

# Overview of Our Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

*Guiding students to be civically, socially, and ethically responsible members of the global community.*

## Overview

Our focus as educators is to create a school climate that accommodates and supports each student. As a community, we are interested in the thoughts, ideas and feelings of all community members. We know that in order to secure the safety and learning of all learners, we must teach respect and responsibility through the creation of a climate of trust, responsibility and fairness. When we keep in mind the *ABCs* of behavior, we can help children develop strong social skills. The *ABCs* of behavior remind us that all children want to have some *autonomy*, they need to *belong* to a group -- to feel accepted and known, and to be recognized for areas of *competence*. Here is a link to the [NYS Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks](#).

We include social skills in our curriculum through advisory in grades 5-8 and the use of the [Second Step](#) program and morning meeting in grades Pre K - 4. We have a commitment to using problem solving and discussion circles to teach students how to talk productively with each other and to resolve social conflict. We integrate social emotional learning into our curriculum and all of our work with students in order to help them develop and use the “knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. [CASEL](#)” And we work to have a strong, culturally responsive curriculum in which students can see themselves and learn to embrace differences in our community.

A key component of any social emotional program is building students’ emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to be aware of one’s emotions and to express emotions in socially appropriate ways. We help children develop their emotional intelligence in several ways.

Mindfulness practices. Teachers use mindfulness practices to help students tune in to their bodies and emotions. There is considerable research on the benefits of mindfulness practices on student ability to pay attention, regulate emotions, and increase resilience. Many of our teachers use mindfulness practices intermittently during the school day.

### Culturally Responsive Reading

Children and teachers read a lot. Reading has been shown to build empathy. At 276 we strive to offer text aimed at supporting diversity and inclusion. Learning about a variety of people and experiences allows students an opportunity to consider diverse perspectives, recognize human

emotions and make connections to their own lives. Through stories we get to “meet” and develop empathy for a wide variety of people; people beyond our own community.

Social problem solving. throughout their time at school, students are bound to encounter social dilemmas. At 276 we view these inevitable occurrences as teachable moments. These moments lead to conversations that involve helping children express their emotions about events and interactions using precise language. We work to help children understand the complexity of their own emotions and the ability to name how they are feeling. As children learn to identify how they feel, we help them process these emotions, consider how they impact the emotions of others and then collaboratively develop solutions to repair relationships.

Community service. Community service is a proactive and and repair minded tool used at 276. Older students are often placed in positions to serve lower grades as a proactive measure to build student leadership, provide positive role models, and create a sense of what it means (across grades) to be a 276 Charger. This is primarily organized through the middle school community service elective, service oriented student clubs and at times individual student initiatives. At other times, community service is used as a restorative tool for students to give back to the school community as a logical response for their behavior.

Executive Function. There are three skills sets that are part of our [executive function abilities](#):

1. *Working memory* which is how we keep information in mind and use it.
2. *Cognitive flexibility* which is how we can think about a situation from more than one perspective. In social interactions, we may use this skill to think about different ways we can approach a social problem.
3. *Inhibitory control* which includes regulating emotions (I will walk away from a frustrating situation instead of screaming) and not acting impulsively (I will wait until my partner is done with the blue marker and not grab it from my partner’s hand. A middle school example would be to think twice before hitting send on an unkind Instagram comment.)

These skills are essential for life and academic success. We continue to refine these skills into our mid20s (and older!)

Restorative Practices. Restorative practices are strategies that use conversations to help people repair relationships that have been harmed. They build on children’s desire to belong to the community. When students behave in a way that causes harm to another, we use these practices to reflect on the impact of behaviors and how students can make better choices in the future. We also make sure that we help children heal their relationships.

Dean Teams. Dean teams are comprised of the dean, administration, and counselors. We meet weekly to keep track of students who may need additional support and identify ways that we can support teachers, children and classes.

## Key Goals of the Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

- Develop self-awareness and self-regulation skills
- Build empathy and compassion
- Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to have positive relationships
- Demonstrate responsible behaviors in diverse social contexts

## Highlights of our program

### PreK - 2nd grade

Our youngest learners are developing their social skills. Their vocabulary is developing and they continue to need help finding words to express themselves. They also need consistent rules, responding well to clear and simple expectations as they develop independence. They also need us to be empathetic with them in their learning as they test limits and make mistakes and struggle to see other viewpoints.

- Community based traditions such as community sings and morning meetings.
- Building independence in problem solving through language, collaboration, responsibility for materials, sustaining attention, making choices.
- [Second Step program](#) on listening skills, calming down, identifying feelings, building empathy, emotion management, and social problem solving.
- Mindfulness practices.
- Using literature to discuss emotions, differences, social interactions and empathy.
- When addressing student conflicts students learn to use strategies such as: “I” statements, using words, not your body, naming and identifying emotions.
- Developing “cool down” strategies such as belly breathing and going to a quiet corner.

### 3rd- 5th grade

Middle grade students are beginning to have problem solving conversations independently and are learning to advocate for themselves. This requires that students continue to build understanding of their emotions and the emotions of their peers and how emotions can be expressed constructively. Students in these age bands also are setting goals for themselves and learning how to achieve these goals. They are also honing their ability to consider the rights of others and learning social norms to behave ethically and responsibly.

- Community circles, morning meetings, restorative circles. Fifth grade has weekly advisory.
- Mindfulness practices.

- [Second Step program](#) on being respectful and assertive, respecting differences, compassion, managing strong feelings, playing fairly and taking responsibility. I statements.
- Using literature to discuss emotions, differences, and social issues.
- When addressing social conflicts, students learn to use such strategies as: interrupt, question, educate, to use “I” statements and to engage in problem solving conversations.

## 6th-8th grade

We know that middle school is a time of tremendous social, cognitive and physical change. Students are defining who they are in different social situations. Use of social media has made this age especially complicated. Learning to respond to peer pressure in ways that are aligned to values and ethics is a focus for middle school students. In order to do this effectively, students need to continue to learn about emotions, how they are expressed, and how behaviors impact others. We continue to help students identify their own strengths and set goals and to draw upon adults and peers to be successful.

- Advisory (see below for more information).
- Teachers develop mentoring relationships with students.
- Community service opportunities.
- Build leadership skills and empathy through National Junior Honor Society, Gender/Sexuality Alliance, Student Government, sports and theater.
- When addressing social conflicts, students learn to use such strategies as: interrupt, question, educate, to use “I” statements and to engage in problem solving conversations.
- Community building events and activities.

## FAQs

**What is advisory?** Students in grades 5-8 have weekly advisory periods. 5th graders have advisory with their home room teacher. Students in grades 6-8 are assigned an advisor in 6th grade who builds and maintains a relationship with the student and the family throughout the middle school years. Advisories in grades 6-8 have about 18 students in them. Advisory is designed to address students needs at each stage of middle school, address social issues proactively and as they arise, explore relevant current events as needed, provide academic and executive function support and develop a sense of community within the group and in the school at large. Advisors in grades 5-8 are advocates for their advisees as well as the advisees’ families, acting as a point person to families to contact and a resource for students to access at school.

**How come you don't just punish children?** "In my day, kids would be expelled...." At 276, we work from the belief that kids do well if they can. When they make mistakes, it is the job of adults to identify the underlying lagging skills and help the child develop those skills. The purpose of punishment is to cause embarrassment or suffering. We don't believe that those are emotions that improve behavior. Instead, we prefer to have logical consequences. Logical consequences are the result or direct effect of an action. The purpose of a consequence is to help the students realize the results of behaviors and to guide students towards positive choices in the future.

**How does Social Emotional Learning help my child academically?** Social emotional learning builds student ability to develop strong relationships. It also addresses self-regulation, self-awareness, self-confidence and develops executive function skills. All of these components are essential for students to be independent learners.

**It seems that your responses to misbehavior give the misbehaving child a lot of attention.**

**How do you help the victim?** The "misbehaving" child gets more attention because we are working to help that child develop the self regulation and social skills needed to make better choices in the future. That doesn't mean that we ignore the victim. We work to insure that the victim feels safe and is heard. Victims also have the opportunity to accept an apology (or not) when they are ready.

**When my child shares something concerning about a classmate or an incident, what should I do?** (i.e. A student is talking about self-harm.) Help your child identify a grown up that they can talk to. Any adult in the school (a counselor, the nurse, teacher or administrator) can be an important listener for your child. If your child is not comfortable sharing with an adult at school, you should reach out to an administrator or dean. We will keep confidence and also make sure that the other student is safe and cared for.

**What if the incident happens in after school?**

You should report these incidents to after school staff. The school administration works closely with Manhattan Youth, but they have the most eyes on the students during after school hours.

**In the park after school I see kids not being kind. What can I do?** It takes a village to raise a child. If you have questions or concerns about behaviors you see at the park, you should talk with your child about how they are processing this social behavior. If you feel it is warranted, you can contact the school. While there is a limit to how we can respond to events that happen outside of school, we are sometimes able to use this information to help children make better choices.

**What is the difference between bullying and social conflict?** Children often encounter social conflict as they learn to navigate different perspectives and wants on the playground, while

collaborating on classwork, or in engaging in conversations at the lunch table or on-line. Conflict is when there is a difference in viewpoints. We work to help students identify when lines are crossed and to modify their behaviors. Most often, children use their empathy and a desire for friendship to realize that they have hurt someone and will want to stop their negative behavior (though they may need help in achieving this goal.) Bullying, on the other hand, is done with the goal to hurt or humiliate, happens repeatedly over time, and involves a social or physical power imbalance. Bullying is never okay. If you feel your child may be bullied, is a bully, or is a witness to bullying, please contact the school. We will conduct an investigation to understand what is going on and then work with the students to resolve any conflict or provide supports needed to stop the bullying. If there is bullying, it takes time to help the instigator change behaviors. Communication between home and school can help us monitor the impacts of our work.