The RULER Approach to Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

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Let’s face it, emotions matter. The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence understands this and has been eagerly teaching people how to develop their emotional intelligence, or EQ, for over 15 years. Using pioneering research and partnering with field experts to build effective approaches for teaching emotional intelligence the Yale Center documented measurable improvements in emotional skills for those using the holistic and integrated RULER approach to Social Emotional Learning (SEL).

RULER stands for:
- Recognizing emotions in self and others
- Understanding the causes and consequences of emotions
- Labeling emotions accurately
- Expressing emotions appropriately, and
- Regulating emotions effectively.

Because emotions drive learning it is critical to teach children and adults how to understand and manage emotions. The RULER program provides an in-depth school curriculum on emotional literacy for children, teachers, staff and families. It focuses on the acquisition and practice of essential emotional skills:

- Building community through group agreements,
- Identifying and naming feelings,
- Engaging in a process to improve reflective practices and self-regulation, and
- Practicing problem solving for complex situations.

To this end, faculty, staff and families learn about the Anchors of Emotional Intelligence, four tools that teach emotional intelligence skills to students and adults. These tools help to foster a warm, positive school community and a strong school-family partnership, the four anchor tools are: The Meta-Moment (a six step process that helps manage intense emotions “in the moment” in order to have more satisfying outcomes), The Blueprint (a tool for helping family members develop empathy and perspective taking), The Family Charter (a tool that encourages personal and social responsibility, harmony and trusting relationship at home), and The Mood Meter (a tool that helps to develop emotional awareness and allows people to share their emotions in a safe way).

Once the Anchor tools are embedded in the culture of the school, faculty and staff are trained on the Feeling Words Curriculum, which enable teachers and students to recognize and express a full range of emotions. Lessons are interwoven into the daily academic curriculum – students practice their emotional intelligence skills by thinking, speaking, and writing critically about their emotions and hone these skills by recognizing, respecting and responding to multiple perspectives.
Through the RULER curriculum students learn to identify and express their emotions in a positive way, helping them to understand themselves and others, which ultimately builds supportive relationships and strong decision making skills.

The evidence of this program’s effectiveness is clear. Schools, public and independent, nationally and internationally, have used the RULER program to great success. Studies show that classrooms that use RULER exhibit greater emotional support, better classroom organization, and more instructional support at the end of the second year of implementation. In addition, students in classrooms using RULER showed higher year-end grades and higher teacher ratings of social and emotional competence compared to the control group. Compared to other schools, classrooms in RULER schools were rated as having higher degrees of warmth and connectedness between teachers and students, more autonomy and leadership among students, and teachers who focused more on students’ interests and motivations. Students using RULER are less likely to bully other students and have better leadership skills and attention. Teacher who use RULER have better relationships with students, less burnout, and better relationships with administration.

St. Andrew’s Schools has adopted the Yale’s RULER Approach to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to serve as our foundation and springboard for developing emotional intelligence. When social emotional skills are strong students are more inclined to cooperate and collaborate with each other, and more apt to become confident learners, creative thinkers and compassionate leaders.

For more information about the RULER programs please go to http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/.

For more information on learning and parenting please explore the links below:

- A Plan for Raising Brilliant Kids, According to Science by Anya Kamenetz
- Should Emotions Be Taught In Schools? By Grade Rubinstein
- The End of Average: Todd Rose’s ‘8 for 8’ (8 minute YouTube video)
- Alison Gopnik: The Gardener and the Carpenter – Talks at Google (50 minutes)
- Emotions, Learning, and the Brain: Exploring the Educational Implications of Affective Neuroscience by Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, a summary by Rebecca Gotlieb