

Betsy Kindall:

I'm Betsy Kindle.

Nicole Fairchild:

I'm Nicole Fairchild.

Stacy Moore:

And I'm Stacey Moore.

Betsy Kindall:

And this is Arkansas AWARE, a project to advance wellness and resiliency in education.

Betsy Kindall:

All right everybody, welcome back. We are talking right now about how our students are doing. This is what we have on our mind. We've talked a lot in the Arkansas AWARE podcast about teacher wellbeing and how are you? I think we've said over and over again, a dysregulated adult cannot regulate a dysregulated child and we preach, be well, get well, think about how you can do this. Because we want to make sure that our students have what they need, but how is it going this school year? How is it looking? I'm curious about what it's looking like in your classrooms? Are your students doing okay? We've talked about teacher wellbeing, but what about student wellbeing and what is that looking like right now?

Nicole Fairchild:

And do you know if your students are doing okay? I have things to say.

Betsy Kindall:

Yeah, how are you?

Nicole Fairchild:

I think I might have things to say.

Betsy Kindall:

Oh good. How are you checking in with them? Last year when we're thinking about social distancing and masks, and we were talking about how this is going to impact our students, and now it's still kind of here for some of us. I mean, it is here. I don't know why I said kind of, but you know, some places have masks, some don't, some are social distancing, different measures are being taken, but how has it impacted your students? Is it still impacting your students? And so how can you check in with them and know. Where are they? How are they? How are they doing?

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah. But also how did they come back from summer? What's that looking like?

Stacy Moore:

How did they come back from quarantine?

Nicole Fairchild:

I feel like too, when we, you were mentioning, how are your students doing? And, and I said, you know, how do you know? I think that we preach and talk about building relationships with students. But I think it's something that we might need a refresher on. I think our educators across the state are overwhelmed. And I know you can hear me out there and I can see you. I know you're overwhelmed, but our teachers are tasked with the job of taking care of those kids in the class. And you can't take care of the entire child, the whole child, you can't recognize the student's emotional and social needs and academic needs, even to be honest, if you don't have a relationship with them, if you don't build rapport with them.

Nicole Fairchild:

It's really that simple. And I'm going to try not to get worked up over it, but it seems like just that key piece is so missing in lots of classrooms. Do you know your kids? Do you know things about their life? Do you know when they've had a bad day? Do you know why they might not have got their math homework done? Do you care enough to ask? Do you have the relationship with them to ask?

Betsy Kindall:

And this is the thing that I think is really hard. I feel like we are always walking this line, because it sounds harsh to say, do you care enough to ask? But it's not harsh. I think what we need to recognize is that when we get stressed, we pair down to the basics and I think we all have a different perspective of what the basics are.

Nicole Fairchild:

I agree.

Betsy Kindall:

And if the basics are only academic, we are going to miss this.

Nicole Fairchild:

I absolutely agree.

Betsy Kindall:

What do you think Stacy?

Stacy Moore:

I'm sitting here thinking about why might relationships be taking a hit right now? Why might our relationships with our students be taking a hit? And so the first thing that comes to my mind, as being a teacher before, is it the pressure to that we're behind. We're behind academically. We took off so much time. We're behind, our scores have come in and so now we got to get back to task. We got to get them back on track. We've got to push the academics. And I'm not saying that's true. And I'm not saying that's happening at your school, but is it happening in your mind as a teacher? It would probably be in mine.

Nicole Fairchild:

Sure and it's, it's not that it's not valid .

Stacy Moore:

Right. We do want them to succeed. And so you know this concept of lost time. I think about the mask and I think about how teachers told me, "Stacy they're really quiet when they're wearing masks". Behavior problems aren't an issue as far as talking out in class and things like that and sharing because they're not. And so I think is that still playing a part as we're masking, and Nicole you've talked a lot about this, but as we're wearing those masks, that connection, that smile, I'm winking at people everywhere I go with, they're probably like what in the world, but in some way of communicating relationship, a tie, being able to talk because with mask, it almost nuzzled us.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah. It did.

Stacy Moore:

Muzzled?

Betsy Kindall:

Muzzled, not nuzzled.

Stacy Moore:

Sorry.

Nicole Fairchild:

Those are different.

Betsy Kindall:

Those are very different.

Stacy Moore:

Muzzled us, I'm thinking of a dog with a muzzle, right. It shut down the communication and we know we have to have time and communication for relationships. So, I guess I'm just thinking, how has this pandemic, how is it still the lingering effects on our teachers having relationships with our students?

Betsy Kindall:

Well, and I think too one thing is that our teachers are in survival mode. I think they're surviving, not thriving. And I feel like that when you are in survival mode, just like Nicole said, you pair it down to the very basics to get through your day. But the truth is if all you're working about is academics, that's not enough. Because quite frankly, without the other, that doesn't even matter.

Stacy Moore:

Okay, so that's fascinating. So, I think for some of us, the basics would be, they're here and, and they're loved.

Nicole Fairchild:

Oh, I love that basic.

Stacy Moore:

Wouldn't that be awesome if that was the go to in our mind of the basic of, okay, we're going through hard things and so my basic is that I'm going to take care of this student and I'm going to love them. I'm going to know that they belong

Nicole Fairchild:

That is elementary perspective. Stacy, you can't do that in high school.

Stacy Moore:

Oh, but you can be playful, right? Like there're different ways. Yes, it is going to look different. But, being playful, being curious, asking them about things. I was in a classroom and there was a student that definitely needed attention. Was getting attention in ways that weren't the most productive. And so still after class was over me being able to have a conversation, and I'm not tooting my own horn, I'm just saying being able to put that aside and say, "hey, so...", asking questions. They connected, they want to connect with us. They want to talk. So even beyond their behavior or what they seem. That was a high school student. I wish that our basic was...

Betsy Kindall:

Yeah, I think that's the pie in the sky. I wish it was too. Unfortunately, I'm not sure that it is. [crosstalk 00:07:33]

Nicole Fairchild:

I think that is where the joy is. I mean, when you talk to educators and we've done this in trainings, why do you do what you do? Why do you do this? Why don't you go smile at people at Walmart and help them at the self checkout?, because they're checking themselves out anyways. You don't even have to scan their groceries anymore. They're just going to stand there and wave at people, like why are you doing this?

Nicole Fairchild:

You know what we hear over and over again is that they love the students, that they're called to this work. It really does. When they tell us why they're doing this it's about relationships. And so when you pair it down and you cut out time for relationships, I think you steal most people's joy. I think you steal their joy and their purpose and their meaning. And no wonder, they're not feeling fulfilled.

Betsy Kindall:

I just feel like that if there's anything happening in the classroom, the first and foremost should be the relationship because that is the foundation in which everything else is built upon.

Stacy Moore:

Well, exactly because I don't want to say that's our basic and lead people to believe that academics and engagement is not important, because it absolutely, that's why we're here. That's why we do what we do. So to be engaged, I don't think it's an either or though, right? Like it's both and we can have relationships and be academically engaged at the same time. So knowing educators who have made that possible, who still are doing that, who are still keeping in mind relationships and the importance of that and keeping our students engaged academically. That's the pie in the sky.

Nicole Fairchild:

That is because I think that once you figure out that relationship piece, it makes the academics so much more successful.

Stacy Moore:

Yes. Oh absolutely.

Nicole Fairchild:

You know, I mean, it just does. And I think that if you're out there listening and as an educator, maybe you could take a look at what's happening in your classroom and assess, have I done my part on the relationship piece? Do I know my kids? Do I understand where they're coming from? Did they know that I care about them because that's really important to you.

Betsy Kindall:

Okay, so let's get behavior specific with this. You want to? What would you see? What would you see in a classroom where there were good relationships going on? So we kind of do this in our SEL program where you walk into a classroom and you feel comfortable there. What would you see? What would you hear? What would you feel? What would you see in a classroom like that? If you knew there were positive relationships going on between the teacher and the student.

Nicole Fairchild:

I think you can both see and feel camaraderie that people in the room like each other, you can tell when people like each other.

Betsy Kindall:

So laughing, smiling.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yes.

Betsy Kindall:

Back and forth conversations.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yes. Cooperation between students.

Betsy Kindall:

Helping each other.

Nicole Fairchild:

Absolutely. I think you see those things. That's a tone though that gets set.

Betsy Kindall:

I think everything we're talking is about school climate, the classroom climate. The climate of that classroom and you can feel it when you walk in. Many buildings, you can feel it when you walk in the building.

Stacy Moore:

And I think that's a good question to ask if I was teaching right now. If I was actively teaching every day, to be able to go, what do I want to see in my classroom?, where I know that I'm connected with my kids. What should I be seeing? And then, am I seeing that?

Betsy Kindall:

And, what do I want people to feel? When they come in my door, what do I want my kids to Feel?

Nicole Fairchild:

Well, I can't do that because I've got a kid who's spoiling the whole climate. I've got a kid who's just really difficult. And I do everything I can to make that climate in that classroom better. And they are spoiling it. They're ruining it, poisoning it.

Betsy Kindall:

What do you say to that?

Nicole Fairchild:

Tainting it.

Betsy Kindall:

I'm asking Stacy.

Stacy Moore:

Number one is that, can you get some help? If you're struggling with a student, maybe somebody else has had success with that student, maybe you can refer them to a school psychologist if it's significantly disrupting your classroom. Where we can look at interventions for that student, maybe on a tier two kind of level, right, where we can look at that. My other thing is maybe they just need more love. Maybe they need more attention. Maybe they need more of your time, not in front of the class, but just "Hey, how are you doing?". I know that sounds so ridiculous. But that's what I have found.

Nicole Fairchild:

It is true.

Stacy Moore:

It is cry for they need something more.

Betsy Kindall:

When you said that, my first response would be to that teacher is what do you know about that student? Tell me what you know about...?

Nicole Fairchild:

What do you like about that student?

Betsy Kindall:

Yeah. What do you like about that student? Tell me some things you like about that student.

Nicole Fairchild:

You don't have an answer, you got to find an answer.

Stacy Moore:

And how would you rate your relationship with that student? Where would they rate the relationship and how do you bump it up one point?

Nicole Fairchild:

One point.

Stacy Moore:

Half a point.

Nicole Fairchild:

Absolutely.

Stacy Moore:

What would you do?

Betsy Kindall:

What little? It doesn't have to be much either. Isn't that amazing?

Stacy Moore:

And the thing about the strengths is, okay, so what strengths do they bring to the classroom? So how can we use those?

Betsy Kindall:

Yeah. How do we feel?

Stacy Moore:

Because we know that people are happier when they use their strengths. How can we use and harness that strength to the benefit of everybody here?

Nicole Fairchild:

They really are hard questions and they're going to take time and effort to answer. It would be a lot easier to pass the buck and say, I'm doing everything I can, let the chips fall where they may, it's really somebody else's fault. But we know that we've got to take the reins. There's nobody else that's going to take the reins. In your classroom you have to take the reins in your classroom.

Betsy Kindall:

And it is about out that awareness and that perspective. And so sometimes in classrooms I could step back and take that broader view. And sometimes I'm too close in it and I need somebody else to show me.

Nicole Fairchild:

And there's no shame in that, nothing wrong with that. Reach out for help if that's you or you're like, I don't know, what's going wrong here? Ask a peer, ask a buddy, ask somebody that's a resource on your campus to observe, just non-judgmentally observe, but tell me what you see.

Betsy Kindall:

So when we ask you, how are your students doing? How are you checking in with them? Maybe, you know right off the bat, maybe you don't and maybe I need to have somebody else come in and give me some feedback or ask them, but it makes me wonder what out there are we seeing. What are we seeing?

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, and maybe this would be a good activity. I'm thinking I could have done this when I was a kid's pastor. Parents might have been, "I wonder what they were wrote on that list", but what if I made a list of all the kids and I wrote at least one thing, adjective, something, that describes them that I like about them. You know, full of energy, lots of questions. Those are double edged swords, but I can choose to like that, about that student. You know what if I could make a quick list of all of those things and then when that student is driving me up a wall, I can look back at that and go, okay, I do like their humor. It is helpful at times.

Stacy Moore:

Not right now but...

Nicole Fairchild:

How can I channel this and stay positive about it? I mean, is that lame?

Stacy Moore:

No. I always think I am stubborn. I'm not going to even blame it on my kids or my husband or anybody else. I am stubborn, but you know, stubbornness, that self-determination got me through programs. It got me through difficult situations. And so I love being able to take something, a characteristic and be able to see the good, the good in it.

Betsy Kindall:

So if you're out there listening, you can think about all the things that we talked about in this particular episode, but think about students in your class and exactly what we've been saying. One good thing about each one of them and where would you go from there and build those relationships?

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, they need you.

Betsy Kindall:

And if you're also listening and you want to share with us, we would love to hear from you about ideas that worked and just hear from you about some things that you've tried in your classroom.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, Betsy's email is easy to find.

Betsy Kindall:

Oh, my good gravy. It is easy to find, but you can totally email me, because I want to know, I want to know what's working, because you know, we're all in this together. We need to share.

Nicole Fairchild:

We'd love to hear from you.

Betsy Kindall:

Anyway, have a great week and we'll talk to you guys next week.