

Eric Neal:

Welcome to the State Support Team 11 Podcast. I'm your host, Eric Neal. Today we are joined by Dr. Gabrielle Hicks. Dr. Hicks is a translational researcher at the Center on Education and Training for Employment, CETE, at the Ohio State University. Welcome Dr. Hicks, how are you today?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

I'm doing fabulous. So happy to be here.

Eric Neal:

Yeah, it's great to have you. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and the work that you do at the Center on Education and Training for Employment?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Sure. So I'm involved in a variety of things. We have projects all over Ohio and a variety of different partners. And so I've been involved with project management, consultation, I am a licensed school psychologist, so I use a lot of that background and experience to support a lot of our educational projects and a few of the ones that I've contributed the most to would be the parent mentor project, Ohio's Parent Mentor Project, and the Staying and Thriving Project here at Ohio State University. So I've done a variety of things, professional development, and really just offering support related to a lot of the expertise that I've built in my education.

Eric Neal:

Great. So you mentioned the parent mentor project. Can you tell us more about that?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Absolutely. So the Ohio's Parent Mentor Project has been around for just about 30 years. And so this is a project where parents who have had, or who have students who have been identified as needing special education. These parents offer support and are literal mentors to other parents who are going through the process maybe for their first time, or they also provide ongoing support for these families just to navigate special education. It's definitely a lengthy and often very involved process that requires a lot of knowledge and language and all sorts of things. And so the parent mentors are really that connecting piece for a lot of these families to really feel supported and encouraged as they navigate the process and ultimately for the advancement of the student and their achievement and success.

Eric Neal:

Yeah, that has to be really beneficial because I think for people, if they've never had to work with trying to go through the IEP process or things like that, it can just be really challenging. And if you're not super confident and comfortable in the school setting, that can add other layers to it. So I think it's really a great help to have them and have them trained by people that are experts like you.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Absolutely, absolutely. We've done a variety of things from helping them with understanding how to engage families, how to help families to feel empowered. I've done culturally responsive practices, trainings with them, just really building their skill set and tool belt so that they can really be an excellent resource for families.

Eric Neal:

Well, definitely. So, equity is a big topic these days. I'm sure that the parent mentor program really addresses that, but how else are you kind of embedding equity into the different initiatives at the center?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Yes. So CETE is huge on equity and one of their biggest ways of really capturing this here is through the REDI Movement. And so that started a couple years ago and the REDI Movement really focuses on building the capacity of all of our staff to be able to understand equity and to really be in the pursuit of equity and social justice in every aspect of our work. And so REDI stands for racial, equity, diversity and inclusion, so REDI. And it started with just a small team that put it together and set up what this looks like. So we have a framework that we work from. It focuses on four levels. So the intrapersonal, within ourselves, the work we do within ourselves and our understanding. Interpersonal is increasing our understanding through dialogue with colleagues, structured dialogue. And then we also have the, what do we have?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

I know we have societal, institutional. That's the first one. Before that the third level is institutional. So looking at our policies and practices here at CETE and making sure they are also lining up with what our goals are toward equity and social justice. And then societal is looking at all of the partners and people that we work with. All of the spheres of influence that we touch, making sure that we also take those tenets and really make sure that they're applied across society as well. So REDI Movement is dynamic.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

It's definitely our prized possession here. If you ask pretty much anybody here, we are all just so excited about the work that is done and really making racial equity, diversity inclusion, the forefront, not an accident, not just something that we talk about once and then kind of put it down. This is something that, we have a steering team that constantly does the work, but then also a number of us are involved in different things, critical allies groups, where we continue discussion and look at issues in society, issues within our workplace and approach it from that equity lens. So that is a huge part of our work here at CETE.

Eric Neal:

Yeah, that's so important because, especially in education, there are so many initiatives or different things that get thrown at people that there's a real risk that equity becomes just one more thing. And I think approaching it from that framework perspective and being very intentional about it and saying, we're going to attack this from all of the different areas that are affected by that, and then make it more about the way that we do things in our work, in those settings, rather than just a thing that we do. That's going to give us a way better chance of seeing the outcomes that we're looking for.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Right? Yep. And then the accountability piece. So, we really take on responsibility of it. Like I said, it's not just one meeting that we do one time, there's this accountability of almost auditing ourselves, right? So we also have a process going on right now, the team inventory, equity inventory process, where we have different teams within the center. And so we have a group of our core REDI staff members that are

going around helping different teams. Essentially audit their current practices and look for gaps that are contributing to a lack of equity and helping them to mitigate that and really almost improve and really go after that social justice and equity lens that we say we're after.

Eric Neal:

Yeah. That kind of leads me into thinking about MTSS, right? So that's another huge topic and thing that is being talked about at the state level. They're working on that and what are some of the ways that districts can make sure that they're attending to equity issues as they develop their frameworks?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Yes. MTSS is definitely something that is critical. And it's been talked about, this multi-tier system of supports. And a lot of times it's actually very new for it to be talked about really from an equity perspective and really as a tool for equity. So we look at it for a variety of different things and getting our assistance to where we want them to be, but really it is an excellent tool for equity. And so some of those ways are really looking at tier one, which is just your system wide, your full school, and looking at what kind of processes are in place. And are we meeting the needs of all of our students? Or is it just the handful that are really benefiting? And so a very clear and concrete way to do that is looking at the data. One thing about my profession and even the work that I do now, database decision making is a core tenet of that and really progress monitoring as well. Looking at what are we doing now?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Is it getting us closer to our goals or further away? And so auditing your own data, looking at discipline data is a huge one that oftentimes will reveal lack of equity and really looking at dis-aggregating your data. So that's splitting it up by race and looking at a lot of these core groups and being explicit about that and saying, okay, what are the numbers here? Are these proportional to the amount of black students that we have, for example, in our population, if we only have 30% black students, they shouldn't be 80 to 90% represented in a discipline for the school.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

And so some of those critical ways of analyzing your data is really where you start to start that conversation of where are the gaps, where's the lack of equity. And then also looking at which families are really engaged in your educational practices in your school. If there are certain groups or if the same group of parents are always there and are always involved, then that's also another slide up that there are certain families who, it is very easy for us to make an assumption and make a story for why parents aren't involved.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

But a lot of times they haven't been given the opportunity. The school maybe is routine. We have our ways about going of engaging families and going about things. But sometimes we have to look at our practices and say, are we adjusting to the population that we have? Are we adjusting to the people that we're actually serving and not just necessarily working from what we assume will work, but looking at our population and our community and serving your specific needs.

Eric Neal:

Yeah. I love that you said it's really about focusing on tier one. I think because we've had this intervening mindset, if it's through RTI or whatever we've been working on for the last 20 or 30 years, the idea is that we do what we do. I teach it, and then if you don't get it, I'm handing you off. Like, it's not my problem. That release of responsibility at the building level, but also in that classroom level. And I think it's so important there to think about what can we as adults do? What changes can we make to approach these things in a way that give all students, regardless of if they have a disability or are socioeconomically disadvantaged, or from a certain race or ethnic group or any of these things, and how can we put these things in place in tier one and in that climate culture side or in that academic side, so that we're giving everybody an opportunity, an equitable opportunity to get that instruction that they need.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

And I understand too, I just did a training last week where I had some educators be honest and say, the perfect MTSS triangle looks nice. We want 80 to 90% of our population to fall into tier one and to respond to tier one. But a lot of times, especially looking at the results of the pandemic, we've been in the last couple years and all of the different things that impact schools. A lot of times we have these inverted triangles where our 80 to 90% are falling in tier two and tier three. And so we're kind of panicking, but I do always come back to tier one because at the end of the day, we can put a lot of our money in resources in tier two and three, like we have traditionally, but a lot of times, even with the same amount of money, if we ration it in such a way where we're really building up and supporting tier one, that alone is an excellent tool for equity.

Eric Neal:

Oh, definitely. Kind of shifting gears a little bit. Can you tell us about Staying and Thriving?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Yes. I mentioned it a little bit in the beginning, but this is one of the projects that, I mean I love talking about all the things that I've brought up, but Staying and Thriving was an excellent opportunity just to witness in [inaudible 00:12:07].

Speaker 3:

Something that we did within the College of Education and Human Ecology at Ohio State...

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

This is for undergraduate black women. There's been several studies and data, and actually our project lead did her dissertation research on this after [inaudible 00:12:20] Walker of looking at the things that impact retention for undergraduate black women in the college of education, specifically at Ohio State and them pursuing and getting to the end of the degree, right? What kinds of things do they need? What resources have they shared that they need in order to reach that goal? And so what we did was design a project and essentially put into place the things that these women have said, this is exactly what I need, this is what would support me. And so we provided professional development. We did what we call sister circles, which was opportunity for them to connect with each other, to build relationships within the college.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

We had a time every month that we would get together and do a lot of these things. We would eat a meal together and really just building those relationships. And our research team was all doctorate level black women who work within the college. And so that alone was a touch point for the students to see these black women that are right here in their college that are a support and a resource for them.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

And then they also had graduate student mentors, so a near peer that was able to guide them and give them additional support throughout the month, and really help them meet their goals, meet their personal and professional goals and have that more one to one kind of a relationship. So we were able to do a lot and we just launched it in January. So it went for five months and it was wildly successful. And we're looking at hopefully being able to bring it back and then have even a larger cohort of black women, because it was very clear to us and through what they shared with us, that it really made a huge impact for the educational experience.

Eric Neal:

The thing I love the most about that is, these are people who are going into the profession that are going to be going in the classrooms where you have a lot of students who probably are going to be facing the same kind of challenges just at that elementary, middle or high school level. And so not only are they getting the benefit of being able to go through the program and graduate and go on to be employed, they'll intrinsically know how to approach these challenges for their own students as well. So it's going to have a really effect that spreads out, not just for them personally, which is amazing and great on its own, but out to classrooms full of kids every single year.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And we're hoping that at some point, this program does turn into some sort of a pipeline where we are supporting, let's say, high school age black women, and essentially standing in the gap between high school and college. So further connecting that streamline to degree completion. So it's definitely an awesome opportunity.

Eric Neal:

That's great. I love hearing that. So you're doing a virtual professional development event for us on September 14th. Can you preview what you'll be covering?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Yes, we are so looking forward to that. I really think this will be a excellent knowledge base and really a time to build your skills and knowledge around trauma informed practices. But although that will be a major component of our time together, I'm really starting with the fair basics, right? The foundations that are needed to really understand about education before we can get into even understanding trauma informed practices. So we'll talk about equity, what that is, what that means, especially to work in education. We'll discuss implicit bias and how that has played a role in equity and outcomes in education. And then we'll get into trauma informed practices and even equity centered trauma informed practices. How we look at trauma informed practices from an equitable lens, from an asset based lens, rather than it being a deficit approach. And then we'll get into the core tenets of MTSS.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

It's always a hit or miss. I just did, like I said, a training last week where I asked who had heard of MTSS or was using it in about two people in a room of maybe 80 or 90 raise their hand. So I always go back to really understanding MTSS and what that looks like then also making it really practical, right? Having a three tiered mindset, what it means to really apply MTSS to just an understanding of system wide practices and then weapons of mass distraction is another one that we'll talk about.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

I don't want to get into that one too much and kind of reveal, but that really is talking about the things that can stand in the way. The kind of mindsets or biases that can stand in the way of us really achieving equitable outcomes. So we'll get into all of that and hopefully set up for, we do have the mind to hopefully do some additional things building off of phase one, that virtual experience and training together. But we'll talk about that more when we get there, but I'm hoping, for sure, that at least those who come really leave with an understanding of race and equity and education implicit bias, and then trauma informed practices.

Eric Neal:

Yeah. I'm really looking forward to that. I think it's needed and it's just at the right time as well as more and more people are starting to think about implementing MTSS in their districts. Well, if people would like to know more about you and the work that you do, where should they go?

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Yes. So the main place to find any articles or things like that that are attached to me would be through CETE's website. So CETE is [cete.osu.edu](http://cete.osu.edu). That is our main website and there's all sorts of things on there. They did an article when I first came in in August of last year, that really details even more about my background, my experience. And then the other place that I try to keep pretty updated is Twitter. So I am on Twitter [@gabriellehicks\\_](#), and then from there, you should be able to link to my LinkedIn account as well. And I post some things on there as well, and try to keep that up to date. So those are the places, at least right now that you can find me.

Eric Neal:

That's great. Well, thanks again for joining us, Dr. Hicks, it's been a real pleasure.

Dr. Gabrielle Hicks:

Thank you.

Eric Neal:

That wraps up this episode of the State Support Team 11 Podcast. If you'd like to know more about us and the work that we do here at SST11, go to our website, [sst11.org](http://sst11.org). Give us a call at (614) 753-4694. Or hit us up on Twitter. We're [@sstregion11](#). If you'd like to get ahold of me, I'm at [eric.neal@escoco.org](mailto:eric.neal@escoco.org). Until next time I'm Eric Neal. Thanks for listening.