



January 2020

Hello Friends and Families of East Side Middle,

One of the few benefits of being a Knick fan since 1967 has been learning that emotional regulation is a skill, just as dribbling, passing and shooting are skills. This was most evident in Game 3 of the 1993 Eastern Conference playoffs, when the highly emotional and talented Knick guard, Jon Starks, lost his wits and head-butted the superbly - and infamously - well-regulated Reggie Miller. Starks was ejected from the game, Miller scored 36, and the Knicks lost 116-93.

I have a Starks-autographed basketball in my office. I loved the guy. Through his tenacity and talent, he went from bagging groceries in a supermarket to dunking on Michael Jordan and winning the hearts of cynical Knicks fans. Starks *himself* was all heart. But he taught me the value of emotional regulation and its connection to success. Being a parent and a long-time educator also have shown me that emotional regulation is not a talent, but a collection of skills that need to be taught and practiced to develop. As with any skill, the person practicing it can always get better. Knowing how integral emotional regulation is to achievement, and understanding it is something that can be taught, the staff at ESMS has sought to make social and emotional education a fundamental part of our curriculum.

This starts in 6th grade humanities with [RULER](#), a social and emotional literacy program developed at Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. Through the RULER approach, our students are taught how to Recognize, Understand, Label, Express and Regulate their emotions. Along with this, all 6th graders take a five-week advisory on anti-bullying.

In 7th grade, all of our students take an 8-week intensive on Sexual Health and Decision Making. They also have a year-long course on Healthy Relationships and Mental Health.

In 8th grade all students take one 8-week intensive on Resilience and another on Mindfulness.

ESMS has partnered with a number of outside experts to both advise us and to work directly with our teachers, students and families. This year we have partnered with the Harvard School of Education's [Making Caring Common](#) (MCC) program, which helps network members build upon their efforts to make their schools kinder and more compassionate. We began our work with MCC by surveying our students, teachers and parents about our school climate and values. We will continue working with MCC to develop and implement initiatives that help us further develop the social and emotional health of our school.

We are also delighted to partner again with the Relationship Abuse Prevention Program ([RAPP](#)). Heather Waldron from RAPP will be working with our 8th graders on healthy relationship skills and healthy decision making.

We also continue to work with Tracy Dennis-Tiwary, Ph.D, Director of the [Stress, Anxiety & Resilience Research Center](#) at Hunter College. Dr. Dennis has worked with our parents and students and recently gave a presentation to our staff on adolescents and anxiety.

As always, we are eager to reflect on our work and look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas.

Best,

David and Amanda