

Interviewee: Jill Polglaze

Interviewer: Christine Bethke

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Abstract: Jill Polglaze is a librarian in the Franklin School District in Southeastern Wisconsin. She manages staff at the libraries at all levels of schooling in this district. In this interview, Jill discusses how COVID-19 has affected her life, including her job, family life, and pandemic overload in the media. She gives specific focus to the Franklin School District's reaction to the pandemic and their involvement in the creation of protocols and keeping everyone safe. Furthermore, Jill discusses the various reactions to the pandemic she has noticed between the different school levels, elementary, middle, and high. Jill has a positive outlook on the future and shares her thoughts on a post-pandemic world.

CB 0:03

So, today is Wednesday, April 28th, 2021. The time is currently 4:01pm. And as of today, there have been 31,924,610 cases of COVID-19 and 569,771 deaths in the United States. In Wisconsin, there have been 595,864 cases. And 6,773 deaths due to COVID-19, with 29% of the US population have been fully vaccinated. So, can you state your name? And then do you mind sharing some demographic information such as race, ethnicity, age and gender?

JP 0:55

Sure. My name is JP, I am a white female, age 50.

CB 1:06

Perfect. Then, what are some primary things that you do on a day-to-day basis?

JP 1:11

I work for the Franklin School District. I am the district wide Library Media system specialist. So, I managed the seven libraries in the district and the staff that work in them. So that's kind of a big part of my- of my day to day, I'm going into work and I'm purchasing books or resources for the libraries.

CB 1:44

Okay, how has COVID-19 affected your job and in what ways?

JP 1:49

Wow. Back in March of 2020, the pandemic it, it shuts our district down. We all thought it was going to be you know, a week or two maybe. And then the governor made a proclamation, I don't know if proclamation is the right word. But he said schools were going to be shut down. So, from mid-March, we were shut down then through the remainder of the school year, the district allowed us to go back in and pick up the things we needed, but it was on a limited basis. We had time slots and you couldn't have more than a few people in the building at a time and then we were all working from home. The teachers were teaching from home, I was doing my library work from home and the first couple weeks were kind of triage. It was- for my role, it was doing a lot of videos. So, the students and staff were aware of how to use some of our electronic resources or updating some of those, so they knew how to do that. So, it was sitting at my kitchen table.

CB 3:29

So, it sounds like the technological part was a big roadblock, obstacle for you was can you explain?

JP 3:38

It wasn't an obstacle for me, I'm- I- I love technology. It was one of those where it was- we didn't have all that. And once we found out we were going to be shut down for more than you know, a week or two, we had certain things we had to get in place and then we had teachers some that were very familiar with technology and some who weren't. So, it was it was a very- it was stressful for everybody and you know the students as well and the parents who had their kids at home and we're trying to do learning with them. I mean all around it was not ideal. So [laughing].

CB 4:38

So how did you go about helping the teachers that didn't really have as much knowledge about technology?

JP 4:47

I have found, some of it was just emails back and forth, but one of the best things was just doing a quick screencast where I was recording my screen and talking and saying you click here, you click here. So, they could go back and watch that more than once and that was something that got shared with the students as well. So that, that was a big help.

CB 5:24

So, you mentioned before you also help with like buying new books and that kind of stuff.

JP 5:32

Yes.

CB 5:33

Was that hard to do as well?

JP 5:35

It was very hard, because I had just picked up an- had just gotten confirmation that an order at the local Barnes and Noble was in. So, I got that picked up from that store prior to them shutting down for the pandemic. But then there's rules that come along with the funding for the libraries for the district and we didn't have anybody in district able to take packages. So, I couldn't order print books. So, I had to order electronic books. So that was, it was wonderful, because we have now a fabulous assortment of electronic books for our students. But that was, it was just a different way of ordering. We've had electronic books for a while, we're part of a state consortium where the students have access to ebooks. But my focus was only ebooks, not any print books. So, it was just a little different and the consortium allows me to run reports and look at books that are in high demand, ones that are student requests, and I would get students that would contact me and ask for a title, or they would ask one of the staff in the library for a title and they would just contact me, and I was probably doing one ebook order every week.

CB 7:24

How has the covid 19 pandemic affected your relationship with your coworkers.

JP 7:35

During the shutdown, it was very difficult for all of us, because at a school, you're kind of like a family and we weren't, we weren't together really and that was difficult. We didn't see each other. We saw each other in meetings, but we weren't really together. With the staff in the library, it was difficult. I did- probably every other week, I would do a video meeting just to kind of check in with them. But it was- you felt that kind of distance from them because you weren't in communication on a regular basis, you weren't having those conversations in the hallway or when you saw him in the office, and when you were talking with them, it was all business because you didn't have time for anything else. Because the- the working at home, it was hard to make that separation when work is sitting right there at the kitchen table. And you've already put your eight hours in, and every educator puts in more than eight hours, but there's always stuff to be done, and there was a lot more to be done. So, there wasn't a lot of time for some of the normal things, the chitchat that we would do.

CB 9:16

Has the lack of interaction and more business affected your mental health at all?

JP 9:26

Um, no, I kept in touch with family and friends, and so that kind of kept me on an even keel. At first it was “okay, this is how it is,” and as it kept going on, I realized I need to make sure I'm keeping in touch with people. So I just made a very conscious effort to do that. I do know, other people it was very difficult for.

CB 10:08

So, for- when you reach out to your family and well-being with your mental health, how is the pandemic affected those relationships?

JP 10:18

Um, you know, it's- I had one- I have one friend, and we used to go out to dinner, a girls night, once a month. Obviously, [email notification] obviously, that's not something that, you know, we could do. So, we would just call or talk on a regular basis. And we made an effort to do that, because that was one thing we knew. We wanted to do just to keep in touch. And it was, it was different than, you know, the text or the phone call saying, “Hey, are you free for dinner?” It was that conscious effort to make time for that conversation. Whereas when we went out to dinner, we had that conversation and, and caught up. And I- that was kind of how I approached it with everybody that I was trying to keep in touch with.

CB 11:25

How has the pandemic affected your relationship with students that visit the libraries?

JP 11:34

The diehard readers, the ones that wanted books during the pandemic, or the closure, they would let me know or let one of the staff in the library know. We are- in fall, we were back full time in person and so, we're getting books in their hands, it looks a little different than it has before, just because of the safety protocols that we have in place in the district. The kids are still getting their books, it's just a little different, because at elementary and middle school, they're not down in the library on a regular basis and at the high school, they're having them contact the staff in the library, and then they pull the book for the students and then the student just comes and picks it up. So, it's- it's distanced, but we're getting them what they need, in a safe way. So, it's a lot less conversations with the kids. I had a conversation with a student outside the library today, and I think sometimes the kids just want to have that conversation with someone, so.

CB 13:14

How has the- What have been the biggest challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak for you?

JP 13:24

Oh, the biggest challenges... I missed family. Not getting together with the family, that stunk. You know, we did zoom calls for holidays, it was terrible. That was, that was the worst. Because

nobody wants to sit around and do a very Merry Zoom Christmas. But you know, we got my mom to do zoom, so that was great!

CB 14:12

Was it hard to get everyone together for holiday zooms like that?

JP 14:17

Um, we kind of we knew we would never get everyone. So, it was- we had to pick, you know, here's what we're getting together. My immediate family was always there and then it was kind of a crapshoot for anybody else. And a lot of times we ran into if we were doing it at Christmas, well, everybody was doing something with their immediate family. So, then it might just be like a phone call later, to, Hey, how are you doing what's going on? But the immediate family always, we always manage to coordinate a time

CB 15:04

Have you- have your responses for the pandemic changed over the past year as it's gone- It's changed itself?

JP 15:15

So, like my, in how I'm doing things and how I'm acting? Is that your question?

CB 15:23

Yeah. Yes.

JP 15:29

I think I'm probably a little more- or a little less anxious when I go to the store, because we know more about it. When we didn't know much of anything about the virus, there was- and I think this was with probably everyone, there was some anxiety when you went to the store. And now I know that I wear my mask, I have hand sanitizer, I wash my hands when I get home, I'm fine. In the first parts of it, there- there was anxiety, because nobody wants to get sick. Because all you heard on the news was bad things about, I mean, and- they didn't have good things to report. But you heard you were just inundated with negative things, bad things, things that could cause a lot of anxiety and sadness. I mean, in the- in the start, I- I was very good and I limited when I went out. Now, I am fully vaccinated. And I- I ate in restaurants. There was still, I think two other people in the restaurant besides me, you know, but I was comfortable with that. I went out to Easter brunch with my mom. And there were a lot- There were more people, but they had very good safety protocols in place. And we were both very comfortable there. So it It took a while to get there.

CB 17:33

So, you mentioned that you have been vaccinated? Um, what were your experiences like getting access to it, like making an appointment, knowing when it was available, things like that?

JP 17:47

I am very fortunate the school district that I work for, partnered with a local hospital, and they had employee clinics. So, we got an email with links to sign up, [cat walks across frame], sorry [chuckling], an email with links to sign up for appointments, and we were- anybody who wanted to get vaccinated was able to when you were there for your first vaccine, they set up the appointment for your second. So, it was- it was wonderful. I was thankful that our district made that partnership to get the staff and that was any staff that worked in the district that wanted to get vaccinated.

CB 18:46

Did you get any side effects from the vaccine?

JP 18:52

I was very tired, and I think the- the two days after I was- I was kind of tired and I didn't realize why I- and I was talking to someone, I got my shot on, I think Sunday, and on Monday, I was talking to someone at work and couldn't figure out you know why? And he said that, you know, his boss was tired as well and it was probably from the vaccine. Never, I just I didn't make that connection. Because most of the side effects that I had heard about were, you know, aches and fever and chill. I didn't have any of that. I was just tired. So, I was I was lucky that for both shots, it was just tired.

CB 19:53

Has anyone you know gotten sick during the pandemic?

JP 19:59

Yes. Yes, I'm working in, in the district, there has done a number of staff members that I know that have been sick. Friends' kids have recently gotten sick. Fortunately, everyone is OK, now. My immediate family has stayed healthy, the extended family. We had some who- who did get sick. But again, everyone is- is healthy now.

CB 20:45

Good. That's good to hear. What- what have been your primary sources of news during the pandemic?

JP 21:05

I still subscribe to the print paper. So [laughing] that and a variety of news on TV or online, and I take everything with a grain of salt, because whatever news source you look at, you have to know that they have their slant and the way they're going to report things. You could take the same exact thing, and three different news outlets can report it different ways. So, it's kind of taken everything you hear with a grain of salt, so.

CB 21:55

Have those new sources changed during the course of the pandemic?

JP 22:07

Not really. It's just it's been a variety. I mean, occasionally, if my- a lot of times my sister-in-law will mention things or my brother will, and so, I might go and look at that article, or they might send me a link to an article or a video, but for the most part, I- I will- I stuck with the same stuff, and it was a variety- [Phone ringing], Sorry. It was a variety of sources, not just one that has their slant.

CB 22:55

Do you wish there were other issues that they were- that the media your news sources were covering, but they may not be covering?

JP 23:04

Yes, and I don't know what I want them to cover, but it was one of those where, the first thing on the news is always the pandemic and that just- it gets depressing. So, I mean, recently, there have been days where the pandemic isn't the first thing on the news. So that's been good, I like that. I don't know what else I think they should cover, but I don't want a full half hour of world news on the pandemic. Because that's kind of in- this is my personal opinion, pandemic overload. Kind of like when the fall TV season started up, there was a show, and you know, some nighttime TV show and they were doing the pandemic and I'm like, "No, I am living the pandemic. I do not need to watch the pandemic for my entertainment." And I'm like, nope, done with that show.

CB 24:18

What kinds of things, people did you reach out to when the information got too much, the pandemic got too much?

JP 24:30

Kind of my little my group of family and friends, and it would- it might be a phone call, [phone ringing], oh my goodness. It might be a phone call, a text, a video call like, I am tired of this or just talking about something else, so.

CB 24:59

And as a librarian, were there any books or things like that, that you picked up?

JP 25:06

Um, yes, I found there was there was they didn't come out, obviously right away, but there was one that came out for kids specifically that I previewed and thought this would be good, just a way to help kids understand. And over summer, and into fall, there were several more published for kids, just to help them understand. Some were about viruses. There's one and I cannot remember the title off the top of my head about, we all stayed inside. There's another one about the essential workers in New York City, and it's the perspective of kids looking out their apartment window and the streets are very quiet, except for, you know, the garbage trucks are coming by and this- and it's something that kids can relate to. So, there, there have been some like that there have been meatier ones for the older kids that are more fact based. Those were kind of just stories. There's been some good fact base once for the upper- upper levels.

CB 26:47

Have you noticed, has it been hard for kids to grasp what's been going on?

JP 26:59

I think, at the elementary level, for- this is from what I heard from moms with kids of elementary level, the kids struggled with why they couldn't see their friends and why they had to stay apart, and this was in the start of the pandemic, and through summer, they struggled with that. And they're kids, I understand that. Older kids understand that, and most of them don't like it, because they're social. You know, first and foremost, kids are social beings. They- they want to talk they want- they want to be around each other. You know, school is a very social place. And when we came back, and, you know, keep your- keep your distance keep six feet apart. The younger kids seemed to do better with it than the older kids. So that's what I noticed.

CB 28:07

That's really interesting. I wouldn't have thought that but yeah. What kinds of protocols were in place when you came back in the fall?

JP 28:18

Our district did a very good job. I know they did some- I don't know if it was updating with the ventilation, and I should- I should know what was done. But I- I don't quite remember, but I know there was some of that done, and that was one of the things that was recommended. We have to wear masks. Everyone wears a mask, and the district has purchased hand sanitizer. So, there's hand sanitizer stations everywhere, every classroom has some, there's some out in common areas. The kids are keeping their distance, you know, six feet. They are not having as much movement in any of the buildings, on the playground, they're kind of keeping the classes separated, so they're not mingling groups of kids just to keep the close contacts at a minimum.

Everyone has a seating chart so they can identify quickly, who will close contact is, so yeah, I mean, there were there was definitely with I think with all the staff, some anxiety going back, and I think it was because we hadn't seen- we read, here's all the safety protocols, but we hadn't lived them, and we hadn't seen them. And once you saw them, and you live to them, like, Oh, this is good. We do all our meetings, virtually. We don't bring the staff together in one room, all our professional development, the staff is not together in one room, they're broken out in multiple rooms. So, they've- they have done a very good job, and there are constant reminders about, you know, keeping- keeping your distance, and those are for students and for staff.

CB 30:54

Have you felt good with how the district has handled it all?

JP 31:00

I do, I do feel good about it. Like I said, because when we went back, we didn't know what we didn't know, because it was the unknown, and once we kind of lived it, like, Oh, they did a really good job. I mean, they- they thought through so much, and our school nurses were involved with the protocol, I had to submit ideas on how are we going to get books to kids, and the school nurses had to approve it. Our high school library is open, and the school nurses had to approve, how's our library going to work and function? So, they were very involved, and they were making sure that everything was done to keep the students and staff safe.

CB 32:04

So, do you have any thoughts on how local, state, or federal leaders are- have responded to that crisis differently?

JP 32:17

[Laughing], I think some of the local leaders at all levels have politicized it, and my personal opinion, this is not a political issue. It's a global health crisis and we shouldn't make it a political issue. We want our families, our communities, our friends, we want everyone safe, and I think that should be more important than whatever way you lean politically.

CB 33:06

Is there anything you wish they would have done differently, specifically?

JP 33:13

They would have done differently... I don't know that any- I don't know that any politician would go and do anything differently. I think, I wish that both sides, both parties might have worked a little bit better together. To look at this as, it's- it's a health crisis. This is not, you know, a right-wing or left-wing thing. It's a health crisis, and we want to keep people in the state in the

community safe. But sometimes, you know, wishing that politicians from both sides work together is a pipe dream [laughing].

CB 34:05

So, knowing what you know now, what do you think that individuals, communities, or governments need to keep in mind for the future?

JP 34:17

I think, that's a really good question. I think they need to keep in mind that their focus needs to be on working more together than saying, "Nope, I'm not going to work with you. This is it." I think, I think politicians need to get back to more bipartisan deals and more acceptance of one another, more willing to meet and talk.

CB 35:05

Is there anything you wish that individuals would keep in mind for the future?

JP 35:14

I think individuals can keep in mind that whatever happens, we should respect one another's opinions. Respecting one another's opinions means we're not going to go attacking other people for what they do or don't do.

CB 35:44

What does a post pandemic world look like for you?

JP 35:50

Wow, sunshine and rainbows, post pandemic world. We're getting there. Um, I think, I think it's gonna be a while till we totally get there, but I think it's going to be, you don't have to maybe grab your mask, when you walk out the door, or when you get out to the garage, you realize you forgot your mask, you're not to have to go back in and get it. It's going to be, I think it's going to be changed a little bit. I think we're going to learn a lot from this. I don't know how many people are going to be shaking hands anymore. But I think there will be less anxiety, I certainly hope that a lot of small businesses and the restaurants that have been hurting, I hope they start coming back, but it's got to be at a place where it's safe to do that, for the people that are going out and you can safely get together with your family and friends, a group of people, you can safely go to a baseball game without, you know, worrying. I think that's going to be a little while coming yet [laughing].

CB 37:37

What does- what does the school look like in a post pandemic world to you specifically?

JP 37:45

I'm not sure, because I think some of the things that happened during the pandemic, some of the technology pieces that we put in place, are, I think those are gonna stay. So, I think there's going to be some good changes that come. I think, you know, we can go back to, [chuckling], we can go back to the kids being able to intermingle with classes. But I think there's some really good things that we started doing during the pandemic. Our teachers were using Google Classroom as a communication method and the students learn that, from that, and that was kind of a place that How is everything? I think that's a good thing. And just because the, you know, when the pandemic's over, that's still a good thing to have. Um, ebooks, oh, my goodness, our ebooks circulation has just skyrocketed in the district and there were staff that were more open to students reading ebooks, instead of print books. I think that's great. Because if you want to read on your phone or your tablet or your computer, why does it matter That it's not a print book? As long as you're reading, read. So, I think those are some good things that came from the pandemic that I'd like to see stick around. So, I think it when our post pandemic school isn't going to look like it looks before and I think that's okay, because I think we'll take some of the good things from the pandemic are good practices and bring them in.

CB 40:00

It sounds like you have a very positive outlook.

JP 40:06

I try, I try very hard to have a positive outlook because it's- it's much easier to have a positive outlook than a negative outlook. I like my rose-colored glasses [laughing].

CB 40:22

Perfect. [Email notification] Sorry about that.

JP 40:26

Not a problem.

CB 4:27

[Chuckling], So is there anything we haven't touched on that you would like to talk about?

JP 40:35

The one thing that I was thinking of, because I was thinking about this interview coming up, and that I noticed with our high school students during the start of the pandemic was their reaction to it was, they wanted to read those pandemic fiction novels and I would see requests and holds for *The Stand* [by Stephen King] and other pandemic books and I thought that was such an interesting reaction for them to have. Though it wasn't my cup of tea to read pandemic books

during the pandemic, I know a lot of people who did. My brother reread *The Stand*; I know a couple other people who reread it. Maybe that was their way of connecting to the pandemic or finding light in the pandemic, I don't know, but I-I thought that was one interesting thing that I noticed with our high school students.

CB 41:59

Yeah, that is really interesting. Alright, so unless there's anything else you want to touch on?

JP 42:12

I cannot think of anything else.

CB 42:19

Okay, so then I am going to end this recording. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this, I think it was really insightful.

JP 42:29

You are very welcome. I was happy to do it.

CB 42:33

Alright, so I'm going to end the recording if you want to stick around.

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