

Podcast 529: Serving Independent Study Schools with Debbi Hall

Episode Transcript

Debbi Hall: It makes us proud to work here and to be able to see the whole methodology in the nine units that we have here at IEW and how impactful this truly is to our students.

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So Andrew, before I started working for IEW, probably long before...

Andrew Pudewa: Wow, you were very young then.

Julie Walker: I was, right, well, I do, I do know this, I should say because when I came on board, I heard about what, what you've been up to for these past few years, and one of the things that you were very intentional about is supporting the teachers and families in Alaska because that is a really unique situation. Alaska is huge. It's like how many Texas can fit in Alaska?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, distance education in Alaska has been a thing forever. Because half the kids could never even get to a school for half the year. So

Julie Walker: Snowmobiles are not.

Andrew Pudewa: This idea, Dr. Webster did correspondence school for his junior and senior year of high school being out in Saskatchewan and circumstance and all that. So there is certainly a tradition for this kind of independent distance education. We've seen, of course, a rapid growth of this in many, many places in the last couple decades.

Julie Walker: Exactly. And that's actually our topic today: what is an independent study school? How are they organized and how can we support them? So it trickled down from Alaska into California. Took off big time in California. Some of those areas are remote and parents wanted to homeschool, but they wanted the support of a school that would help them with their homeschool.

Andrew Pudewa: In California, and there are other states that have, and of course education law is totally different in states. It's completely a state thing, not a federal thing, and that affects people who want to homeschool or do something else. And in California you can either register your own family as a private school with the state, or you can enroll in an organization that is considered a school by the state. And so in California we see these independent study programs that actually serve to give some of the parents a level of.

Julie Walker: Support and accountability.

Andrew Pudewa: support and accountability and not having to be registered as a private school with the state of California. But different states have different laws. For me, it's exciting to see many options for people who want to get out of a situation that is not ideal for their kids, and in many cases be much more involved.

Julie Walker: Well, a little bit of my story and how I came to IEW. I was working at Biola University, and I brought you down to help us teach these homeschoolers, how to write, and specifically the parents who were then the tutors of these classes that I had set up. And this was a long time ago before co-ops.

Andrew Pudewa: Even to this date, we have to let people know you got more people in that room than I had ever had in a room before. And you did it year after year after year. And I remember thinking, wow, this woman knows how to get people to come. And then of course, the story of how we ended up working together, we can save for another time.

Julie Walker: We'll say that for another time.

Andrew Pudewa: But yeah, you were essentially in that position of saying, what support services can we offer to all these moms and parents who want to teach their children?

Julie Walker: Exactly. And so of course, as is my nature, I look for my friends to come and help me on this project. And so one of my dear friends, Debbi. I recruited her to come work for me, Debbi Hall, and it was actually how long ago? See, Debbi is in our studio today. How long ago, Debbi, did you start? Did I pull you away from Biola and have you come work for us here at IEW?

Debbi Hall: It's been around seven years.

Julie Walker: So seven

Debbi Hall: Seven and a half

Julie Walker: It took me a little bit longer than I had thought because I've been here for, well, it was 10 years later that she finally joined our little party here. But the thing that I love about what Debbi does for IEW is that she is that warm supporting voice to teachers who want to be able to support their parents who are enrolled in these independent study schools. So Debbi, welcome to our podcast.

Debbi Hall: Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

Julie Walker: So tell us what are some of the favorite things you get to do? What are some of those phone calls that you get from your teachers who are supporting these parents? What are some of those favorite calls that you take and how do you coach them on choosing the best writing curriculum?

Debbi Hall: Oh my goodness. Well, I love it when my phone rings or if I get an email from an educational facilitator at an independent study school, from all the teachers that are there serving their families. And I know those teachers are just so passionate about wanting to help the families that are homeschooling and we join them in that.

Some of the things that we can offer, we have some resources, is we want the parents to know that we will have review copies that we can send to the independent study schools, and that we can send them review copies, we can provide them even with materials for a preview library where the families can go in and actually see and put their hands physically on our curriculum.

And sometimes that helps just to be able to pick it up and look at it as their families are making their educational choices for the future. It's really nice to be able to pick a product up sometimes, and so we want to just equip our schools with that. And something else we can try to do is we offer our schools, we want our families to know that we have three free weeks of lessons that you can try for almost all of our curriculum now that you can use the three free weeks. And so we want our independent study schools to be provided with that and that they can help the families take a turn to use that and see if it's going to work. We're really positive that you're going to like our products, and we've seen so much success with that, but it's a great resource for you to have a chance to be able to use this for three weeks.

Julie Walker: I know another thing, Debbi, that you love to do is you love to get Andrew talking to these parents.

Debbi Hall: Oh I do !

Andrew Pudewa: I've done a number of webinars, and I've been pretty impressed with the turnout, and of course they record it for a lot of people. It's very interesting to me how you get this very big mix of people who, if they've been teaching IEW with their kids and they ask these kind of detailed questions, and then other people who obviously have very little or no experience listening to me, and then they ask questions. And you get this very broad, and I get a sense of how broad the whole world of parents who are looking for better options for their kids is. And it is awfully nice to be able to see, just try it out, because a lot of people, I don't know why. Can you imagine people hear? Oh, IEW is complicated and hard. Okay, well but

Julie Walker: It's different, but it's not complicated and hard

Andrew Pudewa: Try it for three weeks. And I think most of those people, oh, oh, okay. That actually looks kind of easier.

Debbi Hall: right.

Julie Walker: what I'm trying to do, and it looks like it's, I'm actually going to get

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, so that's a good one. But I really do enjoy those webinars and kind of the range of questions that come in. And of course it's very nice to have you and sometimes someone else on hand to answer the questions I don't want or out of time or the technical questions like, where can I find this product? Or whatever.

But certainly, we look at the changing landscape of education in the country. I might say the world, but I don't know how fast that's changing. But post COVID and with all sorts of different reasons and influences, parents are waking up to this idea that I can actually kind of be in charge of my kids' education, but I don't have to do it all alone and figure it all out. And there's infrastructure and there's organizations that can help me. And I just think that's really a blessing for so many people who might be completely unable to imagine just doing all the homeschooling on their own and figuring out everything and, and worrying. I mean, doesn't every homeschool mom worry?

Debbi Hall: Absolutely.

Andrew Pudewa: Am I going to fail my kid? Like if I blow it this year, I'm going to destroy them for life. This kind of exaggerated fear. And so when, when they have an infrastructure to say, no, here are the options. Here's some accountability. And by the way, we've got people who've been doing this for years and you can have community with them. What a blessing.

Julie Walker: Yes,

Debbi Hall: It's. And I actually homeschooled, as Julie mentioned. We homeschooled our children together, have been dear friends for a long time. And then my oldest daughter became a teacher, and then she actually works for an independent study school at this current time, and she's a supervising teacher. So I see things from her side as well and just how much she loves working with the families.

And as you mentioned, Andrew, it's a place where families can go to receive some extra help and support. And so we want to be there to help with that. And I know one of the things is families are looking for curriculum. They want to make sure that their curriculum meets the state standards for their state. And our IEW curriculum is able to do that. And I would put a challenge out to any independent study schools. As Andrew mentioned, we do have a lot of them in California as well as in Alaska, and I would love you to call me. I would love to meet you and just try to be able to help you with some of our resources as we support our families and serve the families together.

Julie Walker: We have a couple of these independent study schools here. And I should clarify a little bit. So an independent study school, and Debbi, you can correct me if I'm wrong, can kind of show itself in multiple areas. It can be this is it: everything we do for the school is all independent, all distance learning. They might come in together to do a class, but no one is meeting with the students every day for five days a week. Then we have other schools where you have kind of a hybrid where some of the kids are going five days a week and some of the kids are doing this distance learning. Right. And then we have kind of this

other segue where some of these are public schools, and some of these are private schools, and we're able to serve any school in any capacity because of the resources that we have. And Andrew is doing the support. And Debbi, you being available to coach them on what to buy.

Debbi Hall: Absolutely. We also are seeing quite a lot right now or a surge in public schools having programs within the public schools and their independent study programs, but they're still within the public school system and they can get quite large. And we love working with them. And I'd love to see Andrew do some webinars for these students as well. And these families.

Andrew Pudewa: Just put it on my calendar.

Debbi Hall: I'm working on it.

Julie Walker: So, Debbi, what's your favorite thing about IEW? You recently became an accredited instructor, so tell us about that.

Debbi Hall: It is a challenge to see how hard our students work, and I have a brand new respect for all of our accredited teachers and doing this myself, but there's so much to learn. And my husband and I were even just recently talking that it makes us proud to work here and to be able to see the whole methodology in the nine units that we have here at IEW and how impactful this truly is to our students. And my husband and I were saying, we want to use this with our grandchildren because as Andrew, I've heard him say many times, and I agree a thousand percent with him. The only good thing about getting old is grandchildren. So parents have as many kids as you possibly can because then you get more grandchildren.

Julie Walker: It's true.

Debbi Hall: I hope to be using these materials with my own grandchildren before too much longer. But my favorite thing about IEW is honestly talking with the teachers from the independent study schools and the hybrid schools that I work with. And I just love being able to help them, equip them to be able to work with our families as we serve them together.

Julie Walker: Wow. I don't think we need to say anything else Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: There's a little window into a little part or a bigger part of what we do, and I have always said, Providence will bring us all the right people at the right time. Providence will direct our actions so that we can extend that blessing to all the people we don't know.

We do not know the implications of what we do. Every now and then we get some little email of, I just wanted to let you know my son went off and he got his BA, he got his degree, and then he got into Master's and now he's doing this and that. And I'm so grateful because he learned to write with IEW and it made a huge difference. For every one of those we don't get, I wonder how many there are that have experienced that to some degree. So it is a blessing to have both of you, all of us.

Debbi Hall: What makes me very excited is with the independent study schools, Andrew, when you're gracious, we can work it in with your calendar and you're able to do a webinar, is just the trickle down effect of the hour that he has in our Independent Study Schools then record that and it goes to all of their families. And so it impacts, as you mentioned, it just goes so far and we're very grateful for that.

Julie Walker: Well, thank you, Debbi, for being here.

Debbi Hall: Thank you for having me.

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.