesterday and a teacher who said, that's the thing because I was asking them, what are some of the factors that you're seeing? What are some of the problems that we could solve for you? And that's what they said is I feel like students just they don't care. And that's probably not a new thing. I feel like we probably go through bouts of that and I certainly did as a teenager as well, but it seems to be that they're speaking of kind of an increase of that, right? They're more withdrawn internally or into their phone

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a little bit as well, more withdrawn from society, less engaged and less caring or disconnected from whatever is happening at their school.

And so with that in mind, right, as part of these conversations, we really tied into psychologically speaking, theoretically speaking to kind of positive psychology concepts. Of course, the growth mindset psychology, which is, I mean, pretty much been adopted kind of into the educational system. And then of course, cognitive strategies, which is kind of the golden standard. I mean, it has been for the last while. I mean, certainly the evidence would seem to point to successes there.

And so we create these proactive, text-based, email-based, in-school based proactive and intervention style initiatives that can help, I think, bring some peace of mind and potentially even some liability protection. I remember talking to a superintendent who was going through a lawsuit. He was being sued by the parents of this student who had taken their life and they were kind of being sued for the wrongful death. And I think they ended up settling out of court.

But one of the things that he told me was, man, Iuri, I wish I had school posts in my pocket when I was walking into that classroom. Like, I wish we had this proactive engagement that we could lean into and say like, hey, like we are, we are going above and beyond, like, in our ability to not just address risk, but to build the protective factors that could ultimately, right, prevent, yeah, that could prevent students from actually arriving at those points. So, anyways, it's really been a fascinating, I feel like I'm quite the outsider coming into the educational world. I had to learn the language, right, and all the acronyms, right, it was quite the adventure, quite the adventure.

Angela: Yes.

Iuri: It's still is. But honestly, it's been incredibly exciting. It's been challenging too, if I could be honest. I think I can only imagine how, you

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know, the amount of principles that I know that walk around with a couple of cell phones, right? You know, who have like 400 unread messages on their email. I mean, just the bombardment that comes to them.

And so we just want to come in and serve them and not burden them with just one more thing, right? That they're going to bring and try to launch and try to move and so we want to provide solutions that they can touch once and not touch again. They're true plug and play and that provide real value and real data too, real data that they can utilize to inform their own interventions. And so, anyways, that was a lot.

Angela: No, that was perfect. And I'm glad that you mentioned this because my, I was a site principal and a district leader, and one of the things that we know to be true in the field of education is that there is too much to do and not enough time. There are so many things that we are responsible for overseeing and managing and navigating that what I love about what you offer is that it expands a school leader's bandwidth. It expands your capacity to feel that you're providing safety measures, that you're providing mental health, that you're providing emotional support, that you're providing guidance and counseling.

You know, I had one part-time school counselor. They were also in training. They weren't actually a certified counselor. They were, you know, the young men and women and people who were studying to be counselors. Those were who we were assigned. And that one that poor person just learning the business of their profession while navigating 550 students and their needs and their families' needs. That's insufficient. Of course, there's no way one person can do that job.

And the school principal or the district administrators feel responsible for that. So what you're saying is like, we have in time, real pulse interaction, engagement with students, checking in with them, how they're feeling today, what their thoughts are today, what their emotional state is today. And knowing that as a principal, there's just such a level of relief associated

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with knowing that it's not just me having to know where my kids are and check in on all 500 of them. It's knowing we have a team approach to this with experts who are on the line and trained specifically to know what to do and say in, you know, a crisis situation or in a situation that might be leaning towards crisis.

Iuri: And it's always challenging and I think you and I may have touched on this a little bit before too, but it's really challenging to measure prevention, right? And I think that's why our eyes turn towards intervention immediately, right?

In fact, I find that I find that sometimes when things begin to happen, I think people's first response, number one, is assessment, and so they'll spend money in assessment, they'll spend money in awareness, and then they'll go straight to intervention. I feel like there's this place, and maybe it's because it is a little bit harder to measure, right? You know, it's challenging to measure the success of prevention. But I think the data points to it very clearly.

And so when I talk about like, I mean, we've had hundreds of interventions with students, right? I mean, who report like that they're actively suicidal, I'm done, I'm going to KMS, right? And we're literally, you know, jumping onto the line, providing support, providing resources, connecting them to parents, connecting them to professionals. And it's really extraordinary because I and I think I told you this too, and I want to be practical and pragmatic here. Like we have been 100% successful in that. As far as we know, but I realize, right, that regardless of our best efforts, right, and this is the same as me, like as a therapist in my community, like I have had clients who have taken their life by suicide. And so I realize that is an occurrence.

I just want to highlight the fact that our ability to just engage, your ability to give your students an enthusiastic, gentle, kind voice is life saving. And I know that's so simple, right? Like a kind response, a kind word, a gentle place. Like is incredibly healing and not just healing, but deescalating. The

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fact that a student pops on and utters those words or texts those words, that in and of itself is a therapeutic, he is entering a therapeutic place and actually that action in and of itself deescalates the situation, which is why our tool is so powerful is because we're not just waiting for crisis to happen. We're proactively engaging students.

And I would say that about 85% of our engagement with students happens as a response to our proactive texting. So we still have 15% of students who will come and just jump on like on so our texts go out Tuesday and Friday proactively to the students. You know, and we'll have students who will pop on Monday and talk about this or on Wednesday and Thursday.

But the large majority happen when we tap them on the shoulder and say, hey, check this out like or hey, what do you think about this or hey, how are you feeling today? Or how are you feeling about the culture at your school? And then the student responds and then conversations ensue with live people, not AI, by the way. But so that part is kind of essential.

Angela: Yeah. Well, there is, there is something about human to human connection. We talked about this on the meet and greet where, you know, there is an energy associated with knowing that there's a real human who's listening to you with compassion and empathy and understanding and care and genuine concern on the other end of that text. And that's what makes this so magical is you've been able to expand your own company's bandwidth to be able to provide that service with real human beings on the other line there. And I think that is one of the reasons that this has been so successful.

And we did talk about this. We talked about it's difficult to and schools do this all the time. We respond with intervention because you can measure it. How many kids are in intervention? How many students have received intervention? How long have they been in intervention? What types of intervention? But what we're not doing is, you know, like it's harder to measure, what are teachers naturally doing in their classroom when a

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situation comes up, right, that tier one level, it's hard to measure that because the teachers are doing it based on their wisdom and their knowledge and their experience and their expertise, they're navigating and deflecting or deescalating or responding to and scaffolding for students in ways that we don't see on paper or the computer screen.

So this is such a proactive measure. I just, as you were speaking, some questions came up for me and I'm a. If I'm listening to this, these are the questions I would want Angela to ask. So, can you tell us like what a typical interaction would look like? Like, let's say you proactively reach out and then a student responds and they're, they're not, yay, life is great and you're like, good, thumbs up, you're going. Let's say they jump in and I'm not doing great or I'm not feeling well or I'm struggling and whatever words they would use like, what would an interaction look like as an example?

Iuri: I love that. Yeah, we have a obviously a pretty strict protocol, right? I think anytime we enter the life of a minor, right? I mean, there we have some really specific, I mean, even federal restrictions in place, obviously to protect children and protect ourselves, but just to give you an idea, at the end of December, in Wisconsin, there was a school shooting there. I think it was in a middle school, there was a shoot, the student who came in, who was unwell, unfortunately, and there was a shooting that took place and I think some children died as a result of that.

And I know it's going to sound a little fantastic, but I'm just telling you, like this is what happened. That same day, in another school in Wisconsin, whom we happen to participate with, who we have a wonderful collaboration with, there was a student who came on and as we had kind of a relationship with this student, like we had lots of engagement and interactions with the student.

And the student came forward and said that they were having some homicidal ideation as well. And so obviously, the first thing that we do, I mean, obviously, we're there for the student, we're caring for that student,

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we're providing that student with resources, we're providing them a space where they can talk about this because once again, right, what we talk about, we can begin to control what we don't talk about controls us in a sense, right?

And so providing that space is essential toward the de-escalation, but what we were doing on the other side is we were connecting that student to the administration and the school counselors at the school, which we were able to do. And then though that administration and counseling was able to then connect that student to the parents. And so, I mean, that's just one example. I mean, there are others.

There was a student who came forward and told us that they were being sexually assaulted by a member of the faculty as well. And we were able to converse with that student and connect them and guide them into that counselor's office. I often talk about the walk from a hallway into the counselor's office is a very difficult walk for students. It's just challenging for them. Most students don't do it, won't do it.

And part because the student, the counselor is there, like they're part of the community and of course, there's a benefit to that, but there's also a nervousness and an anxiety to that and sometimes students just don't want to do it. And so our ability, right, to gather that student's identification number, give that to that counselor, and then have them initiate and we were able to intervene with that as well. In addition to countless others, right, who have either dealt with the loss of students at their school who needed support just grieving or other students who were having suicidal ideation and that we were able to intervene directly, connect them to the services at the school and then have them be connected to their parents.

And in fact, just this last week, we had another one that was remarkable. A dear student who actually had graduated, they would, I mean, they were just graduating, but they came on and said, hey, I'm really worried about a good friend of mine. The last few conversations, in fact, they had kind of

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had an argument and during that argument, that friend of theirs had kind of just flippantly said or was using a lot of suicidal ideation type talk and they were just really concerned. They were a middle school, junior high student, their friend was.

And so they reached out to us and said, hey, like I'm really concerned. I've got a friend that is kind of saying this, what should I do? And they've also reported that they were being hit at home, like and so we were able to immediately connect to that counselor, who actually then communicated with this other counselor at the junior high, who we were not in, but we were able to connect to that school and then intervene directly with that student. So we really just have, I mean, they're just phenomenal stories. And this is just with our text-based support, right, where we are proactively providing some prevention, but also intervening directly with students.

But then you talk about your counselors too, and I have to talk about them because in a sense, that's kind of where I come from a little bit, right? I come more from the clinical side. And schools, I think you even mentioned this, Angela, is schools are kind of becoming these, they're not treatment facilities and it's important I think for schools to know their boundaries as well.

But they are dealing, right, I mean, with a significant amount of students who are dealing with mental health type issues, whether it be persistent sadness or suicidal ideation or anxiety. And ultimately this all lands on a teacher's doorstep, right, on the administrator's doorstep and they have to deal with it.

And so what we provide, the tools we provide for administrators and counselors are awesome because in a way, they kind of become the mental health hub in a sense. And that's not what they're trained to do, and I totally get that. And I don't expect them to become trained in that, but what we want to provide for them are real-time tools that they can give, that they can push to parents, that they can give to students, that don't require any

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training on their part, but that provide them with the most comprehensive mental health resource for teens in the country and actual tools. So, so that's what we're there to do.

And I think you've said it well, right? We just want to come in and amplify, right, and multiply, right? We can see the burnout, we can see that principals are at times drowning and doing the very best that they can. And we just want to come and multiply their efforts in a way that doesn't add. We're not coming in there like surgically trying to modify everything. We just want to come in and provide real tools now, right, that will amplify their work.

Angela: Just listening to those stories made me feel like if I were a site leader or a district leader, I feel like I've just been able to expand my staff. Like that the staffing, I might not have the budget for five support members on our actual team, but if I can provide the service, if I can use this service, I have expanded by five or 10 or 20 where we don't have the capacity to house that many professionals to support us.

And I will say, I do want to say something else. So one, I can just feel how this feels like it expands your staffing. But two, you are spot on. Now, I'm a coach for school leaders. I'm a life and leadership coach. I help them navigate mental, emotional, physical demands of this job and really navigate the business that we're in, which is human development. We are in the business of human development.

We're developing young humans, we're developing the adult humans on campus because we are all in a continuous state of development, right? And so my job is to help those school leaders expand their capacity and to empower them to do their job to the best of their capacity and live a fulfilling life while they're, you know, running an exceptional school and having an exceptional life.

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So that's my job. And their job, they see that it is so massive that it can feel overwhelming, which creates the, you know, I get they get in the overwhelm cycle and then they get burned out. This provides one piece of the puzzle for them. And it's a piece of the puzzle that I feel like none of us were trained in. This is why a lot of educators leave. I wasn't trained for this. I don't know how to do this. This is beyond my capacity of expertise, of knowledge. And teaching has changed, people will say, or I this is not what I signed up for. I hear this a lot in my work.

And you're absolutely right. We aren't trained and yet we're expected to handle these types of - and I know, and I do have a question around this. I do understand like we're not trained to handle these life-threatening crises such as, you know, suicide or homicidal ideation. Definitely not. But do you also get the text that's like, hey, I'm just having trouble with my, I don't like this teacher or I don't like school or I'm having trouble with a friend. So they're not necessarily life-threatening issues, but they're that kind of tip more typical teenager or pre-teen frustration with school, a friend, a classroom, a teacher or content area. Do you have those types of kind of what I would call everyday issues that you help kids navigate?

Iuri: Oh, Angela, I'm so happy. Yeah. I would say that's the large majority, right? The large majority, I mean, beyond the positive texts, right, which is actually really important as well, right, when students come in and they tell us about the positive things happening in their lives, right, expressing happiness amplifies happiness, sharing happiness amplifies it, which once again is kind of our positive psychology piece, right? That's what we want to do.

But you're absolutely right. Like the large majority of the issues particularly that are expressed by students, number one, of course, is friendships and relationships, right? I mean, that's like top, right? Students are constantly talking about whether it's a relationship with peers or friends or being left

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out or feeling like they're lonely or they've just broke up and what should they do or should they break up?

And of course, we're really there to be supportive. We're not there to take the role of a parent. And one of the first things that I want to make sure that I express here, because we have the utmost respect for parents and their role, is always, hey, have you spoken to your parent about this? Like, is this something that you've told that you've shared with them that you've asked them about? And we can provide tools. We can actually drop our incredible videos that I'll share with you that are free to everyone right on that text chat. Like, hey, give this a go, give this a listen, watch this. Tell me what your thoughts are about it. And kids do, like they'll watch it, they'll talk about it.

But yeah, the large majority of the conversations that we have are about that. Like I'm falling behind, I'm overwhelmed, I'm late for work. This is a waste of time. Why am I even here? I got in trouble again. I got caught for smoking weed in the bathroom or for vaping. So I mean, these are smaller problems, right? We're not just dealing in crisis.

Once again, I always tell people like we're not a crisis line. We're really a positive psychology service. Like that's what we do. We also happen to deal with crisis because once kids realize like, hey, this is a safe place, I'm greeted with enthusiasm, I'm treated with gentleness. And all of a sudden students are willing to kind of share some of their struggle. But yeah, the large majority of what students are talking about are actually academically related challenges, right? They're overwhelmed, they're burned out, they're not doing well, they're frustrated with the teacher or with the administration or with the soccer game that they just played.

And our role, right, once again is to help deescalate, relieve some suffering so that we can amplify their joy and optimism and hope with the idea, right, that these things, right, that happiness, that success revolves around that

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happiness. And so that's really our hope is to enhance that with our service. So, but yeah, large majority.

Angela: Yeah, that's so great. Because I know that's a question on everyone's mind. It's like, what about the little everyday things that I am now dealing with? Would that, would some of that be alleviated, which is great. And then I'm going to ask the flip question of this because I know it's going to come up. District administrators in particular, but definitely site administrators as well, are going to wonder like, what's the protocol or the process for like, like they want to be in the know, even though maybe it's not them.

So, and you alluded to this in the beginning and I just want to highlight this for the listeners, there is, there's a very, you know, I'll let you explain it, but I'm sure there's a structure and a process to, you know, and a protocol for understanding when to talk to who and who gets informed and all of that, like from parents to administrators, to teachers or, you know, professionals, that kind of thing. So, can you just give them a general overview of what that looks like?

Iuri: You bet. And that is a really critical part. And I would say that is the number one question that we get, right? Is, is if we with permission from the school, right, and at times in certain states from the parents directly, right? Like we're being gifted this opportunity to enter into a student's life, right? To become part of this educational and optimistic force and positive force in their life. And often times we have to deal with these interventions, right? And when students do that, right, the moment that they describe harm to self, harm to others, any situation obviously that's physically, mentally, sexually abusive, anytime there's self-harm, like these are things that we're going to report. And then there are other things as well. I mean, they may report a specific concern to a teacher or with a counselor or with an administrator.

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And these texts, I want to emphasize this as well, even though these texts are anonymous to us, right? We, I mean, we're federally restricted. We're not allowed to have personal information from the students, right? And so when these things happen with the student, our job, right, is to facilitate and encourage that student's connection to the professionals at the school so that intervention can begin to happen there, where it needs to be with the professionals and with the parents or guardians of that student.

And so we usually do that. We've been incredibly successful at gathering a student's identification number. That's what we ask for, right? And then we connect that student specifically with that story that I just told you where a student came in and reported about another student in another school that we weren't a part of. We actually got their name. Would you be willing to share that student's name so that we could provide support? They did, they shared their name, we contacted the school, they contacted the other school and we were able to provide some intervention and support there.

But that's really how it works. The moment that something like that happens, right? There is an immediate phone call to the school. And by the way, these text conversations that are happening like are available at the school on their dashboard. So the schools actually have full access to every interaction that is happening between our team and that student. And I mean like the entire thread, right?

And so when a student reports anything like that, we don't expect schools to manage that. That's our job. We provide it. And even though those are very fun and engaging to listen to, watch, schools have better things to do. And that's our job. We do that. And the moment that something like that happens, we're talking about a physical phone call to our individual at that school, usually a school counselor, many times an administrator, where I just said, hey, just want to make you aware, like we're dealing with a situation right now where a student is having some suicidal ideation, that has to be reported to a parent, right?

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Angela: Sure.

Iuri: And so we provide that and we want to give that information to the principal or the counselor so that they can then provide that connection. But it's not an email. It's a physical call, it's a physical conversation that happens with those principles. And so, yeah, they are totally apprised. They have access to everything that we're doing, but they're busy doing other things. So when there's an emergency, yeah, it's a direct contact.

Angela: Yeah, they are informed, yes.

Iuri: Yeah. Yeah. It's very important. So I'm glad you asked that question.

Angela: Yeah, no, I know that's the logistics are always on people's mind. I mean, we are managers of a building and so we're always thinking about the management system and how much do I have to manage? If I were to sign up for something like this, how much more will I have to manage? And what I loved about what you said from the very beginning is our philosophy in designing this was to be as helpful as possible and to be as plug and play as possible so that they're not having to learn the entire system, manage the entire system, oversee it and have it be another task on their to-do list. It really is, we're doing the work for you and we're informing you so you can just keep abreast as to what's going on with kids.

And sell, now I was going to shift gears here and talk about the positive side of this like, how are maybe students celebrated or what are some great comments that you've received from kids where like, let's talk about all the fun stuff, right? Like the positive energy and the positive outcomes and the celebrations that you've been able to witness and experience as a result of school pulse.

Iuri: Angela, I wish I could show you. One of the things, so when we come into a school, we do it in a variety of ways, right? Schools want to roll out our service in a lot of ways. We actually provide them with really large

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printables, with really cool messages and they actually put these just like that QR code throughout the school so that students can just walk in.

But a lot of times, I'll actually end up doing these virtual assemblies, right? They'll say like, hey, can you roll this out to our students and we'll take 10 to 15 minutes, no more. We don't want to be an inconvenience. We'll step into, you know, about 10 or 15 classrooms. They'll just televise me and I'll do a quick, you know, psychology pump up, right? Let's talk about, you know, how to have an extraordinary year and I'll give them some tips. And then part of that is a quick introduction to what school pulse is. A lot of times we'll provide schools with little QR codes that the kids can opt in right then or they can take home and opt in later.

But one of the funnest things that happens like with what we call our pit crew, our pit crew stands for positive interaction team. It's our pit team.

Angela: I love it.

Iuri: Yeah, is when we sometimes will walk into a school, right, and do one of these assemblies and we'll have a rush of students that will opt into the service, right? We're talking like anywhere between two to 300 to 500 students who like in a matter of seconds opt in. I mean, and it's like a madhouse on the inbox for our team, right? I mean, it's an explosion of kids coming in. I mean, it's like, it's madness, but it's joyful madness. It's like joyful mad.

Angela: Like the first day of school.

Iuri: Exactly. I mean and they're coming in and they're like, you know, what's this all about? Is this AI? Am I talking to a bot? And they're just the funnest things. You know, and then of course there are massively inappropriate things that kids will type. And that's actually a really important part of this too, is that kids, and I'm talking within like two texts are already talking about challenges, like within like, I mean, they're just meeting us

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and they're talking about like, this isn't going well or I'm really struggling here or it's been a really bad year for me.

But once again, I mean, we're talking, that's kind of that part right there that five percent. But we have this like 75 to 80 percent of kids who are just coming in and really getting to know us for the first time. Like, what's the vibe here? How does it feel here? Like, you know, am I allowed to say these ridiculous things? In fact, I'll tell you one more quick story. I know I'm probably going way over, but

Angela: It's okay.

Iuri: I went and did a physical assembly here in Utah in a really wonderful community, rural, very small. And I went and I presented to this extraordinary group of teens and I had them come up and we were doing all sorts of fun and silly things. And I had the students opt into that service right away. And then I walked and I kind of, you know, went over with the principal to their office and a couple of other, one of the counselors was there. And I was just really kind of giving them a quick tour. Like, let me show you like what this looks like. Like if you wanted to come in and look at the actual chats that are happening. And as we started to click on some of these chats, we could see, and some of them were kids right who were just being ridiculous, right? They were swearing.

Angela: Testing it out. Yeah.

Iuri: Exactly. They wanted to like, what is what's going to happen, right? And the principal was, he was so, I think that's part of the like the ownership that a principal feels like. He was so upset. He was like, oh my gosh, like I want to know who these kids are. We're going to take their phone.

Angela: It's like your own children.

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Iuri: Exactly. And what I told him is like, like, no, don't worry. Trust us. Like they will come in that way and over time it will shift. When they realize that they're just going to be greeted with enthusiasm, in fact, there's a story that I have to share as well. Reminds me there was a student in one of the states that we've served in for a lot of years. And this student was really cruel, I'll be honest, like he was really inappropriate, like really sexually inappropriate, violent or would I mean would speak that way, right? To the point that it was challenging for our team. Like I mean and our team was just, I mean and I had coached them, we do trainings every month, right? They're highly trained.

But it was a burden, I think in part because they were trying to find ways to get that student to change or to transform a little bit. And there was even a period of time, it was he was so negative, he was so violent that we even considered like, should we just remove him from the service? Because no matter what we did, right, I mean there was just no, like he would just come back with more. But we didn't. We did not. We did not take him off the service. We continued with our service and over time, and I'm not talking about like, you know, rocket science, like 100% change. Right. He's going the other way.

But what we saw was that here and there, like some of our proactive messaging would match something that was occurring in his life and we started to get some softer language, right? And once again, right, we have no idea the impact that we are making. We don't know if that prevented something. All we know is that we had a student who was highly inappropriate, highly violent with his language. And we were just a soft place, right? We were just a kind place that would listen and that would just repeatedly say like, hey, we're just here for you. Like we're glad you're here.

In fact, one of our mottos in our pit crew is every interaction is a positive interaction. That no matter what comes through, right, whether it's

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something silly, gamey, sad, or like deliberately like inappropriate, right? It's an opportunity for us to just show that like we're safe here. It's a little bit of a unique place. Our pit inbox is a unique spot. And we're just here. Like we're just here. We'll laugh with you. We'll just say, hey, like maybe next time, let us know if we can do anything. Like or, hey, check this out. Here's something that maybe will uplift your day. And I actually, I mean, that was years ago, but that was one that stuck with us just because of, yeah, how challenging, like that was a burdensome a little bit on our team because he was a slow changer. It was a slow change. Very subtle, like, but we did, we certainly did celebrate.

Angela: Way to persevere there because we have students who give us a run for our money and, you know, and the teachers will be like, they need alternate placement. We can't service them here. And that takes time. And so we do have to service the students that walk through our door, no matter how challenging or difficult, and we have to be the most emotionally mature person in that room to the best of our ability at all times. So you guys also help with that, which is wonderful because it gives students a space to test and push those limits to the brim, it sounds like in this case, and still be received with love and compassion, understanding and just provided the safe space to be themselves and to test that to the point they no longer maybe need that testing, which is interesting.

What I wanted to say was when I was listening to you talk about the highs, the lows, like those everyday interactions and then the crisis interaction, it feels like you are literally for those listeners who've been listening to this podcast for a long time, it's like having me in your pocket. It's like having a life coach or a counselor in your pocket on your phone who's there for you when you needed at any time. That's what this feels like and students are walking around with access to mental health support, emotional support, social support through this School Pulse service that is being provided and it just feels like a miracle.

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It feels like a dream come true and it is really giving students the opportunity to be heard. And what I heard you say is, you know, they all test their kids, they're going to test the waters, they're going to say the silly things or the inappropriate language, but they desperately want to be heard. They want to talk. You said they slip right in. And I was thinking about how much they actually want this. They want to talk about what is hard for them, what's their struggling with, how they're feeling. They do want to talk about it.

And whether that's in a classroom and a teacher has the capacity to hold space for those conversations in person or whether it's school pulls coming in, those kids all want to talk about how they're feeling, what they're thinking about, you know, what's working, what's not, and what they want to be different about themselves or their lives. And the truth is that we all want that. We all value having someone who will stand there and hold that space for us and be firm in their concern for us all the way through unconditionally. And what a beautiful story you just shared with us about your team's capacity to hold space for somebody who really needed it. What a beautiful story to end our session here.

And my audience knows this. I curate this podcast. I am fiercely protective of who's on the podcast and what we talk about on this podcast. And I will put a trigger warning at the beginning of this because it is, we are talking about crisis situations here. And also, it there needs to be a place where we talk about this, where educators can come and have real conversations. These are real things that we're dealing with as school leaders and as district leaders.

We need a place to talk about students in crisis, staff in crisis, you know, and how we can proactively communicate and deflect crisis from occurring. We're not going to prevent it 100%, but we can deflect and we can de-escalate in many cases. And the proactive approach you're taking and the positive psychology behind it, I think it's exactly what schools need and I'm

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so honored that you took the time to be here with us on the podcast today, Iuri. Is there anything else you would like to share before we sign off? Any last birds of wisdom for our listeners?

Iuri: I'll share something that I think is I not just in my individual practice, but as I mean, like I said, it's been a very steep learning curve as I've kind of dove into the educational world. And honestly, like there's nothing better in my mind that I think when I was a young boy, especially when I mean, I'm originally from Portugal when I came to the US. I mean, walking into a high school was incredibly intimidating. Like it was quite intimidating for me in part because I was young and maybe a little insecure.

But there is a feeling when you walk into a building, oh my gosh, like I mean, it's like palpable. I mean, there's like tension and excitement, it's incredible. And our goal, I think this is maybe what I would just like to end with is I think for a lot of years, the field of psychology has been so mired in the negative aspect of humans. Like they we've been highly focused on our deficiencies, right? Our risk factors, how sad we are, how depressed we are, our traumas, right? Our propensity for abuse or other things like that.

And I think what I really wanted to shift in schools, this is more of our vision in a sense is to help schools shift away from this kind of highly diagnosed, just focused on risk factors, to really what I would say is our really our focus is the success of students. Like we really want to amplify their academic, their social, their engagement, their success. And we do that not just through some of our proactive services, but all of our activities, all of our videos are really meant to enhance the positive side of us, right? The things that bring us joy, the things that bring us a sense of meaning, the things that connect us to the stuff we're learning in high school and makes it feel worthwhile instead of a waste of time. Because we know that if we can even just as a matter of percentage, right?

Like if we can raise a few points that we know that ultimately will show up in their schools. And I just want schools to be a better place. I want my girls

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who are working in school, I want them to walk into their school and to feel like they want to be there. Like because it feels enjoyable, it's fun, it's they have tools, they feel like they can be successful there instead of a place where the culture or the climate is not good. And so that's really our goal is we're highly on the positive side of things. We do spend some time on the crisis things, but our goal is really to provide the kinds of skills to help your students succeed. That's maybe that's where I could finish.

Angela: I love this. And I'm just going to wrap this up quickly. The number one thing in a school is the energy of the school. You mentioned that, but that energy is emotion. So when we say we feel a vibe on a campus, there is an atmosphere, there's a culture, there's a climate, what we're talking about is the emotional energy of the individuals and the collective in that organization and in that building. And what I do is I try to help school leaders navigate that emotional energy and put it into positive form, into empowerment form for themselves so that they can empower staff and students.

And what you're doing is you're coming in right at the heart of the students and helping them feel more empowered, feel like they have a voice and they have some choice and they you give them perspective to help them see that there is a solution, there is a person to talk to, there is somebody who cares about them in this moment. And I just think that if we can focus as educators on the emotional energy of our staff and our students and our school community, the rest of it falls into place. I really do believe that. And the work that you're doing, it's a miracle, it's magic and it's really a Godsend to our schools.

And as a former site and district leader, boy, do I wish we would have had this service. But I'm also so grateful so that our children, our grandchildren, and forever more can use services like these to prevent the crises from becoming crises in the first place. So thank you for the work you're doing. It's beautiful work and I'm so honored to have met you and I look forward to

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hearing more about how school pulse can support the entire field of education. So thank you. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your service.

Iuri: Yeah, I love it. Yeah, Angela, thank you so much and I want to take that emotional energy. I really like that. That's like totally just resonated with me and it's actually a really good descriptor of I think what I was attempting to describe. And I think you nailed it. Anyways, I'm just, yeah, those are super kind words and we're just excited. I tell people we're a small team, but man, like we, we want to pack a punch, a really good punch. So.

Angela: Yes. Yes, awesome. Well, thank you for being on the show. All right, my friends. Thank you for listening. I hope you enjoyed this episode. If you want more information, we're going to drop all of School Pulse's information, links, the free resources down in the show notes. So take a look at that and we will see you all next week. Take good care. Bye.

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