Description:
This episode features Saskatchewan teachers Cindy Lowe and Jill Labas, who share how they successfully advocated to make financial literacy a graduation requirement. It's Canada's first province to do so! From late-night petitions and rallying community stakeholders to building province-wide teacher training, their story shows how persistence, passion, and student voices can drive systemic change. You'll hear firsthand how they transformed classrooms into hubs of excitement, where students say it's the one class they know will matter every day of their lives. You'll also learn about the differences and overlaps between U.S. and Canadian personal finance education, as well as practical tips for making lessons engaging and relevant.

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Tim Ranzetta:

All right, folks. I want to know what the highlight of your summer has been so far. I'm in San Diego—this is the first time I've ever done the Speaker Series from outside of our offices or my home. I'm here doing a FinCamp with 30 teachers, and they're excited because California has a new course requirement. That energy brings me joy.

Cindy and Jill, what's been your highlight of the summer?

Cindy Lowe:

We farm—we have cattle and crops. So in addition to being a business teacher, I'm a farm wife and entrepreneur. We just bought new equipment and rolled up 140 bales—made what we call a big bale sausage tube. Farming is exciting for me, plus I love being outside with my little son.

Tim Ranzetta:

That's awesome! What crops do you grow?

Cindy Lowe:

Canola, durum, lentils, even some mustard this year. We've had five inches of rain, which is huge, because we've been in a drought since 2016. Honestly, the better highlight is that we finally might have a real crop this year—it looks amazing.

Jill Labas:

My highlight has been swimming in Canadian lakes with my three boys. And honestly, another highlight—hello—I'm on NGPF!

Teacher Backgrounds

Tim Ranzetta:

Great. I'm excited to introduce today's NGPF Speaker Series. We have two guests from Saskatchewan, Canada: Cindy Lowe and Jill Labas. Let's start with introductions.

Jill Labas:

Hi, everyone. I'm Jill, entering my 20th year of teaching. Back in 2016 I was ready to leave teaching—I taught history, law, psych, and thought I might return to the business world since I have a business degree.

Then in 2017 I stepped into teaching business education and found my passion reignited. That's also when I discovered NGPF online, which provided resources and tools that saved me as I jumped into the role mid-year.

My school has about 1,500 students. Back then, only one or two grade 12 personal finance classes existed, total. I just knew more kids needed it, and that got me interested in building it up.

Tim Ranzetta:

And Cindy?

Cindy Lowe:

I have a commerce degree in finance and started out in banking at World Bank. I thought I'd be a financial advisor, selling investments—mutual funds, stocks, etc. But I quickly realized most people knew nothing about finance. I spent seven years explaining basic concepts—net worth, debt, savings—while being pushed by managers to sell more credit cards. It felt wrong.

Eventually, I realized teaching was the answer. I got my B.Ed in math (since there was no business option in Saskatchewan). I taught some high school, then adult learners at a local college, and found that teaching personal finance transformed lives.

One experience stood out: I had a newly divorced student in her forties, no savings, crying in class when she realized she'd never learned about retirement saving until now. At that point, I knew I needed to reach younger students, so I went back to high school to teach accounting and, unofficially, personal finance.

Advocacy Story – Saskatchewan's Push for Required Financial Literacy

Tim Ranzetta:

You both pivoted into advocacy. How did that happen?

Cindy Lowe:

We started small—incorporating finance into accounting, starting business clubs, creating "Finance Fridays" and "Money Mondays." Students loved it. Attendance was great. They'd say it was the one class where they learned something practical.

That response fueled us. We business teachers started pushing for finance as a required course, not just an elective. In 2017, I met the Premier of Saskatchewan, who placed me on a curriculum renewal committee. In 2019, two elective finance courses (Finance 20 and 30) were introduced.

But enrollment numbers were low, so we kept advocating. In 2023, I created a Change.org petition. It exploded nationally, with over 1,100 signatures in a week and coverage in national media. That pressure finally worked.

By November 2023, financial literacy became a graduation requirement in Saskatchewan. By September 2024, Finance 10—a new Grade 10 course—was live in every school province-wide. That's a turnaround of less than a year.

Jill Labas:

And we were shocked—the government didn't just require one of the elective courses; they created Finance 10 as a brand-new graduation requirement. That meant every Grade 10 student had to take it. At my school alone, we ran 14 sections last year. Enrollment in Grade 11 and 12 finance didn't drop—it actually went up.

Teacher Training and Resource Development

Jill Labas:

A big challenge was training teachers. Not all schools even had a business teacher. Many teachers were nervous—"I've made financial mistakes myself, how can I teach this?" But after teaching it, they all said it was the best class they'd ever taught.

Cindy Lowe:

Exactly. To support teachers, we built a giant shared Google Drive of resources during COVID—accounting, finance, entrepreneurship—and turned it into a provincial Financial Literacy Hub. The Ministry asked us to lead professional development workshops for teachers. Over 200 teachers attended our daylong sessions where we broke down the ten Finance 10 modules.

We also keep pointing teachers to NGPF, which is fun, interactive, and engaging. Our goal has always been: don't let financial literacy be boring.

Curriculum Differences – U.S. vs. Canada

Jill Labas:

Most core concepts are the same—budgeting, credit, spending habits, saving, behavioral economics. The differences are really in technical details.

Taxes: Different filing system (Canada Revenue Agency instead of IRS).

Investing/Retirement: Canada has TFSAs and RRSPs; the U.S. has 401(k)s and IRAs.

Postsecondary costs: More focus in U.S. curricula on FAFSA and student loans.

Cindy Lowe:

For Grade 10 specifically, we focused on mindset, respecting money, and understanding the consequences of debt. We don't dive into mortgages yet, but we want students to understand savings and responsible credit before making big choices.

Pushback to the Mandate

Cindy Lowe:

We faced big resistance—from colleagues (English/social studies teachers worried about losing credits), some school administrators, and even our union, who didn't like the public petition.