



Kansas State Department of Education Insight Podcast Transcript

Episode 7 – Social Emotional Growth

Intro:

You're listening to the Kansas State Department of Education Insight podcast, where we bring you conversations and information on our vision to lead the world in the success of each student.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Hello, Kansas educators. I'm Randy Watson and you're tuning into our episode seven podcast. Wow. Thank you. Thank you for tuning in. We're so happy. We're circling back now after the holidays and turned into the first part of the year where we're still struggling trying to keep schools open.

COVID continues to ravage our state. I want to just give a shout out to all the educators and families and thank you for the grace that we're giving everyone during this time as we're all doing our best to keep schools open for everyone in learning happening, which is so appropriate because, you know, our topic this month is social emotional growth, which ranges from self-regulation and curiosity and perseverance to the mental health of our students. And we're going to be, we're just so excited to be talking about this that this month and also, oh, we're going to get to hear from a rock star of rock Stars the 2022 Kansas Teacher of the Year, Susanne Stevenson, elementary teacher extraordinaire, fourth grade at Beeston Elementary School out in Dodge City 443. And now let's hear from Suzanne herself, the 2022 Kansas Teacher of the Year.

She's going to be talking about her goals and aspirations, not only in her own classroom but for all teachers in Kansas. We're glad to have Suzanne on the episode.

Susanne Stevenson:

Hi, my name is Susanne Stevenson, and I teach fourth grade in Dodge City, Kansas, at Beeson Elementary USD 443.

This is my eighth year teaching in Dodge City. I've only ever been in that classroom and fourth grade, and I'm recently engaged and excited to get married in the next couple of years.

This year, as the 2022 Kansas Teacher of the Year, I really hope to be able to promote and celebrate educators. I think it's such a vital time to make sure that our educators feel that support and that love and know that the job that they're doing is so valuable and important. And while I want to celebrate those teachers, it's also a passion of mine to make sure that my students stories are lifted up as well. I

have a lot of culturally and linguistically diverse students, and I think it's so important to make sure that they know that their stories are being heard around Kansas.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Thanks, Susanne. Great words, boy, powerful words coming from our Teacher of the Year.

Today's topic is all around what we learned in 2015 when Kansans said there's these other skillsets outside of academic that we know lead to success. And we'd like for you to focus on those as much as you do academics because we know without those students can't be successful and without academics, they can't.

But we need to merge these. We kind of call those social emotional skills, well it's a wide range of skills from cognitive and interpersonal and interpersonal. So I like to say from the way in which a student maybe perseveres or shows up and sets goals to really not mentally healthy.

And there's a lot in between. So we're excited about this topic today, and we have with us someone that does work with the mental health and social emotional growth in our agency. Shanna Bigler and Shanna, thank you for being here with us.

I know everyone's excited about talking about that's certainly been heightened during a pandemic right as we see, boy, a lot of challenges. So I just start. I kind of laid out a little bit of a social emotional I like for you to talk to our listeners about what is social emotional growth.

And you know, I hear people called, I think, soft skills or employability skills or mental health skills, but from you, how would we talk about social, emotional growth?

Shanna Bigler:

Social emotional growth are all of those things that kids need to be able to learn to do to manage themselves and not even just kids, adults as well?

Some adults don't have very good social emotional skills. The nice part about it is we know the research, the social emotional skills can be taught and very successfully embedded into the classroom setting. And I think that's why it's such a big board goal that people are interested in and are doing a lot of great work out in

the field towards because they see the benefit of it directly.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

So, give us an example. Give me some examples of what are these skills that we could teach in school?

Shanna Bigler:

Yeah. So perseverance, empathy, grit, that's a word that sometimes often used students being able to create and design their autonomy and have a voice for what they want to learn and how to learn it. Curiosity and learning how to relate and interact with one another in helpful and beneficial ways, and how to communicate in a helpful way, which really just fills them up for those same skills as adults.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

And we can teach these skills.

Shanna Bigler:

Absolutely.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

So so I think some people would say, well, but where do kids get these skills in the past if they weren't taught these skills in school? I like to say. Well, we always did somewhat teach and we certainly modeled them.

But maybe they were taught in other generations of very specifically in other places. But why all of a sudden do we think are coming to light kids maybe don't have these skills as much and we ought to teach them the ideas about that?

Shanna Bigler:

Yes, I think it has a lot to do with just changing community, changing society and evolving. I always think it's funny, we have another staff member here who actually went to a private school and she had etiquette class.

And so hearing her talk about etiquette class, it really was quite social and emotional. You know, the idea is that we're taught not, and it's quite interesting to hear her talk about it compared to what we're kind of advocating for because back when she was being raised, that's what it was considered was etiquette.

And so our society is changing now. We didn't always have social media, we didn't always have such a world view that we have now, and we have to have kids that are ready to be able to handle all of the things in the world that are coming at them, whether that's through social media, whether that's through the ease of travel and, you know, world experiences that are so much more common than it used to be.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Yeah. You know, we could spend probably a whole session just talking about social media writing. Right? For sure. A lot of positive impact, but but really a fake world, right, in which we're trying to navigate adolescents and adults with that. So let's talk about then what schools can do, what systematically can schools do, Shanna, to implement social emotional growth, to teach social emotional growth, to help work with parents on how to grow these skills in young people?

Shanna Bigler:

Yeah, I absolutely love it. You know, I've heard several stories from parents where their kids actually come home and they teach the parent, you know, different skills, whether that be self-regulation, calming and breathing, something they've learned at school.

And they see mom or dad getting upset and say, oh, here's what we learned at school. And parents are like, Oh, I could do that too. And so I love that. But we definitely have a structure. So we have our social, emotional character development standards. The first state to really, you know, put those character pieces in it. And that's vital because it brings intentionality to what we're doing. And then we also have the Kansas can competencies. So when we have the standards, that's kind of our what we want our kids to be able to do with and then the how is really through those competencies, those things we want them be able to to be successful at and again, it's about intentionality. And just like with math or reading or any other school subject, you start with basic curriculum, basic learning and then the more that is needed based on, you know, assessment and seeing kids and really identifying individually what that need is then you involve interventions and you may involve community partnerships and you may involve more family dynamics and things like that to really support each individual child.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

So Shanna, then what, whether it's a parent or a teacher? Here's the million-dollar question, where do I find the time to teach these skills when I'm supposed to teach these academic skills? There's only so much time in the day.

So how do I do both? So talk about how that would work.

Shanna Bigler:

You do it while you're doing all the other teaching. It can be completely integrated. You know, I'll give my own child as an example.

If that's OK. I have a seventh-grader who has dyslexia. He's always struggled through school. It's always been very, very hard for him. And when we worked on his plan with his school this year, you know, we

said we really want him to stick with it. We want him to keep trying because of something. He's he's pretty quick on giving up, and they've worked on that this year with him. And every time he comes up and he asks for help, they give him just a little bit, just enough and they send it back to get it on his own.

He came home the other day so proud because he wasn't a character award for Perseverance, one of the eight awards that Auburn Washburn at the middle school that was given out and he was so over the top. And I think what's important about that is those teachers that did that probably didn't think twice. It probably came very naturally to them to that. But with him, it will stick with him forever and he will always have that trait now.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Yeah, absolutely. You know, Shannon, when I was superintendent, we would see really high achieving academic students. And they hit a wall, many of them hit a wall in a class that we had McPhearson high school pre-calculus. And in that first nine weeks, all these straight-A kids were getting B- and C+ and they wanted to get out. They've never experienced this right school. I'm working hard and I'm not seeing what I usually see. And it was always an interesting conversation with the high school principal, and sometimes I sat in and the parent and the child.

And what we generally would try to say is, what's the word your kid through this? This is a good thing. Struggle was OK. Right? Mental breakdowns are not OK, but struggle is OK. Perseverance is OK, but don't when things get tough immediately bailout.

Learn how to work through that. And those families that said, yes, we're going to do that. Things came out OK in the end and they learned that. And what we would say is. Everyone's going to struggle. And the more we can teach those skills while we have them at home and where we have them in school, it's great because when they're out an adult and they're on their own. And that's really so true. So we've been talking about the importance of these skills. The state board said and cares and said these skills again called many different things, right.

You know, employers don't call employability skills. Let's talk again about the importance of the lifelong success of kids and why we just have to we have to integrate these skills in school.

Shanna Bigler:

Yeah. So for me, I really believe it all boils down to relationships.

I think that if you can build relationships with students, then you are going to build students that are willing to take risks that are curious and that are able to learn. And I think that that's one of the biggest things that we can do for students because those relationships that they build at school with adults, with peers, that they take home and transfer those skills with parents and with family and community members, then they will have those relationships skills to express, you know, when they are adults and they're in society and contributing.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Yeah, absolutely. We're talking to Shanna Bigler, our expert here on social, emotional and mental health of students and then our agency.

The importance of social emotional growth. I want to shift just a little bit. Yeah, because as we've talked about the spectrum of skill set and we've been talking about skills, every student needs and every student is going to be strong in some of these skills and not as strong.

And then we get on that spectrum, though, where students start to get in trouble, right? The mental health starts to deteriorate. So now we're going to start talking about goal setting. Talk about curiosity. We're still working on that.

But now I've got some other issues that are creeping in. Let's talk a little bit about that. What we're seeing in schools and then how we try to address those, too.

Shanna Bigler:

Yeah. So one of the biggest pieces to remember is that children experience things just like adults do.

They just have fewer skills to be able to experience them with, and so they have to learn how to handle it. Our kids are struggling a lot right now. I mean, COVID has made everybody struggle right now and I think one of the most challenging pieces of that is to teach a skill you have to possess it. So we have to be sure that our staff are well and our staff are doing, you know, good for them to be able to help our children be well. The partnerships and collaborations that we've been able to do have been amazing.

For example, we have co-marketed with DCF for their mobile crisis hotline, where families can call 24 hours a day. It's a helpline and you either have a over the phone consultation and if you if your child is really struggling, they'll they'll come out and do an in-person support.

And this is across the state of Kansas. It's huge that this is the first time that we've been able to do anything like this. We also have, you know, a school mental health initiative project that is working really hard to set this great system up to help schools and community mental health centers collaborate together. Because we know 70% of the mental health services that students receive, they actually receive in the school setting.

Another project that we have is the legislatively funded Mental Health Intervention Grant, that puts liaisons directly on-site to help families navigate the systems and help support them. Because when their kids are struggling, families are struggling too and they need just as much help and support it.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Absolutely. So, you know, whether we're just talking about the major employer may be in town saying what really skill sets I just don't see in students. They, you know, they don't seem to work in teams very well. They don't seem to be curious. They don't seem to take initiative,

Shanna Bigler:

delayed gratification?

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Yes, to the national really media that has shone a spotlight on mental health, right?

Whether it's Simone Biles in the Olympics or, you know, we're looking at a lot of things. And so it's keenly aware right of this spectrum of skills that we that we are seeing that needs to be taught and reinforced.

Let's talk then about the role of the teacher, the role of a counselor, the role of a social worker, as you see maybe a team approach helping that whole spectrum out.

Shanna Bigler:

Absolutely. It's kind of that idea takes a village. It really does. When you're talking about mental health and social emotional skills, it takes everybody. I really love when teachers team up with school counselors, social workers and school psychologists to do any kind of teaching because again, you're getting that practice for the adults and for the student at the same time.

So I think it's it's very effective. Another thing that we really encourage is to have every school, have a mental health crisis team that's made up of mental health specialists that it's within that school. So again, the counselor, the social worker, school psychologist, if they're, you know, lucky enough to have all of those components and then even school resource officers and other people that might be vital to that team so that when there are children that have extreme needs, they can be identified quickly. We know that the only way to tell that a child is kind of at a crisis moment or crisis point is by noticing a change in them.

And teachers are with those kids every single day. They are the most likely person other than other students to notice a change for someone and to be able to say this, something's going on. We need to check on this child.

And that's really how prevention for four major issues like suicide can take place.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Yeah. So, Shannon, we could talk hours around this topic because there's just so much to talk about. It's it's almost like the academic side. We say, Well, let's talk about math.

Well, that's an hour. Let's talk about science. Well, that's another hour. Let's talk about music and social emotional certainly covers that gamut, as we've been talking about. Someone wants to find out more. How can they get in contact with you?

What's your email? How could they call the agency? I'd like to learn more. I'd like to get more resources. Where can I find resources?

Shanna Bigler:

Absolutely. So my email addresses is sbigler@ksde.org

Email me anytime. I also have a direct line here at 7852964941. Again, you can call me. We also have a specialist Kent Reed who works a lot with school counselors and, you know, some of the academic pieces of that as well and how it integrates in.

We have John Calvert with school safety and security, so there are several people here that we really form our own mental health team somewhat, so to speak, here at KSDE. The other resource that I would strongly promote is our website.

There's mental health information, there's our star recognition for our social emotional growth that really can almost take an entire school through the process of becoming a really good program to support mental health and social emotional needs. And then there's also the TASN website.

And if people haven't been on the TASN website, there are an abundance of resources on there for them to look at and explore.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

So we go to KSDE.org and look for mental health is that what the search will be? How do they get to where they need to go on the website?

Shanna Bigler:

So they can go to mental health, we have a mental health advisory council, there's that page as well.

There's even if you type in social emotional growth, you can do a search for just about anything and it's going to take you to one of our pages to help you navigate it.

And again, that star recognition page is a really good one because there's a rubric attached to it that outlines and very clearly how we can help embed this for kids in schools.

Host Dr. Randy Watson:

Very good. And the TASN is T A S N and you can go and there's again, a lot of social, emotional mental health help there.

You know, we saw some great examples from Baldwin USD 348 and DeSoto 232. I just want to congratulate them. They really discussed a lot of the things that they were doing. They were recognized at the silver level at the state board of ED, and they've just been doing remarkable jobs.

We can't wait till we get the first school district with a gold level, right with social, emotional and that's going to happen. I'm hoping that's going to happen this next year.

So, Shannon Bigler can't thank you enough for the work that you do and being with this episode 7 I don't know where all the all the the time has gone, but it's flying by.

I want to thank all of you for tuning in to listening to about social emotional growth and the work your Kansas teacher educator that you're doing around social, emotional.

Thank you. Look forward to seeing you next time on episode eight.