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Speaker 2:

Join us for Virtual NASN2020 starting on Monday, June 29th through Friday, July 3rd, 2020. Our closing keynote speaker for this event will be CEO and founder of Chicago Beyond, Liz Dozier. She will be talking to school nurses about the value of taking your seat at the table. Sign up today for Virtual NASN2020 via [www.nasn.org](http://www.nasn.org) .

Donna Mazyck:

Welcome to the NASN School Nurse Chat podcast. This is Donna Mazyck, Executive Director for the National Association of School Nurses. The focus of today's podcast is the topic Taking Your Seat at the Table: Be Brave, Be Dynamic, Make it Count. This will be a keynote presentation by Liz Dozier for the NASN2020 Virtual Annual Conference. Co-hosting with me today is Jade Bland-Slaffey. She's my colleague at the National Association of School Nurses. Jade, welcome.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Thanks, Donna. I am the Nursing Education and Practice Specialist, and Lead Nurse Conference Planner here at NASN, and I'm just excited to be a part of this conversation today.

Donna Mazyck:

Well, we're glad you're here today. I want to introduce our listeners to Liz Dozier, who's founder and CEO of Chicago Beyond, which was founded in 2016 to invest in community led initiatives and individuals who are fighting for all youth to achieve their fullest human potential. This is for Chicago and beyond Chicago.

Donna Mazyck:

Prior to launching Chicago Beyond, Liz Dozier was the principal of Fenger High School in Chicago's Roseland neighborhood. The school had been cast as one of the most violent and underperforming schools in Chicago. Liz and her team were charged with turning the school around. And this turnaround team of Fenger understood that traumatic events outside of the classroom were affecting those students. So, Liz led a holistic approach to the work which included the adoption of restorative justice, along with mental health and wellness strategies. And the results were amazing. They included double digit increases in attendance and the graduation rate.

Donna Mazyck:

So excited that you're here today with us, Liz. Welcome.

Liz Dozier:

Thank you so much, Donna. It's great to be here with you today, with you and with Jade.

Donna Mazyck:

I will tell you, Liz, I am a former high school nurse, and I was excited to hear about your story and what happened to Fenger High School. Tell us, what was one of your biggest challenges as a principal?

Liz Dozier:

Donna, I'd have to say it was trauma. Undoubtedly, it was trauma. I became principal of what people said, like you mentioned was one of the most violent and underperforming schools, not just in Chicago, but in the state of Illinois. So what that really looked like in practical terms was a 20% dropout rate on a given year. It looked like 40% of our young people graduating, and 300 arrests every single year on the inside of our school buildings.

Liz Dozier:

People hear that and they hear those numbers and they think, "Well, gosh. Those kids must've been so bad. All 1500 of them, they must have been bad kids." But, what we were seeing when I first became the principal of Fenger High School, was the effect, ultimately, of the trauma in which our kids were living in. Ecosystem, their neighborhoods, the environment, the homes, the things was filled with traumatic experience.

Liz Dozier:

And this was before trauma was really talked about as regularly and as openly as it is now in 2020. Paul Tough had come out with How Children Succeed right around 2009. ACEs, or Adverse Childhood Experiences, that had come out and had been started to be talked about more during that time. And our situation was extreme in that, a lot of our children had seven, eight, nine, ten, in terms of their ACEs scores.

Liz Dozier:

However, we were still able to achieve in spite of that, because we were able to wrap our kids with the actual supports that they need. Both the physical supports, but also the mental health and wellness supports. And so, although we started at that point that I shared with you, ultimately, where we ended was graduation rates went from 40% to over 80%. And dropout rates went down from 20% down to below 2%. And those arrests went down to virtually zero on any given year.

Liz Dozier:

And I don't want to oversimplify it. It was complicated. There was restorative justice practices in place. We had trainings. And I mean, there was just tons of hours and stuff that went into that. But it was possible, because we were able to step up to that challenge, that really, really big challenge of trauma by working together in service of our young people.

Donna Mazyck:

Well, thank you for sharing that, Liz. We definitely know it's layered and complex. And you've repeated the word "we" and you repeated the word "together" several times. And I know that you've been known to say that no one does this work alone. What would you say to school nurses who feel they're working in silos or alone as they advocate for students to be healthy, safe, and ready to learn in school?

Liz Dozier:

Donna, I truly believe, and in my very DNA, I really believe that no one does this work alone. I think we can look at some of the most successful people in our society or even just in our very communities in which we live. And at least for me, I always find that there are others who either they contributed, they pushed, they supported, they were thought partners, they help to execute. And the same was true at my school, as well.

Liz Dozier:

Often times I think school nurses, school counselors, feel that they are working in silos and oftentimes they are. I think there's an incredible opportunity, especially in this time of COVID-19 where the school nurse is typically front and center in responding to and into contributing to both the plans that we'll develop for our schools, but ultimately the plans that we'll develop to keep our children healthy and whole.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

I was going to say, Liz, that's very amazing. I know you mentioned thought partners and connecting in and how that all relates to COVID-19. And so, as school nurses, they're trying to get ready for our school re-openings probably as you know, and trying to prep themselves and kind of figure out, what exactly is their seat or their role when it comes to this conversation.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

And so, I just wanted to ask, how can school nurses use their voices to gain a seat at the table with educators or school leadership? Because, that always seems to be a little bit sometimes of a barrier for some of us.

Liz Dozier:

It goes without saying that we're an unprecedented times. And COVID has, I think in many ways, brought us as a society to our knees. And it has revealed all types of disparities and equities, everything from healthcare to education. But I do believe that there is in this time a unique opportunity for us to really rebuild if you will, and to really re-imagine in the school context, what school looks like. And we truly can't do this without school nurses.

Liz Dozier:

I've seen as I've traveled the country, just in speaking in other school districts. In many cases, the school nurse is the medical professional that our school children and that our families ultimately interact with the most. It's more than their pediatrician or their doctor that they see. There is this real, incredible opportunity for interaction. And I think that especially this time that the school nurse really has the opportunity to step up. What's going to happen on the other end of COVID once we actually get back into our schools, we're not only just the effects of this, the physical effects, but also the mental health and wellness effects. And the school nurse comes with a wide range of information.

Liz Dozier:

Let's give this quick example. I don't know if you guys know Doug Harris. He's at Tulane University. And he was a major part of a research team that was tracking students who actually returned to school after Katrina happened, hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. And what they basically did was, they tracked young people who had re-enrolled and re-organized schools. He tracked him for roughly two years. And what he said, what I thought was really interesting, is that there was obviously this learning loss. But, there's also this suggestive evidence that he said that there's a huge negative impact, particularly for low income young people who are in poverty, despite race, and he said that what hurt our children at that time wasn't just the interruption in class time. It was the economic impact and the emotional trauma and those things are really impacting kids across the board.

Liz Dozier:

And so, if I think about that, all of these factors apply in the situation that we're in right now with COVID. And so, I think we should expect something in terms of a time of recovery, both social ways and systemic ways. And as I think about from my perspective, they don't have to gain a seat at the table. The school nurses are front and center. And I would argue the question will be, how can the school nurse really maximize that seat during this time? Because, they will ultimately be looked to for advice and for direction, as we think about our schools in our communities.

Donna Mazyck:

Liz, we appreciate hearing what you're saying. And you mentioned that this is a unique time to re-build and re-imagine how schools are working and how we work with young people. Which school roles do you see that are currently untapped? And how might we tap into those roles to have a seat at the table?

Liz Dozier:

Typically, when people think of schools, I feel that they maybe have the image they conjure up in their mind, typically is of teachers and principals. And that is the image. But, when I think back to my experience at Fenger and its success we were able to achieve, it was truly because we had tried to in our best efforts, tap into every single person in that building. I mean, you both know I'm sure in firsthand ways that young people build relationships, not just with teachers and principals, but with every adult in the building.

Liz Dozier:

And so, as I think about some of the untapped roles, it is everything outside of that. It's in every person from nurses to guidance counselors, social workers, the lunchroom staff, the janitors. There are so many people that make up the fabric of a school. That not only keep things in terms of up and running, but keep us healthy and whole, in the true sense of what a community is.

Liz Dozier:

I remember as a school principal, often times students would have issues or concerns, or things would happen. And sometimes they would go to teachers, but the school nurse, Nurse Cook was a trusted confidant, and kids would go to her. Or, our janitor, or our social worker, and our counselors. And so, as I think about recovering, think about rebuilding, it will be critical for those relationships and roles to really be honored. And for many people to have a seat at the table, as we think about how are we going to do school.

Donna Mazyck:

Liz, what you shared reminds me of the evidence that shows that if every student had at least one adult with whom they connect in a school, that it makes a difference for their connection with school. So you really-

Liz Dozier:

Absolutely.

Donna Mazyck:

[crosstalk 00:13:01] the community there, yeah.

Liz Dozier:

Absolutely. Those relationships are so important. It's one of the things that worries me the most about what's happening now. All the relationships that are will be fractured as a result of being not in the school building.

Speaker 2:

In 2016, Liz Dozier launched Chicago Beyond, an impact investor that backs the fight for equity by fueling organizations that support young people. Since its inception, Chicago Beyond has invested more than $30 million in efforts for youth to achieve their fullest human potential. To learn more about Chicago Beyond go to chicagobeyond.org.

Donna Mazyck:

I'd love for you to share with us your definition of equity, I'm wondering how that shows up in schools.

Liz Dozier:

So, in my mind, equity is championing the individual cultures. Their identities, talents, abilities, language, interests of each and every single student, by ensuring they receive the necessary opportunities and resources to meet their unique needs and their aspirations. I just think in an equitable education system, every student has access to resources. They have access to opportunities. They have access to educational rigor, despite however they come to the table. Right? Despite race, despite sexual orientation, language, how they learn. And that's really important.

Liz Dozier:

And I think it shows up in schools, at least from the adult perspective, how I've seen it show up in some of its best ways, is adults really taking the issue of equity seriously, to ensure that every student has access to what I was mentioning before, and examining their own biases. And really seeking to interrupt an inequitable practices when they see them. I mean, I've seen them in schools before. I'm sure you have, too, Donna. These things happen. I think it's our responsibility as we work to create equitable schools and equitable environments, to really sure inclusivity and environments that really champion equity for all.

Donna Mazyck:

Absolutely. So, as you have been in this work throughout your career, and you've been disrupting school and community cultures of inequity, what encourages you to keep at it?

Liz Dozier:

I'm sure it's the same thing as it was for you, Donna. For me, it was, and still is, it's the young people. I literally love being around young people. Whenever I get too bogged down with all the adult minutia of everything, I always find myself going back and spending time with the youth.

Liz Dozier:

There's such promise and possibility in every single young person, despite their zip code, despite their home situations, or what schools they attend all across America. I just see promise and possibility in young people. And that always keeps me encouraged and keeps me going, especially in this work. At Chicago Beyond, where we're not just to serve young people in a school, but ultimately really re-imagine what an equitable Chicago would look like.

Donna Mazyck:

I definitely have that same heart that keeps me in the work. And those two words, possibility and promise, are words that I remember sharing with young people. Because, for some of them, they don't see those, and you have to hold up the mirror to them sometimes. And your staying with the work does that.

Liz Dozier:

It's so true. There's something when you say that to a child, they stand up a little straighter. They stick their chest out a little further, because you believe in them. I'm sure that changed a lot of kids' perspectives, Donna.

Donna Mazyck:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I actually kept a little mirror with me, just so that I could remind them of who they would see as ones who had promise and possibility. How have you seen that Jade in your work?

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

I've seen it in very similar ways. I find, as I was thinking about what both of you said, and even Donna, what you asked, the whole disruptor piece, and how that looks. Sometimes, I think it always kind of gets a negative connotation. But, I find that it's actually a good thing and it causes innovation in creative ways for people to kind of think outside the of box of how we can reach young people.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

And Liz, I'm always inspired by the things you've done and where you're going, because of how you've been able to do that, and really having our youth to kind of see themselves as more than what others may view them as, or what school the system actually kind of views them as. So, I always kind of find that to be encouraging as well.

Liz Dozier:

Thank you. I think there are so many across the country who are doing just that. Who do see, like you and Donna both mentioned, seeing the promise and possibility in kids and championing kids and championing communities. And so, I'm proud to represent them today.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Good.

Donna Mazyck:

Very glad you're representing them. And we're glad you'll be at our conference to speak more about it. You mentioned earlier Liz about COVID-19. And we know that COVID-19 challenges our current work that we do with students and families. How do you hold the resolving of this immediate human suffering and needs, with a long-term systems-level work that needs to go on during this pandemic?

Liz Dozier:

So, at Chicago Beyond we're taking a look at both. And we've very distinctly decided that for us, it is important to look at the short term, but also to plan for the long term as well. So, the "short term", and I'll put short term in quotes, because it doesn't feel very short right now. But, eventually COVID will be over, and we will have to [inaudible 00:19:13] different on the other side of that.

Liz Dozier:

So for us, in terms of the short term, Chicago Beyond has worked on just getting immediate needs front and center and working to support that. So, we're feeding roughly about 5,000 families per week with a week's worth of groceries. We're getting hygiene kits out across Chicago. We've provided masks to outreach workers and those doing direct community service work. We purchased, I think, close to now 700 gallons of hand sanitizer, and are getting them out to people who are working in communities, community members.

Liz Dozier:

And so, really working on some of those very prominent, immediate needs that families are facing here in our city. But we're also aware, like I was mentioning earlier, that COVID-19 is really revealing its disparities. It's revealing inequities, everything from healthcare to education. And so, we have started to think about, okay, as we're supporting immediate needs in the short term, how do we not miss the long-term planning and planning for and re-imagining what our future can look like? I think COVID-19 in a lot of ways was our report card, at least for our city, on equity. And we didn't do so well. We know there's greater disparities in terms of death rates to African-Americans, and so on.

Liz Dozier:

And so, we are working with community members, with school leaders, with folks who work in schools just across the city to figure out, what is the best long-term path forward and how do we support it? Because, we all are in this together. There is no separating things out, we're all in this together. I think it's an opportunity for us to reimagine a brighter future.

Donna Mazyck:

Thank you so much, Liz.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

Yeah, thank you, Liz.

Liz Dozier:

Thank you.

Donna Mazyck:

You've left several words that just resonate, and I'm looking forward to building on those words, the re-imagining. We do have a really different time in our world to be able to re-imagine. And we're so happy you we're able to be our guest today and share some of what you're looking at.

Liz Dozier:

Thank you so much, Donna. And thank you, Jade. It was great to be here today with you on this podcast. And I am looking forward to connecting and to all of what is to come.

Jade Bland-Slaffey:

For our listeners, Liz is our actually closing keynote speaker for conference. And so, we are eager to have her come to join us virtually for NASN2020. Her session is on July 3rd. It starts at 2:50 PM Eastern Standard Time, up until 4:05 PM on Friday, July 3rd, 2020. So thanks again, Liz.

Liz Dozier:

Thank you. Thank you both.

Speaker 2:

Virtual NASN2020 is right around the corner! Come and learn about the latest topics and trends that are impacting school nurses around the world. Earn up to 15 plus contact hours of continuing nursing education. See ending credits. Highlighting our theme, A Seat at the Table, Winning Together for Student Health. School nurses are navigating uncharted territory with school re-openings. So, the value of your seat at the table is more pivotal than ever. Learn the value of your voice and seat with our closing keynote speaker, CEO and founder of Chicago Beyond, Liz Dozier.