



The Yorktown Way

A Handbook for
Social-Emotional
Learning at
Yorktown High School



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Introduction

This booklet reflects some of the essential components of the educational philosophy we strive to put into practice each day at Yorktown.

"The Yorktown Way" brings together many social-emotional learning (SEL) moments, lessons, and reflections from the past six years. The purpose of this handbook is to remind of us the day-to-day ways in which we can model these behaviors for our students.

Thanks to all the staff at Yorktown High School for their input into this handbook and their efforts in our continuing mission to stress both high academic expectations for all students and to model skills and attitudes needed for success in school and life.



Why Social-Emotional Learning at Yorktown High School?

Several years ago, over 95% of the faculty at Yorktown voted to work toward two fundamental goals in the education we provide our students:
a first-rate academic education for every student; along with that, the deliberate emphasis on skills and attitudes which promote social-emotional intelligence.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) plays a critical role in improving students' academic performance. A growing body of research evidence also links SEL to improved school attitudes, improved school climate, and positive student behavior. In brief, enhanced social and emotional behaviors can enhance student success in school – and life.

Many schools make efforts to provide a strong academic program and to provide social-emotional education. Something we have going for us at Yorktown is that it is a collective, not fragmented, effort. Faculty and staff treat students with care and respect, and expect the same from students. Parents, faculty and students are all aware of the type of learning climate we make a deliberate, daily effort to create in our school. We are far from perfect, but we are committed to continual improvement, and expect that from all members of our school community.

Some of the skills and attitudes we collectively try to foster: self-management; communication; responsible decision making; self-awareness; respect for self, others and the community. We work toward developing a safe, caring and orderly environment conducive to student learning. The relationships our faculty have with students can best be characterized as “caring and respectful,” with a commitment to help **all** students develop their academic potential through high expectations.

We know that when students learn to self-manage their stress and motivations, and when they set goals and organize themselves, they do better in school. We try to help them learn these skills; we also recognize and celebrate students who have mastered SEL skills, who show empathy for fellow students and others, and who help promote a positive school climate.

No one individual's efforts help create the kind of school and climate we try to create at Yorktown. It is instead a collective vision and “project”, that requires the faculty and staff to have academic competence, but also to model the SEL skills and attitudes we strive to promote in our students. This makes for an engaging but challenging school environment – for all who study and work at Yorktown.



What is SEL?

SEL — *Social Emotional Learning* — is the deliberate school-wide and classroom reinforcement of the following skills and attitudes:

self awareness

self discipline

self motivation

impulse control

persistence to task

empathy

social skills—courtesy, kindness, appreciation of diversity

communication

listening

- The use of teachable moments to help our students continue to learn how to make better decisions
- Our agreement, as a faculty, to be responsible for all students at our school – and agreeing not to ignore behavior of which we disapprove
- An increased awareness of our professional responsibility to treat others with the same regard and respect we hope to be treated: students, colleagues and parents
- The active support of initiatives that support our students' social and emotional learning along with their academic learning
- A recognition that students will not care about what we know until they know we care about them as individuals
- A commitment to fostering a broad definition of intelligence which includes social and emotional skills as well as high academic expectations
- The collaborative, daily development of a school climate characterized by a uniquely high level of caring and mutual respect



SEL in the Classroom

Recognizing Opportunities for Social and Emotional Learning

Students learn social and emotional skills – in the classroom and via special school programs – through three elements: example, experience, and reflection. These varied modes of learning develop skills in distinct yet complementary ways.

- *Example:* As a responsible adult and teacher, you are in an influential position to serve as a role model yourself each day, while also pointing to other role models who appear able to handle, in an intelligent and self-controlled manner, the conflicts that inevitably arise in life.
- *Experience:* Consider your curriculum. Where and how is it possible to present students with opportunities for problem-solving, decision-making, and analysis?
- *Reflection:* On occasion, provide time for students to slow down and experience the importance of personal reflection as a means to making wiser choices in school and life. If we don't provide the time, some never take it.

Principles to Remember

- **A “cookbook” approach to teaching emotional intelligence does not work.**
Teachers themselves design the most effective lessons for infusing their discipline with instruction in social and emotional learning.
- **The amount of time a teacher must spend outside the normal framework of their lessons should be minimal.**
The goal is not to change a science course into a course in emotional learning, but to use the content of the science class or some specific aspect of the scientific method to reinforce, on occasion, a specific principle of social or emotional learning. A common error is to “overdo” one’s efforts during the first 3 or 4 weeks of school. It is more effective in the long run to plan an occasional lesson and point to specific applications as they arise throughout the year.
- **The content of some academic disciplines lends itself more naturally than others to the application of social and emotional education.**
Teachers of any content area have occasions to emphasize, directly or indirectly, hallmarks of social and emotional intelligence, such as self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, and so forth.
- **The effort will be worthwhile.**
Students who learn to develop an awareness of how they feel, how others feel and how their behaviors affect others, become more able to calm down and think when confronted by challenging situations.



- **The skills must be modeled as well as taught.**
- **Don't presume that students have mastered such important basic skills.**
- **Think about class dynamics as well as class content.**
Explicit comments from the instructor on the roles and dynamics within group situations, or cooperative learning experiences, can prove helpful and educational to students.
- **Be explicit.**
When an occasion arises to reinforce some aspect of emotional learning, do not assume students will quickly or naturally pick up the implied message of the lesson, material or classroom activity.
- **Broaden the frame of reference to the whole school.**
When an appropriate "teachable moment" arises, do not hesitate to refer to student written Goals of Community Behavior.

Used with permission of author. Pasi, Raymond J. (2001). *Higher Expectations: Promoting Social Emotional Learning and Academic Achievement in Your School.* New York, New York: Teachers College Press.



SEL Throughout the Disciplines

Using SEL can take different forms within our classrooms depending on our subject area. Whether using a teachable moment to reinforce one of the ROCS Goals of Community Behavior or specifically focusing on an SEL skill in a lesson, we are helping our students develop their emotional intelligences along with their intellectual abilities. Listed below are ideas for how SEL can be used in different curricular areas:

- Examine literary, historical or scientific problems that are both interesting and nuanced, in which an individual must choose between possible courses of action
- When an appropriate occasion arises, refer to the student written ROCS Goals of Community Behavior posted in your classroom
- Teach how to give positive and negative feedback in peer review and group situations
- Computer: require students to discuss with at least one peer the results of individual work and how to deal with the frustration of mastering a new software program or computer language
- Social Studies: help students gain multiple perspectives of events leading to problems, solutions taken, possible alternative approaches; what would happen next?...different sub-groups work on different facets of a problem; groups rejoin to arrive at solutions... discuss qualities of leaders and how they help or hinder them in reaching goals...use problem-solving steps to address major dilemmas in historical periods
- Arts: provide many natural occasions to express emotions and examine them; practice constructive criticism - paying attention to respectfully sharing viewpoints and how criticism is given and received...use a multicultural approach to art appreciation... increase self-awareness through visual diaries
- Counseling: make use of tools such as Personal Electronic Portfolio to encourage students to take responsibility for self-monitoring
- Mathematics: Help student develop awareness of the strategies they use when solving problems - what works and what does not...have students articulate how they solved a problem...teach students how to deal with distraction and the value of persistence in problem-solving



- Foreign Language: use language as a natural discipline for developing appreciation of empathy as a personal characteristic, enhancing and promoting multicultural understanding and appreciation of diversity...analyze stereotypes...promote self-control as a necessary skill in learning a new language
- English: point out and analyze SEL skills in literary characters...apply skills in writing... use peer editing in a respectful manner...emphasize tolerance in varied points of view during discussions
- Business: teach and reinforce skills needed for effective group work, human relationship skills needed by managers...examine systematic approaches used in solving business problems, generalizing these approaches to life skills
- Science: use opportunities to draw connections between problem-solving in science (and the scientific method) and problem-solving in life...reinforce cooperative strategies required by lab partners.



Creating Learning Environments to Motivate and Challenge ALL Students

- Learner-centered
- Encourage academic confidence in every student
- High mobility, flexible groupings
 - Provide tiered assignments
- Allow compacting of instruction
- Nurture questioning behavior
 - Provide varied resources
- Encourage independence, risk-taking, creativity



How to Make Yorktown ROC in Your Classroom!

SEL Tips from the *STUDENT* Perspective

The following is advice to teachers from their students on how to promote a positive climate of mutual respect in the classroom. These ideas (which could have come from any graduate school of education had you not realized they were developed by students!) reflect what teenagers believe is necessary to do to create a positive and encouraging atmosphere in the classroom. However, in compiling this list they were all quick to emphasize that students who are in classrooms where teachers follow these guidelines are more likely to challenge themselves, participate in class, respect their teacher and fellow classmates, and excel academically. In essence, everybody wins!

****This list was created by students in the Leadership and Diversity class who are at the forefront of the movement to promote respect for others, community, and self at YHS. ****

Treat students as equals by never talking down or patronizing them. Demand respect and give it. Attempts to rule with an iron fist or to get the class to fear you are often counterproductive. Treat students fairly by not playing favorites and calling on everyone.

Develop a personal relationship with your students. Relate to them on more than just an academic level. Show students that you care about them as much as you care about your class. Ask them about their lives and interests, treating them as individuals. Try not to draw a line between teacher and student, creating more of an “intertwined” group. Share something of yourself with your students. Be open, friendly and honest. Show your sense of humor. Approach a student if you feel that he or she has a problem or is going through a difficult time. Show them you are someone they can trust.

Get enjoyment out of your job and your students. Maintain a positive attitude and show enthusiasm for what you are teaching. Make it interesting and connect it to the real world.



Give as much feedback to students as possible. Take extra time to point out their strengths and the areas in which they could improve. Set positive goals for the class and focus on achieving them. Try to avoid busy work. Always make time for your students. Be accessible to students outside of the classroom and let them know you want them to do well. Encourage them to come for extra help. Give them options. Never dismiss their concerns, even if it seems like something small. Acknowledge the stress that students deal with and be flexible to the occasional student request. Be willing and open to discuss whatever they want to talk about. Students don't expect you to give in to them every time, but they do expect you to listen to what they have to say. Try not to judge. Always assume the best and trust students who have earned your trust.

Be careful what you say. You'd be surprised at how much your students listen and absorb. Never make inappropriate comments or laugh at the negative comments of others. If a student makes an inappropriate comment, address it immediately, especially if it is about another student or is demeaning to a group. Set a positive example for your students. Try not to complain, gripe, or use sarcasm to describe a student, a colleague, or your personal or professional situation. It is okay to admit you are having a bad day. The students will understand and be considerate. It is also okay to be wrong occasionally. If you make a mistake, own up to it. Students will respect you for it.

Respect all opinions. Don't force your own opinions on your students or put them on the defensive if you disagree with theirs. Treat students as equals, especially during discussions. You might learn from them!

When in doubt, follow the Golden Rule and treat others as you would like to be treated.



TIPS for Motivating Unmotivated Students

Create a positive classroom environment.

- Welcome students as they come into the classroom and/or at the beginning of class.
- Notice when students are absent by saying something like: “We missed you yesterday.”
- Show that you are interested in students - concerning both their school lives and their outside lives.
- Show enthusiasm for your subject and for teaching.
- Recognize differences in students’ learning styles and abilities.
- Avoid ridicule of students and demeaning sarcasm.
- Encourage students not to be intimidated by hard material and/or students who pick up material easily. Tell students it is normal for learning of hard concepts to take time.
- Notice students’ strengths and give them positive feedback whenever possible.
- Use your “leverage” in a positive way—expressing disappointment or concern when work is not completed instead of indifference may be effective.

Structure your course to help students be motivated.

- Vary your teaching methods as much as possible.
- Use appropriate, concrete, and understandable examples in class.
- Work on developing activities that will engage the students.
- Remember good grades are not a motivating factor for all students.
- Give students a variety of academically sound opportunities to improve their performance, particularly towards the end of a quarter when many students exhibit “the end of the quarter slowdown” syndrome.
- Describe and model specifically how to study for your subject.
- When possible, give students some choice in their assignments.
- Identify the worst performing students early, and let them know individually you are there for extra help. Try to get them to commit to specific dates to come in to meet with you. “Treating” this early can avoid students falling too far behind to ever get back on track—**even if they want to.**



Classroom Management

Effective instruction is based on content knowledge, the ability to communicate that knowledge to students in a relevant, understandable way and the ability to manage the daily nuances of classroom instruction. While the first two characteristics of effective instruction are significant to promoting student success, they cannot occur within a learning environment that is devoid of order and mutual respect.

Yorktown High School sets high expectations in all phases of the educational setting. Academically, we strive to provide instruction at a level that will allow students to reach beyond their potential. Socially, we strive to educate students on what it means to be a citizen not only within the school community, but also in society as a whole. Emotionally, we strive to help students understand how to deal with the situations and issues that arise as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. In all, we strive to educate the whole child in a nurturing learning environment.

As part of our effort to provide students with a nurturing learning environment, Yorktown is committed to the incorporation of Social and Emotional Learning as part of its curriculum. Central to providing effective instruction is a teacher's ability to create a learning environment that promotes student success. To create this successful learning environment, several principles are offered as a guide.

Respect: the old adage "to earn respect, one needs to give respect" applies to many of the instructional practices at Yorktown. Students respect the teachers who respect them. In fact, respect is one of the central themes of daily life at Yorktown as seen in our ROCS philosophy. Respect from students is established by providing them with effective instruction from a deep content knowledge, within a learning environment that is open to questions and aware of an individual's right to learn.

Expectations: from the outset of the school year it is important to establish your expectations regarding student behavior and classroom procedures. While students may be involved in the process of establishing classroom rules, teachers set the tone for the school year in how the class is conducted and the atmosphere of respect that is present.

Consistency: with the establishment of classroom rules and procedures, a foundation of expectations has been established. Regardless of the strength of the foundation, the supporting structure of daily interactions between students and their instructor must be consistent. A lack of consistency will result in a learning environment that is disorderly and ineffective, while simultaneously diminishing the respect students have for their instructor.



Creating a Positive, Encouraging Classroom Climate

Given our dual focus at Yorktown, we want all students to be academically challenged and to be respectful of themselves and others. In our efforts to challenge our students to perform to the best of their abilities, sometimes our comments unintentionally have the opposite effect, demoralizing rather than encouraging. Recent research on school connectedness in the United States has shown that 40-60% of high school students do not feel that adults in their school care about their learning and them as individuals.

Below are phrases used by staff members at Yorktown to encourage our students and comments they try to avoid:

Encouraging Phrases

- You have the ability to do this work!
- Your grades do not reflect your capability—keep working!
- What can I do to help inspire you?
- You're so smart; you just need to do a little work to show off!
- You are on to something!
- Rarely tell a student that an answer is wrong—try to find at least one small thing to compliment.
- I've seen you do it before. I know you can do it now!
- You can achieve anything you put your mind to do.
- I see you are working hard!
- You make my job easy! It's a pleasure to have you in class.
- What a smart cookie!
- Everyone is great at something. What are you great at?
- You never know until you try!
- You are a leader with your friends. You can also be a leader in the classroom.
- Your "I will" is more important than your IQ.
- I'm so pleased with the way you think/write/interpret, etc.



Encouraging Phrases (continued)

- Your contributions in class are welcome and will be even more valuable with a little more time on homework tonight.
- I appreciate all your effort despite the circumstances you are in.
- Everyone tries at various levels from full effort to just getting by. Success comes from doing what I know you can do.
- Don't be afraid of making a mistake. Often you learn more from being right than from being wrong.

Phrases to Avoid

- You should have learned this last year.
- This class is too hard for you. You'll never pass it.
- What would your parents say?
- You don't work hard.
- This is a gifted/honors/advanced class—you should know that already!
- How many times have I answered this question?
- You should never take an intensified or AP class.
- You're not college material.
- Stop being lazy!
- Avoid any comments that deal with intellectual ability.



Helpful Hints for Communicating with Students

All of us can reach the end of our ropes at times with students. Even then, we need to model appropriate SEL communication skills. Remember: it is not what you say; it is how you say it. When you are angry, if what you want to say will make you feel good, it is not good. Use positive feedback when you least want to do so. The less ego you show, the more power you have. For example, trying to win an argument will turn a disagreement into a battle for dominance. Intimidation can cause students to challenge you further. Disputes are often caused by a lack of communication. Make an effort to get more information in a non-threatening way.

Avoid a debate when your buttons are being pushed. If you make a mistake, apologize. Remind yourself that as a teacher, you are responsible for maintaining an environment of physical and psychological safety for your students. Rather than feeling personally attacked, say to yourself “that student is upset – I wonder what the problem is.” After the incident, reflect on why your buttons were pushed and what you could have done differently.

Tips for Handling Situations with Students You Don't Know

“I don't know that kid – maybe I will ignore it” is NOT the solution when you see inappropriate behavior. Remember, you set the tone for the interaction with the way that you approach the students. Make eye contact and approach the students in a friendly way. Introduce yourself. If you know a student's name in the group, address that student by name.

If you get the sense that a student is looking for a confrontation, reframe the situation. Briefly describe the offensive action that you witnessed. Make the request for the change in actions in a simple brief statement. If possible, phrase the request as a positive (do) statement versus a negative (don't) statement.

-adapted from *Verbal Judo* and *Working with Defiant Kids: Communication Tools for Teachers*



Student Responsibility & Accountability: What Can Teachers Do?

Student accountability and responsibility are best fostered in an environment of mutual respect. You can't reasonably expect a student to act a certain way or internalize particular rules and values with respect to your class or the school community in general if you do not demonstrate a clear and sincere example of what you ask of them. Some strategies for creating responsible members of the school community are:

Teach school expectations.

Don't just glance over them. Incorporate them somehow into your lessons each day during the first week of school at least. Make them as important as your academic subject foundation material.

Demonstrate belief in your policies.

If you ask for respect, give it. If you ask for courtesy, extend it. If there is a no drinking, eating, etc. rule in your class, leave yours for the break as well.

Link your rules to measurable consequences.

Awareness of consequences encourages following the rules by some and reduces conflicts when the negative consequences are imposed.

Review positive and negative consequences of inappropriate actions.

This keeps you away from presenting a totally negative environment when reviewing rules.

Enforce consequences consistently.

Building a perception of fairness on your part tends to encourage respect from others. Consistency promotes predictability, which lessens a student's tendency to test your rules.

Hand out a flow chart of your rules and consequences by behavior.

Avoid the "You never told me" issue.

Deal with exceptions.

When there is a necessary exception to a rule, address this with the class. Don't ignore it. They've already noticed. Remember, "Because I said so" and "Because I can" are set-up attitudes.



Link your expectations to your classroom structure.

When possible, explain how or why this expectation is helpful in creating the necessary environment. Kids always want to know the whys of behavioral expectations. Pleasantly surprise them by addressing them right off.

Listen, listen, and listen.

When you present expectations, assignments, etc., listen to student questions and concerns. Address the issues that are brought up. Make students understand through experience that an option or concern may or may not change what is expected, but it will be heard and addressed.

Set a time to discuss non-curriculum issues.

Avoid burning up class time even when inquiries are valid. This can easily get out of hand and use up your whole period. Schedule non-class time for discussion.

Support what you state.

Guard against undermining general school rules and expectations by attitude, affect, statement of non-support, etc. This can make you look like a maverick and invites students to do the same around you.

Avoid power struggles.

If you argue an issue, this indicates the possibility of changing the outcome, which encourages more struggle. Heightened emotion increases the perception and hence the struggle. Assign the consequence then move on. Create the understanding that it is the rule the student is bucking, not the teacher.



Parent-Faculty Relationships and Disagreements

(Below is a copy of a letter to parents in 2005 that touches upon some aspects of our approach to parent-faculty disagreements)

Dear Parents,

Many of you may have seen the recent Time magazine issue in which the cover article focused on "difficult" parents in schools. A few parents mentioned it to me, so I made a point to read it.

First, let me assure you that the article described parents that do NOT typify the Yorktown parents. My experience here has been that with rare exception, our students' parents and school staff try to be reasonable and helpful when issues arise involving our students. This is the way it should be. We share responsibility for educating them, so we share responsibility for developing a relationship that provides a basis for their success. Parent and faculty relationships, even when there is a disagreement, should be characterized by the spirit of understanding and respect I almost always see here. In the end, our ultimate concern must remain what message we are sending our students, in the decisions we make and the way we interact as adults when we make them.

Of course, no one of us is perfect. Any of us can make a mistake, and when we do, we need to recognize it, correct it and move on. Sometimes, an apology is appropriate; most of us are not above that when it is called for. Other times, there will be a difference of opinion that cannot be resolved regarding issues such as a behavioral consequence, decision, or grade. My main interest, in such situations, is if both parties have looked at the situation honestly and tried to arrive at what each considers the fairest course of action. In the end it's not possible for everyone to be happy with every decision all the time, but I think parents and school staff here have a good record in trying to arrive at fair decisions.

Each day at Yorktown, we deliberately work at fostering an atmosphere of respect. We expect faculty and staff to respect students, in the same way we expect students to respect faculty and staff. Parents also deserve respectful treatment from our faculty, and all who work here have a right to expect the same. Among our staff, those most highly regarded are as able to work with adults as they are with young people. In working at all this, and it does take work at times, we promote better working relationships as adults, and serve as more effective models for students about how to handle disagreements and problems when they arise. I am convinced this will serve them well long after they leave our school.

Many years ago, I received what I thought was excellent advice from a mentor of mine. He advised me that when upset or angry, "not to deal with everyone as if Winning through Intimidation is the only book you ever read." He said that people who deal with disagreements and upset in that way may win a battle here or there, but they lose others' respect along the way. I still think there is a lot of wisdom there, and I believe our students learn a lot when they see us deal with disagreements, problems, and different points of view in an honest - but mutually respectful - manner.

Dr. Raymond Pasi, Principal



SEL and TESA

Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA) is an APS district-wide initiative which has similar philosophical roots to our SEL program in that both believe the most reliable way to affect change in others is to model appropriate behavior. Through 15 targeted teacher interactions, teachers learn to maximize behaviors that influence student learning. TESA behaviors mirroring SEL and ROCS characteristics are:

- Express courtesy
- Allow time for responding
- Praise student's performance
- Give reason for praising student's learning
- Take a personal interest in student or give a compliment
- Listen attentively to student
- Accept and reflect student's feeling in a non-evaluative manner
- Correct student behavior in a calm, courteous manner

TESA helps create a respectful atmosphere in the classroom as students are more likely to emulate the way the teacher appreciates and rewards student participation. The principles help each student see that they are valued. Taking a personal interest helps the teacher and the students to see each other as a whole person with outside school interests.

Through reinforcing appropriate questioning methods, TESA directly impacts the classroom environment. Teachers are more aware of their habits of calling on students to answer questions and how they react to students' answers. In increasing their awareness that they may have been showing a "preference" for certain groups, without intending to do so, they can correct themselves so that all students become included and feel respected. TESA also emphasizes a 5 second or longer "wait time," a difficult concept in this fast-paced world. The whole atmosphere of the classroom becomes more comfortable as it is slower paced. With a comfortable and respectful climate, students should feel that they can be successful and then accept responsibility for their part of the deal - doing the work!