What to say to your child's teacher when your child is struggling with learning to read - with Michelle Henderson

Triple R Teaching Podcast #218

Hello, this is Anna Geiger, author of *Reach All Readers* and creator of the Reach All Readers website. Today I'm interviewing Michelle Henderson. Michelle is a reading specialist and parent coach who is there to help parents who know their child's needs are not being met when it comes to learning how to read in school. She helps parents know what steps to take next. She has free downloads, free consultations, and materials. I know you'll want to listen to this episode and then check out the show notes for how you can get in touch with her if you're concerned about how your child is learning, or not learning, to read in school. Here we go!

Anna Geiger:

Welcome, Michelle.

Michelle Henderson:

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here, Anna.

Anna Geiger:

I'm really glad you're here because I do get a lot of emails from parents saying, "My child's struggling with reading. I'm not sure they're getting the help they need in school. How do I talk to his teacher or her teacher?"

We're going to get into that today, but before we do that, could you introduce us to yourself and talk about what you're doing now in education?

Michelle Henderson:

Oh, you bet. Let's see, I've been in education now for over 25 years. I started out as a preschool teacher and then did some early intervention and a few other things.

But my path took a more specialized turn when my own son began struggling with reading. Boy, was that a hard pill to swallow as an early literacy teacher for many decades. I struggled to know what to do to help him.

That experience actually led me back to grad school where I earned a degree in reading science from Mount St. Joseph University. We have that connection, you and I. You know, of course, that it's one of the few programs accredited by the International Dyslexia Association. I also completed the Orton-Gillingham practicum, an advanced practicum to become certified as a structured literacy dyslexia specialist.

Today I work with families nationwide. I do private tutoring. I do parent advocacy coaching. Really my goal is to help bridge the gap between what students need and what's happening in the classroom, to

help empower parents to know how to advocate for their struggling readers, and to help them know they're not alone and this process doesn't have to be daunting because we have the research that teaches us how to teach these kids.

My goal is to help parents know what their rights are, what to ask for, and how to proceed so that they can support their children through this really crucial journey of learning how to read.

Anna Geiger:

Would you call yourself a parent advocate?

Michelle Henderson:

So I try not to use the word advocate, to be honest, because some people get scared, especially schools. And so I call myself a coach – a parent coach or an IEP coach. It doesn't always lead to an IEP, which is an individualized education program. Sometimes it's a 504, sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's just helping parents know how to ask for support and to know what's actually happening at school. How's my child being taught? How can I support them at home? How's their progress being monitored, that sort of thing.

Anna Geiger:

I like that, because as parents, we all need help.

Michelle Henderson:

That's for sure. I'm a parent. Like I said, it was my own son and our journey that really lit the fire beneath me to feel that passion to help other parents. When I started trying to seek help for my own son, it was like hitting wall after wall and it felt so overwhelming and daunting. I just don't want it to feel like that for other people because it doesn't have to.

Anna Geiger:

What was your clue that things weren't going as you thought they should? I know your son is a twin, so maybe that made it a little more obvious.

Michelle Henderson:

I knew he was struggling to remember his alphabet, and he had a hard time just kind of processing and remembering. When he was younger, he had speech delays, that's very common. I just didn't know at the time that these were kind of red flags for possible reading struggles or even dyslexia. I didn't know enough about dyslexia then.

One of the things that I want to tell parents whenever I'm working with them is that dyslexia has nothing to do with intelligence. Kids with dyslexia can be so incredibly bright. In fact, they can be up into the gifted range when we're talking about IQ. So there's that discrepancy, where it's like, “Oh, my kid's so smart. I'm sure nothing… Maybe they just need to try harder.”

That can be really damaging because they're really trying so hard. I was even told that sort of thing from teachers, like, “He's just so smart. I'm sure he'll catch up.”

But reading is one of those things that you don't want to leave to discovery, right? You want to make sure that they're staying on track because if they get behind, then it just takes that much longer to catch up.

Anna Geiger:

So there were early red flags, which people don't always know are red flags. Things like taking a longer time to learn his letters and things like that.

What was his experience like when he got into school?

Michelle Henderson:

He started kindergarten and it was incredibly frustrating for him. Let me back up... When he started, he was super excited, and then quickly it became just really frustrating and overwhelming to him.

Our kids start school in August here, I'm located in Hawaii. We started in August and by October when I was having my first parent-teacher conference with his kindergarten teacher, she said to me, "You know, your son is not going to be ready to move on to first grade at the end of the year."

My heart broke.

Anna Geiger:

That is awful to give up so quickly!

Michelle Henderson:

I'm kind of speechless just remembering it because all the emotions come back to me. But for them to say that... I felt like, "How could you be saying that? We've got seven more months of school! Why aren't we creating an action plan rather than saying, 'Well, you know what, he's really struggling. There's no hope.'"

And I was mad, I was confused, all the emotions.

Plus he has his twin sister in class with him, and she's just kind of excelling very easily without any extra help. Of course that's always frustrating for kids to experience that with a regular sibling, let alone a twin, right? There was no way I was going to split them up and kind of have that trauma being like, "Oh yeah, we're twins, but we're not in the same grade anymore."

It was really then where my story all began because at that point I realized I need to be his advocate or it's not going to happen.

So I dove into the research. I found the science of reading. I realized how much we as educators hadn't been taught. That's when I enrolled in grad school and basically became my son's private reading interventionist and advocate.

The good news is fast forward to today, he's finishing fifth grade and not only can he read, he loves to read! He's above where he needs to be for his grade level.

I will never forget the moment I found him reading for fun under his blanket with a flashlight. That's when I knew, "Okay, we've made it."

It was definitely worth the whole journey of getting him the help.

That success is directly related to early intervention and advocating and making sure that he was receiving not only support in school emotionally, but also evidence-based instruction that actually works for how our brain learns how to read.

Anna Geiger:

When I think about the teacher telling him in October of his kindergarten year that he's going to need another year in kindergarten, it makes me think about this idea that kids are going to learn to read when they're ready. They were looking at him saying, "He doesn't look ready, so I know it's going to take more time," versus here are the specific things I need to teach him to learn to read. He's going to get instruction with everybody else, *and* he's going to get extra instruction later on so he can accelerate.

It's basically knowing what to do and leaving it kind of to chance. I would say I probably was in that at one point as a teacher. We talked before we pressed record that I don't know how receptive I would have been, unfortunately, if parents had tried to tell me that what I was doing wasn't evidence-based.

I wonder if that's the situation that you were in with the teacher. Did you face a lot of brick walls where teachers really weren't aware of evidence-based instruction, and how did you overcome that?

Michelle Henderson:

Yes, all along the way. I guess this is why I say so often that I'm not a fan of retention. More of the same is not going to cut it. That's not what the kids need.

At that point, I didn't know. I could tell that the way they were teaching him was not working for him, but I didn't know enough to say, "*This* is what he needs." Which is why I went back to grad school. I realized if I don't figure this out, nobody's going to help him.

And so once I did have that information, that knowledge, that understanding, then I started advocating even more with teachers and with parents. Then of course, parents kept coming to me saying, "I know your child was struggling, and now he's doing so well. What did you do?"

That's kind of how I have started advocating more and more and become a parent coach. I realized from my own experience that parents are desperate to understand how to advocate and help their child, and they don't know how.

I remember that feeling of hopelessness, "My child needs help. I don't know how."

It's why I created my... I have two free guides available. One I call a getting started guide. It's how you can support your child on their literacy journey. Let me help you just get an understanding of where to start and how to dive in.

Then I have a parent-teacher conference guide that really outlines questions to ask yourself. Do you understand? What are you seeing? Because there were things that I was observing in my own child that I didn't realize made a difference or were red flags, right? It's asking yourself those kinds of questions.

Then it has specific questions to ask the teacher, questions that are helpful and meaningful to know how is my child being taught? What is your instruction like?

The tone really matters here when you're... Here's the thing, I know how hard teachers are working. Teachers are putting their heart and soul into what they do. They want our kids to excel. They want our kids to succeed. Unfortunately, too many of our teachers have been given an impossible mission because they weren't trained how to teach reading using evidence-based instruction, and that's not their fault. Teachers who have figured it out are really frustrated that they weren't taught that. I imagine that's how you felt when you did learn about the science of reading, right?

I suggest asking teachers with curiosity rather than confrontation. For example, try something like this, “Can you tell me more about how reading is being taught in the classroom?” If they say whole language and balanced literacy, those are red flags. The gold standard is structured literacy.

Something else you might ask is, “What kind of phonics instruction is being used? Is the program aligned with the science of reading?”

I have a bunch more questions outlined to help guide your conversation so that you have confidence in what you're saying. And I have the answers, so that you know what you're hoping is being said.

If it's not, then you'll know how to follow up, but asking respectful, open-ended questions that invite a dialogue rather than shut it down are really beneficial.

You had talked about sharing resources like articles or podcasts. I think that can be helpful if it's done in the spirit of collaboration. I might recommend saying something like, “I came across this article. I found it really eye-opening. Would you be open to looking at it and letting me know your thoughts?” Then you could ask to set up a time to talk in-person or a virtual meeting.

I think those go a long way for building relationships, and you feel like you're collaborating. You're on the same team, rather than opposing each other or somebody's getting defensive or feeling like they're not doing what they need to do.

Because I think teachers already feel so overworked and under-resourced and under-supported, and understandably so! They're doing so much. I think they can appreciate having parents who are willing to reach out, if we do it in a way that's collaborative and not critical.

Anna Geiger:

I think a couple of things. First of all, I appreciate you talking about how hard teachers are working, because most teachers do work very hard. When I think back to my teaching, I was a single teacher and I was at school till 10 or 11 or 12 at night spinning my wheels, honestly, because I didn't know what I was doing. I thought I did, but it was a lot of just busyness because I didn't understand how to be strategic and how to teach reading.

For a parent to maybe insinuate that I didn't know what I was doing would feel very insulting, because I was working so hard and I did care about these kids very much!

At the same time, when you have a parent whose child is not learning appropriately, their emotions are high, understandably. These two sets of high emotions could be a bad thing.

I think another thing that teachers don't like, I always hated this, is when parents would say, “Can we have a meeting,” and I had no clue what we were going to be talking about. I just felt sick until we finally had that meeting. And most of the time it was fine!

But if you could set up in advance, “I would love to talk through this with you. There are some questions I have about it.” You could even point out, “Could we talk about this paragraph? I'm trying to understand it.” It’s giving them something to prepare versus just blindsiding them. We never want to blindside anybody.

And go into it with the belief that the teacher cares about your child. As a teacher, I remember being frustrated with a particular student, and then having a parent-teacher conference with the two people who loved this kid more than anybody else in the world. There is nothing like that to change your perspective. If you can try to look at the teacher that way… Most teachers really do care even if you're maybe not feeling that because of the disagreement you might have about methods.

Michelle Henderson:

Right.

Anna Geiger:

I think another good question to ask teachers is, “How do you know… How specifically do you know if a child isn't making adequate progress, and then what do you do about that?”

Michelle Henderson:

Yes.

Anna Geiger:

If they can't answer that, which I probably could not have answered that, then you need to follow up on that and figure that out with the teacher. “How could you figure that out? Because it would be helpful for me to know where my child is at,” and so on.

I think where this gets tricky and hairy is when you have a teacher who's still entrenched in balanced literacy or similar practices that are not aligned with the science.

You asked about asking the teacher, “How do you teach reading?”

I don't know if a teacher would say, “I use balanced literacy,” but they'll say other things, which you talk about in your downloads that people can get.

What would be some examples of things that would be red flags or things that you should dig deeper on?

Michelle Henderson:

Yeah. For example, if your child is being asked to memorize 100 sight words, which they're often called, that's a red flag.

If your child is being asked, “Look at the word. What's the first letter? Okay, what could it be? Look at the picture. Look at the context.” Anything that's taking their eyes off the word and actually decoding the word is a red flag. Those are guessing strategies, which are not only not effective, they're actually damaging and take a long time sometimes to kind of dig out of. Sadly, they're very commonly taught across the United States in various curriculums. Sometimes people refer to them as three queuing or guessing strategies.

Any of those, or if teachers are sending home books that are leveled, “My kid is at J level. Now they're at the next level,” or something like that. Kids are not a reading level.

What you want to be able to see is that your child can attend to the sounds that are represented by letters in English, and do they know what letters represent the sounds and vice versa? Do they know that correspondence between the sounds in our language and then this man-made code? These letters that have been determined to represent different sounds. That's where phonics comes in.

Now, it is a misunderstanding that effective reading instruction is just phonics. I mean, there's so much more to it, but when we're talking about early readers, that's an important thing to make sure is happening in reading instruction. It's not the only thing that needs to be happening, but it is often not happening.

And so I would definitely want to ask about that and make sure they are being taught explicit phonics that's multisensory, and that they're tracking and monitoring progress.

If a child isn't progressing, what are they doing about it? You would mention that. “Well, if my child's not progressing, how do I know?” How are they even monitoring? That's another really important question.

If a child is struggling, first of all, have you done a universal screener? Do you know where they started? Where was their baseline?

Anna Geiger:

They might not know what that is. That could be another red flag.

Michelle Henderson:

If a child is struggling, they should be getting help immediately. They don't have to have an IEP or a 504 plan to be getting help within the classroom. Schools should be employing an MTSS, multiple tiered system of support, or sometimes it's called RTI, response to intervention. They should have that.

There are three tiers to that. Tier 1 is core instruction. Everyone should be getting that. If they're not progressing well enough with that alone, then they should be getting additional help in Tier 2. That's not in place of, but *in addition* to Tier 1. Then Tier 3 would be even more specialized and more time with a smaller group even still. Hopefully a very small portion of children would need that. That could be another topic altogether.

Kids should be getting help from the beginning if they are showing signs of difficulty.

Like my son, for example, in kindergarten. Apparently between August and October, my son's teacher noticed some serious challenges, right? Rather than say, “Well, he's not going to be able to move on to first grade next year,” what I would like to see happening, and this is what I help parents communicate through my free guides, is there should be a plan of action. You want to collaborate with the teacher and create an action plan. If your child is performing below benchmarks, they should be receiving that targeted intervention.

Of course, starting that conversation, that's just the beginning because as a parent, you play a crucial role as your child's first advocate. Although teachers genuinely want your child to thrive, they also have many other students that they have to worry about, right?

So it's a parent's responsibility to maintain that open communication through regular follow-ups, establishing a timeline for future check-ins to assess progress.

It's very important to document all your dates and communication in writing. That in writing could mean it's in an email, but also if you have conversations in person. That's great, and then I always recommend going home and putting a summary of your conversation in an email. Then you also have a written record of it.

The reason I recommend doing this is because if your child is really struggling and they're not catching up, and they're not getting help and it's looking like maybe they have dyslexia, you need to have that documentation about all the steps that you've gone through. It shows what you've requested, what concerns you've expressed, what the teachers have said to you, and what they've tried.

When you go into the process of trying to get that child an IEP or an individualized education program, all of that is really important to have for a parent. If it's not in writing, it didn't happen is what I like to say, because it's just hearsay otherwise.

Anna Geiger:

So far we've talked about how you notice your child is behind or maybe the teacher has told you they're behind, like in your instance, and other things that you noticed as well.

Now you want to talk to the teacher in a non-confrontational way, which is very hard because your emotions are going to be high, and possibly the teachers as well, depending on their personality. You might go into it with something you want to discuss specifically versus blindsiding a teacher, and you want to talk about this as a partnership. What can I do to help?

Now here's the problem though. what if you go to the teacher as a parent who's been educating themselves in the science of reading, and you go to the teacher and say how can I help, and the teacher says, “Practice these leveled books and memorize these sight words.” Then what?

Michelle Henderson:

Right. Well, leveled books, like I said, are a red flag. What you want is to have your child getting phonics instruction in how these sounds are represented by letters, and then you want them to be able to practice in decodable books.

If you request some decodable books and your teacher's like, “Well, we don't do that. Those just kill in reading interest.” That's a myth as well, and some people think that.

I would say this is a really tricky situation, but it happens far too often. If you're being dismissed, you can't let that stop you. You need to start documenting everything, emails, meetings, everything that was said, and then you might need to take it up the chain a little bit.

I don't like to recommend going above the teacher, but it is necessary sometimes because it is an awkward situation. You don't want to disagree and have to go and talk to somebody else. But in my own experience, and just in general, literacy is too important to leave to chance. Just because a teacher is saying, “No, I don't agree,” follow your instincts. Follow your gut, and do what needs to happen. Your child's future reading skills are at stake.

It may require a difficult conversation or many difficult conversations, but it's important and it's too important to leave to chance.

Stay calm and professional. Keep the focus on your child's needs. You might request to meet with the special education coordinator. You might request to talk to the school psychologist or even the principal or vice principal. Maybe you feel a connection with the vice principal over the principal, someone that you know is an advocate and is on your team and knows your child. Speak to them and voice your concerns.

Then it's okay to say, “I'm not here to blame anyone. I just want to understand what's being done and make sure we're not missing anything.”

If you hit a wall still, you can seek outside support. There are advocates, coaches, specialists, and nonprofit organizations that can guide you. You don't have to do this alone.

Anna Geiger:

I would like to repeat what you said, something about, “I don't want to blame anyone. I just want to understand what's going on, what can be done, and make sure we're not missing anything.” That's really an excellent thing to memorize and get so that you can say that in the meeting because it is very hard

to want to blame someone or to get worked up in your emotions. At least maybe I'm just talking about myself here, but I know how that is.

Michelle Henderson:

For me, in the beginning, it was really hard for me not to be angry. I was so upset. I felt betrayed. How is this teacher not teaching my son how to read? This just feels so foundational and basic.

Then I quickly realized, no, these teachers are doing the very best they can with, like I said, never enough resources, never enough support. They're certainly not getting paid well enough and they really want our children to do well, but they haven't been trained far too often in what effective reading instruction looks like.

It's a tricky balance. You can understand where these teachers are coming from and feel empathetic, AND also advocate for your child and say, "I understand, AND my child needs to learn how to read in an effective way."

Anna Geiger:

And in an efficient way. That's the other hard thing. You can trade articles with a teacher for two years, but where is your child going to be at the end of that?

How do parents balance that? How do they balance working with a teacher who may not understand appropriate reading instruction, but perhaps thinks they do, with maintaining a good relationship, but helping your child. Is the only answer getting outside help? Is that a requirement? What do you recommend to parents?

Michelle Henderson:

Every situation is so unique, but I will say that time is of the essence because children who get intervention and support early on have the best opportunity for catching up. There are some pretty sad statistics about kids struggling to learn how to read and really struggling for years if they don't get help by the end of second grade.

Because really once you hit third grade, teaching shifts and it's no longer, let's teach them how to read. It's now that you know how to read, and you're expected to now get information out of what you're reading on your own. Too many of our country's third and fourth graders aren't even reading at a proficient level, and so it's silly to expect that from them. But that is what the expectation is.

You don't want to wait until then. If in kindergarten or first grade, if you're noticing these difficulties in your child and you are trying to talk to the teacher and you're just hitting wall after wall, I would say it's really crucial to get outside help, whatever support you need. It can be a parent coach or an advocate. Reach out to a reading specialist or speech and language specialist, they also specialize in reading.

Reading is a language-based skill, so the deficits that are there with kids that are struggling to read are language-based. If you are hitting a wall, then find someone that can help you kind of navigate this process of saying, "This is not an effective way to teach. They're not making progress. Look here, we have this information."

The other thing that's really important is to be able to show where they were and what progress, or lack of progress, has been made. "We've been talking about this now for three months. Is there oral reading fluency progressing? Are they getting better?"

If the teacher isn't tracking that, then that's something that the parent should track as well so that they can say, “Hey, listen, we've talked about this, we talked about this back in October. I had my child tested to see where they were, how many words correctly per minute they're reading, and what kind of accuracy score they have. They were well below the benchmark. Now three months have gone by and I've had them reassessed, and they've only improved by a few words correct per minute and their accuracy score is still well-below. This shows that what is happening in school is not working. They should be, at this age, gaining at least three words correct per minute per week, in effective instruction. They're not progressing. This indicates that they need strategic support and intensive support at this point.”

Anna Geiger:

Now, to a parent listening who is not in the same space that we're in, it might have just sounded like a different language, all the things you were just talking about. How do parents know what their child is entitled to, and how can they make sure that they receive it?

Michelle Henderson:

Right, so the IDEA law is for specifically supporting individuals with disabilities, and a child that has dyslexia would be considered eligible under the IDEA in the specific learning disability category.

I would say parents shouldn't be required to know how to do all this. Of course it doesn't make sense because this is all specialized stuff.

Part of what I do in my parent-teacher conference guide is kind of outline how to ask about their oral reading fluency. This is what it means. This is what it should have to help them start that conversation.

But if you're really hitting a wall, and the teacher's not cooperating and not helping in addressing those needs, then I would say you need to get some outside help so that they can help you know, what is oral reading fluency? What are my rights?

That's a lot of what I do in my parent coaching is to help parents know what are their rights? What can you ask for? What should instruction look like? How should your child be progressing? If they're not progressing, what do we do?

Anna Geiger:

Do you have any experiences of your own or clients, I don't know if you call them your clients or the people that you work with, where a concern was brought to a teacher and positive changes were made based on what they brought to the teacher? For example, an article or a podcast, or any encouragement in that area, or best practices...

Mostly I don't hear that. I mostly hear, unfortunately, experiences where parents are dismissed.

Michelle Henderson:

My son's third grade teacher had been teaching for a number of years. She was an older woman and a really fabulous teacher. He had finally been able to receive an IEP, and I was starting to make some traction, and then we moved to a new teacher and I was nervous at first.

I spoke to the teacher, and she said, “Oh, I've been learning a little bit about reading science, and I'm really interested in learning more.”

It was really a refreshing experience because she didn't know a lot yet, but she was open-minded. I said, “Oh, you know, I have this podcast, Sold a story by Emily Hanford. I think you would really find it interesting, and I'd love to hear what you think about it. Let me know.” And I sent that to her.

Then she's like, “Oh, you know what? I shared that with some other teachers at school that I know are open to learning, and they're realizing we're doing what we were taught to do in school, and it's not working.”

It’s understanding the history of how reading has been taught, which is what Emily Hanford's podcast does well. It's called Sold a Story, and I've recommended it to so many parents and so many teachers. Some of the teachers have been really open-minded about it, like you're talking about, and others not, which you're also mentioning.

It is really refreshing when teachers are willing and open to it, but you can't always count on that, unfortunately.

Anna Geiger:

So it may help to go into it with a positive outlook. That's not always my go-to myself, I admit, but try to be positive and assume that the teachers are going to be interested in what you have to share.

And that requires you to share it in a loving way, not a confrontational way, because nobody will receive that well.

But first, before going to this conversation, we'd recommend downloading the guides that you have so parents can educate themselves on exactly what questions should I ask and what am I hoping to hear? And if not, how can I respond?

Back to that question about what if they tell you the things they want you to practice, and you know that those things are not what is going to move the needle and actually could actually hurt your child. I want to go back to that question again, just because that's so hard.

What if they're being given the patterned books, which as I've said many times, I did use those as a first grade teacher. The kids had to memorize the pattern. I thought that was teaching them to be fluent and building their comprehension and their love of reading. I thought that decodable text was going to cause their fluency to be stunted and that it was an overemphasis on phonics. That's what I would have recommended to parents. But if a parent would get that from a teacher, what should they do?

Michelle Henderson:

I think that's tricky because if a teacher is really entrenched in that, it's going to be tricky to convince them otherwise. But I would say, “Listen, I have learned about these leveled readers and what the research has said is that they're not effective. In fact, they can be damaging. Have you heard anything about that? I'm wondering what kind of effect that might be having on my child's progress.”

If they're just really unwilling to interact in that conversation, and if it's kind of like, “Oh, well, no, that's just nonsense,” I don't feel like you're going to get very far with that particular teacher.

In that case, I would say you probably need to have a conversation with the school psychologist and find out if the school psychologist open-minded and understanding, and are they willing to help you out there? If not, maybe an administrator, but a lot of times stuff trickles down from the administration, not always, but you never know.

If you're feeling that wall again, I feel like then it's really you might seek outside help. There are nonprofit organizations that have advocates that can help support you to know what to do. You can have

somebody come with you because, like you're saying, it is a very emotional thing. You can feel emotional. You can feel overwhelmed, and it can just feel so daunting because you don't know how to help your kid and you just desperately want to.

The thing that I would recommend is seeking help.

I actually do free parent consultations. On my website, which is michellehendersonliteracy.com, you can sign up for a free consultation. You can find my free guides. You can find some of my favorite podcast picks, and there are different resources.

Actually I'm really excited about a new mini course that I'm going to be launching very soon. It's designed specifically for parents of struggling readers, whether they suspect dyslexia or other reading challenges, but aren't sure how to advocate for that student at school to get the support they need. I'm going to make it super affordable, $27, packed with tons of value. Parents will learn what to do if your child is showing signs of dyslexia. What are those signs? It has how to request help the right way with sample emails and templates. It has what your legal rights are under the IDEA and section 504 and how to decode what's actually happening in your child's reading instruction. Then it has how to confidently advocate for services without conflict, and how to support your child at home as well.

Now notice I didn't say how to support your child at home because it's not a parent's responsibility to be a reading specialist and know how to teach their child how to read. The schools have the responsibility to teach children how to read. It should be happening, but it's not always happening.

I don't think it's for lack of effort and desire, but as a parent, I think it's our role to make sure to advocate for what is their right They're not asking for a favor; it's their right.

My goal is to give parents a roadmap so they're not left second guessing. They're not Googling at midnight. I want every parent to know you don't have to do this alone.

Anna Geiger:

That is wonderful. If I had this this issue, I'd be very comforted hearing all of that.

I appreciate, especially, hearing that you can have a free consultation, and that you you're working on a mini course at a very affordable price point because for some parents, they may be ending up going down the road of tutoring, which can get very expensive. To have this initial, how do I get started to be a very affordable, accessible thing is wonderful. Because we do want to get that out of the way. We want to figure out what am I going to do? I've got to figure out what to do next, and you need to do that right away.

I'll just go back to my question about the reading homework that was not appropriate. In my personal opinion, if someone would send me an email, I would say, I would not do that because I think it's going to be bad for your child. I would just amend the one thing you said, that if you would talk to the teachers and say, "I've heard that research says that this is bad for kids." I would say, "I've learned that this doesn't work for every child, and that some kids need a more structured approach," because if someone had said that to me as a teacher, I would have said, "What do you mean? It's working for my class!"

I taught all six of my kids to read, and the first five I did use balanced literacy with a smattering of phonics. They all learned to read because I think they're in that that part of Nancy Young's Ladder of Reading and Writing that are just going to learn no matter what you use.

I think it's worth acknowledging that the teachers had success, but this is not working for your child.

Parents can be talking to you, and they could certainly email me, about what if I'm getting this material home that I know is not right, what should I be doing at home instead? That's a big discussion, but something to think about. You don't have to fall in line with what you know is not supported by science.

It's also something that you have to take command of, like you talked about, setting up continual meetings to we check in and putting those on the calendar when you're talking. Because we all know that before you know it, that school year is going to be over.

As parents, we love our kids and we want the best for them, and so we're willing to take this on, but knowing that they have support and knowing they can reach out to you and others is great news.

Is there anything else you want to share before we sign off?

Michelle Henderson:

I just want to reiterate, don't assume that these updates are going to come to you. Take that initiative and know that you're not asking for a favor. These are your rights. Your child has the right to learn how to read. Every child does. As a parent, you don't want to complain. You know how hard your teachers are working. Remind yourself of that. I am just advocating for my child's right to read and that is priceless.

Anna Geiger:

Thanks so much, Michelle. I really appreciate it.

Michelle Henderson:

Thank you.

Anna Geiger:

You can find the show notes for today's episode at reachallreaders.com/episode218. Talk to you next time!

Closing:

That's all for this episode of Triple R Teaching. For more educational resources, visit Anna at her home base, reachallreaders.com, and join our teaching community. We look forward to helping you reflect, refine, and recharge on the next episode of Triple R Teaching.