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Betsy Kindall:

I'm Betsy Kindall.

Nicole Fairchild:

I'm Nicole Fairchild.

Stacy Moore:

And I'm Stacy Moore.

Betsy Kindall:

And this is Arkansas A.W.A.R.E, a project to advance wellness and resiliency in education.

Nicole Fairchild:

Hey, welcome back everybody. Happy January to you all. We are on the second semester. Yeah buddy.

Stacy Moore:

It's so crazy.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, I know. It goes fast. So today it's going to be Stacy and I have asked Stacy what she's seeing out there in the field. She's in and out of lots of different schools right now. And one of the things that we wanted to just circle back around and talk about one more time is skills.

Stacy Moore:

Makes you think Nicole's like we've talked about this.

Nicole Fairchild:

No, really part of me thinks, I don't know how many people are going back and listening to the archives anyway. And we do have different perspectives and ideas about these topics when we come back around to them. But this is pretty critical and coming up all the time.

Stacy Moore:

It really is. And so when you ask me, okay, what do you see out there? What's going on right there? And then there's just been some instances here lately where I've been going out there with behavior. And so we get called in when they need help with, there's some student behavior that is challenging or difficult or some relationships that are difficult or things like that. And so a couple of the things primarily on my mind that we've been dealing with are lagging skills. And so some of those actually have been academic. So we see behavior issues and we say, oh no, they're good. They could do this if they wanted to. If they really tried, I've seen them do this, they really can do this.

Nicole Fairchild:

And then when you get in there and look at it.

Stacy Moore:

And then when I get in there and look at it, there's awesome avenues for determining that. Some of that is psycho-educational assessment. And so it's their formal evaluations that may have been done. And not just looking at achievement in IQ even though those are important, but looking at fine motor skills, looking at executive functioning skills, looking at auditory and vision and things like that. Some skills that you might not even just look at if you flip through an assessment if you're not going through it thoroughly. So those skills for sure, but also just some skills, some assessments that they do in the classroom. And so I know that there was like, oh yeah, yeah, he can do it if he means to. And I think that my concern, Nicole, is this, as kids get older, I don't know if they purposefully hide it, but it can be hidden.

Nicole Fairchild:

Well, they've had to cope.

Stacy Moore:

And so the behavior overshadows the academic skills.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, because they've had to cope and it gets more embarrassing the longer you go.

Stacy Moore:

And so it's like, oh well if they would just sit down, if they would stay in their seat, if they would quit interrupting, if they would do this, then I know they can do it. But then if you talk to those teachers who work with them one on one, they're like no, he does great with me because we are at his level, when he goes in the classroom he's overwhelmed.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yes.

Stacy Moore:

But other teachers don't see that, they don't see the academic deficits there. And I've wondered about this with my own kids is that as a teacher it's very hard, and I try to think back to when I was in the classroom, it can be very difficult to be up on every student that you have and the skills that they're bringing in and where they currently are.

Nicole Fairchild:

Oh yeah.

Stacy Moore:

You can do a math test, you can do an assessment or whatever, but it's hard to know exactly where they're at and whether those lagging skills are. It's just hard.

Nicole Fairchild:

It is hard, but I don't know why, maybe it's because it's the time of year to lose weight. But I was thinking about weight loss because I think that when you go to the doctor and the doctor says you need to lose weight and they give you what they consider to be the recommendations to do so and you come back six months later or three months later and you haven't done it, they would say that that's your motivation, they would say that's your will. You could do it if you wanted to.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

You know what I mean?

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

But there's a reason why it's hard.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

You would do it if you could.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

So the reason why it's hard could be skill, could be knowledge, could be unmet needs, a variety of different things. And you're actually not going to do any good by blaming the client, by blaming the patient.

Stacy Moore:

And that's where I almost want us to not assume, let's not assume they're on grade level. Let's not assume their school levels are where they are. And I don't think, I could be wrong, I don't think many of us, I don't think I going into the education field knew what it was like to struggle with academics.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yes. And yeah, that's a big deal because if you don't know what it's like or you haven't had one of your own babies, your own children struggle, the assumption is this is a motivation issue.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah.

Stacy Moore:

All kids could do this.

Nicole Fairchild:

Sure, why not?

Stacy Moore:

They should be able to do this.

Nicole Fairchild:

I'm sure Jillian Michaels thinks I should just be able to lose some weight.

Stacy Moore:

Just put her video in-.

Nicole Fairchild:

Just yell at me a little while. No, really. And I think, I guess maybe I'm relating it back to that because I'm hoping that the adults out there could grab hold of that and realize we're only going to make progress with people if we're curious about why.

Stacy Moore:

Yes.

Nicole Fairchild:

If it's just protective and it's just your problem and I'm just going to blame and then that satisfies whatever guilt I have or concern I have about why you're struggling or whatever, then we don't really end up helping these kids. It's really more about, I am curious about why this still isn't working.

Stacy Moore:

And it's not like it's really unknown, and I wish I had the data for you, but I did not look it up because I didn't think of going this direction. But thing about academic skill deficits that are in our LEs, reading difficulties that are in our prisons. There's deficits there, and we're not saying, it could be chicken before the egg kind of thing, we don't know what caused what, but there is a deficit there. So I guess being out there, it's like being curious, like you said, and getting digging deeper. And it's not just academic, here lately, goodness, how many social skill curriculums we've handed out or skill cards or things to teach, the social skills that our kids have missed somehow, or that we take for granted and that our students really don't know how to do, like entering a group conversation, like having a back and forth conversation.

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Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah.

Stacy Moore:

Autism is on the rise too, and that is one of the known social interaction is social communication or some of the known characteristics where they struggle. And so social skills, emotional..., social, sorry, emotional regulation, executive functioning, those types of skills that do contribute to our behavior.

Nicole Fairchild:

So explicitly teaching the things that we might otherwise assume they should know how to do.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah. And we've got some options here. So when it comes down to behavior plans, and we do a functional behavioral assessment and we look at behavioral plans and we say, okay, there's some skill deficits here. There's some social skill deficits. That's why they're getting in conflicts at recess with peers. Then as a school, what do we do?

Nicole Fairchild:

I would-.

Stacy Moore:

Do you punish it out of them?

Nicole Fairchild:

Exactly. Yeah. But then I think when you look at teaching this kid's social skills, then the next question is how and when and-.

Stacy Moore:

And who?

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, and who? And who?

Stacy Moore:

And who. And that's a big deal. Do we have the resources to know the curriculums, to have the people, to have the time to do that. But the other side is if we don't, is this likely to get better? Can we promise them a great reward every recess if they just get along, if they don't have the skills to do it, is it going to work?

Nicole Fairchild:

No. And I think the perspective of thinking about it as lagging skills, even just that mindset is so very helpful because if you look at a struggling student and the initial impulse is just blame or dismissal, then we are not doing our job in public education.

Stacy Moore:

So let's go back to the weight loss thing.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah.

Stacy Moore:

So if the doctor said, okay, Nicole, if you come in here and next time you've lost X number of pounds, I will give you blank.

Nicole Fairchild:

A \$50 gift card.

Stacy Moore:

\$50 gift card.

Nicole Fairchild:

I don't care.

Stacy Moore:

Would it work?

Nicole Fairchild:

No. But probably because that reward is not addressing my unmet need, or the reason why this is actually hard for me. And the thing is this, I'm a grownup and I can think that through. And I am self-aware enough to understand that, kids are not. So we say to a kid, if you do this, I'll give you this reward. And they're like, yeah, that sounds great. But then if it doesn't actually meet the underlying need, you're not going to see the success. And they're going to be like, well I tried.

Stacy Moore:

What if they can't get there? And they're not going to have the train, the avenue to get there if they don't have the skills. Likewise, if the doctor said, okay, Nicole, next time in here, if you have not lost this, then you're going to pay me 200 bucks. What if there's a punishment attached? Would that make a difference?

Nicole Fairchild:

I would just not go back.

Stacy Moore:

Which is a good point.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, but kids don't have that option.

Stacy Moore:

They don't have that option. But does that make it right?

Nicole Fairchild:

No. And probably what I need is something different. And how different would it be for, let's say my doctor to sit across from me and say, what makes this hard for you, Nicole? And what can we do to make sure that you have the supports you need?

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

Which would be a completely different way of going about it.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah. Where are the bumps? Tell me about those. When is it hardest for you? Tell me about those. And to plan into active. Because when I'm out there at recess and kids are amazing. They'll find you, if you're an adult on the playground, they're going to find you and strike up a friendship because they're so stinking cute. But when they start to unfold about what they're watching and what they're playing and what their home lives are, you just see a part of them out there that when the classroom, I didn't even get to see, you get to know your kids over the year for sure, but you also have insight into where they're coming from and what their lives are like and how school may not be the top priority for them, unfortunately. It may not be their major concern.

Nicole Fairchild:

And I think, we've done a training for a couple years now about blending SEL into the classroom, about folding it in, not making it be something separate or different. And I really do think that, I hope every time we've done that training, I think we've had people in the room go, oh, oh, okay, okay, I already do a lot of this and I can do a little more of this. And I do think there will be a ground swell where that shifts things because what we're doing the old way it isn't working. Just identifying problems and assigning labels and blame.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

That's really not the way forward. And I think you're right too, Stacy, that when we can catch these things earlier in kids, it's going to make a bigger difference if we can catch it earlier. If you have a lagging skill and it's caught in stage one rather than stage four, I think that is why in the older grades when we look at it, we see more attitude, we see more prickles because they've had to defend and cope for so long, obviously, you would've done that too.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah. And I've worked with kids that would not have admitted that they needed help, or they will cover that, that they can read, they would say, that they-

Nicole Fairchild:

It's too vulnerable.

Stacy Moore:

... it's too vulnerable. It's too much. So I guess the whole message I'm continually reminded, I think that we have this, I think we know this, and then I go into the schools and there's another example and there's another example and there's another example.

Nicole Fairchild:

So let me ask you this, Stacy, what makes this hard for educators?

Stacy Moore:

I think it can be multiple things. I think that when you're talking about, it's almost like the accountability, the buck gets passed. And so it's like, okay, so our students don't do well. And so what does that look like? Well then as a teacher, that makes us look bad. And I'm not saying we're not doing or doing things for that reason, but I remember my name being up on the screen, I remember my kids scores being there. And so it does get passed where it looks rough on us. So I also think there is, I'm supposed to teach this subject for this kids, how do you meet all the needs as one person?

Nicole Fairchild:

Okay.

Stacy Moore:

How do you meet all the needs as one person with this push for inclusion too? I feel from the educators, the stress that I can't be multiple places at one time. I can't do 10,000 roles. Okay, that's a little over exaggeration, but you know what I mean. So there's a stress for time, for people, for resources that we don't know, and then so when there's bad behavior that goes with it, "bad behavior" that goes with it. Is it easy? Is it just like a survival tactic to keep pushing forward and say when they learned to shape up.

That sounds really bad. I don't mean that bad. I don't think our teachers are like that normally. I think that sometimes we also don't have access to the knowledge. We don't have access to the information. We can only use what we know. And so a lot of times we'll go into conferences and we'll talk about their past scores and teachers didn't know.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, sure. Yeah. Oh.

Stacy Moore:

They don't have access to those records. If this is a new student for them this year and they had their test two years ago, they don't know.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah. They may not know. So I think one of the things about curiosity is, it's only going to flourish and pop its head up if there is a relative amount of safety and if most of your personal needs are met. I can't be curious if I am way down on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Curiosity is not down there at the base where I'm getting my physiological needs met and having safety. I can't be curious there. I'm on alert. And so I do think it just continues to swirl into this conversation we are always having about teacher wellbeing, because here we are, we're saying, let's be curious about what the lagging skills are.

Stacy Moore:

And I don't have, and I never want to sound like that's a negative thing, but I'll just use me as an example. I don't have time for that. I love these kids, I'm working for them, I'm working the hardest I can. And yet more is needed.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah. So educators maybe are not far enough up in Maslow's on a daily basis to be continuously curious about lagging skills.

Stacy Moore:

And not saying that they don't care about their kids.

Nicole Fairchild:

No.

Stacy Moore:

And not saying that they don't want to do something.

Nicole Fairchild:

No. Their own physiological needs are their bodies, their regulation is not in a place where that is easy to grab hold of every day.

Stacy Moore:

Well, let's say we have, I don't know how many numbers of kids you have, but whatever number of kids that you see on a daily basis, and we know Johnny struggles and he has some social school deficits. Okay, now what? What can I practically do? Do I refer them to the school counselor? So I've identified the lagging skill, I know it's there, but I do think there's a breakdown too in, okay, now what do we do next? What tier two level is in place? Do we have social skill groups?

Nicole Fairchild:

How many schools do you think have social skill groups, percentage wise? We're speculating now.

Stacy Moore:

We're speculating. I don't know. We need to do a survey. The ones that I've been in, zero. Have a determined-.

Nicole Fairchild:

Okay. Yeah.

Stacy Moore:

... curriculum where there's a flow in and out. Normally it's we identify students through the FBA. BIP says we have to do social skills, so therefore we construct social skills training or social skills instruction.

Nicole Fairchild:

Got it.

Stacy Moore:

But those that have that tier to, but now other schools around the state may definitely have that as a constant flow. I know when I worked at a bigger school, they did have different groups, lunch groups, and that was what they called qualified as their social skills groups. And so that was a pretty regular thing. Three or four times a year they would do three or four different groups that would cycle in. But I don't know what that is like since COVID, have we gotten back to that? Are we there? In my schools, not so much.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah. Because it's a staff issue, it's a personnel issue, it's a time issue. It's all the things. And I always feel like when we talk about these issues, that there are people that might be like, those are not the core issues. I want you to teach my kid to read and write. I don't care about whether or not they can make eye contact. But the fact of the matter is making eye contact and social skills aren't just as important in the course of your daily adult life as being able to read the signs around you.

Stacy Moore:

And they're the ones who flag for me. Those are the ones who I end up coming in on because those skills are not present. So yeah, they are struggling. They are struggling with behavior. They are struggling with relationships and interactions. And some of those are still not only social skills, but academic. They're struggling academically for one reason or another, they're struggling academically. And so when we put them in the classroom in the Gen Ed and we expect them to be able to do the same thing on the same level.

Nicole Fairchild:

Without adequate support. It's tough, it really is tough. And I don't know for sure the way forward, except that we are continuing statewide to push in a variety of ways with multiple ideas and topics and issues to meet this need. I just think it's going to take continuous pushing and time.

Stacy Moore:

And I know y'all talked about champions, right?

Nicole Fairchild:

Yes. We have been talking about champions.

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Stacy Moore:

And I do think it takes a champion for that student.

Nicole Fairchild:

Not just a champion for the program or for the idea in general.

Stacy Moore:

For that student. Because when, and I'm going to say this and it's going to be controversial, but it's harder to do things for those kids that continually end up getting in trouble.

Nicole Fairchild:

I don't know if I've ever told this on the podcast, but I had a student like that that just got in trouble a lot, had a lot of unmet needs, had a lot of trauma, had a lot of hyper vigilance, and just reasons why there were problems. And we're talking about a, I don't know, somewhere seventh, eighth, and ninth grade and there was some sort of trouble. Student has to go to the assistant principal's office requested that I go with him because who was his champion? Me.

Stacy Moore:

You were. Yeah, for sure.

Nicole Fairchild:

And the principal said, you can go in there as his counselor, but not as his lawyer.

Stacy Moore:

What about his advocate? Can I go in as his advocate?

Nicole Fairchild:

I was like.

Stacy Moore:

But there's a reason he called you. There's a reason he wanted you in there.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah. And I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that I had knowledge and understanding about the reasons why, which did not make the outward behavior okay. It did not make it something that we needed to dismiss or not address, but just the understanding of why, of being able to, in that moment, when you're vulnerable, you're in trouble, you're in this bad place again, to have somebody go, all right, I got you. I'm still with you, we're still going to get through this.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah, we're going to figure it out. So you've introduced a new word to my vocabulary.

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Nicole Fairchild:

Oh, I have.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

What's that?

Stacy Moore:

Thinking of it this morning in the car as I was driving, prickly.

Nicole Fairchild:

Oh.

Stacy Moore:

Prickly.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah.

Stacy Moore:

Sometimes it's hard to pull prickly people close to you.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, but those prickly people, they need it.

Stacy Moore:

But they do.

Nicole Fairchild:

They do need it.

Stacy Moore:

And that behavior and some of those things and attitude and whatever that we get as a result, it's harder for me, I don't want to project that on anybody else. It's harder for me to draw them closer and to be their advocate and to be their champion. Now through time, sometimes I love them the most.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, for sure.

Stacy Moore:

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... not really, but I do love them. I'm like, they're endeared to my heart because of that. But I think in the day to day, it's easier to help those that need the help and want the help than it is those who somehow, how would you describe prickly?

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, they-.

Stacy Moore:

Resist.

Nicole Fairchild:

... Yes, they resist. In fact, it makes me think back to the episode we did about stonewalling with the four horsemen that, that what it looks like is stay away.

Stacy Moore:

Yes.

Nicole Fairchild:

What's actually true under the surface is I need something and I don't feel safe to ask for it.

Stacy Moore:

Amen. And what it looks like is, I'm trying to annoy the fire out of you.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yes.

Stacy Moore:

But what it really is, is I have needs and I need something.

Nicole Fairchild:

Absolutely, it is.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

It absolutely is.

Stacy Moore:

If we just had those, if we seriously could have glasses that we put on and we could just see through.

Nicole Fairchild:

I know. But I do also recognize that that's a hard way to be all the time. It really is.

Stacy Moore:

Oh, absolutely.

Nicole Fairchild:

It's just a hard way to be, especially when you've got multiple things pulling on you.

Stacy Moore:

Absolutely.

Nicole Fairchild:

So, I don't know educators out there, we do struggle with you as we think about these things and as we think about the best ways to help you, I know when we have these conversations, what's always going on in my mind is, okay, how can we create professional development trainings that are actually going to help, that are actually going to help educators to be ready and prepared.

Stacy Moore:

But we know that by you doing the things is what's going to make the most difference. So can you lean in? Can you lean in when you really want to lean away, can you lean in to that person who's, I don't want to say prickly again, but that person, that's harder to understand. That's harder to do the nice things for, that seems to be trying to irritate you. What if you leaned in to that?

Nicole Fairchild:

I think there's really treasure there, especially in the long run. I think those are where the stories are.

Stacy Moore:

Yeah.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah. I really do. Yeah. Yeah. Well, we're with you out there. We're knee deep in January and we want you to know that at this time of year, we appreciate you guys. We know January, February and March till we get to spring break are a long slog, my friends. And so we just want you to know that we're so thankful to be working in education and with educators and supporting you all. So let us know if you have any thoughts, if you have any needs, if you need to request a training from us, we've got that on our Arkansas A.W.A.R.E site at DESE. So just let us know how we can support you and your staff as we finish out this semester.