

Student Well-being: A Collective Responsibility

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Being Explicit about Well-being

ANNIE KIDDER: So right now, I think well-being is not as defined as it should be. We've done a lot of work in the past years, getting very, very, very specific competencies defined, very concrete, observable, competencies that exist in various ways from when you're four years old, for the rest of your life, so that when we're thinking about building that foundation of well-being, it's not just about making people feel well. It's about delivering, providing the opportunity for, again, that teaching and learning of specific skills within, if we think about how Stuart Shanker talks about self-regulation and social emotional learning, there are very, very specific competencies within that that help kids understand how to get themselves calm, alert and ready to learn. And the other piece that's important in this is that we shouldn't do it by stealth either; that it's very important that kids understand -- and again, from when they're four, they can think about really complex things then -- what it is we're trying to do here. So I am teaching you whatever, the ABCs, but we're also learning how to listen to each other. Or I'm teaching you how to persist when things get hard, because that's an incredibly important core skill. Or I'm teaching you how to take something you learned in one subject and apply it to another one -- that is an important kind of foundational skill.

So I think that in building the foundation, it's having an intentional conversation with kids, it's having it be an intentional part of your planning, and even of assessment. So that for the teachers we've been working with, they've been exploring all kinds of ways to assess these competencies. And what they're finding is, because they're very concretely defined, that it enables them to assess their own practice -- I planned this out, I thought it would work this way, and it didn't work that way at all. But I had my concrete goal for it, so now I can go back and look at it. It's helping them communicate to students, so students are going, I thought I would learn this competency in this way, and in fact, I did, and it worked really well. Or, this part didn't work. So it's like it's making that process happen more kind of out loud, so that when, again, when we're thinking about well-being, it's not how we implicitly provide the space so that people feel more well, but it's more about how we do that explicitly in our system, so that we take it as part of the responsibility, but that we understand it as part of education.