Character Initiatives Theory & Praxis

BRILLA
Public Charter Schools

An Initiative of Seton Education Partners

Brilla Public Charter Schools, K-8 Schools in the classical tradition, help students to grow intellectually, socially, and physically into young men and women of good character and spirit, and to be prepared for excellence in high school, college and beyond. Brilla, which means "shine" in Spanish, was founded in 2013 in response to the shuttering of 60+ Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York. Brilla pairs a secular charter school of virtue with El Camino, an optional, privately operated afterschool Catholic faith formation program. Together with El Camino, Brilla schools seek to educate the whole child—mind, body and soul—bridging the best of classical education[1] with modern 21st century technology.

This document is designed to capture Character Initiatives at Brilla: both the high-level vision (theory) and specific practices (praxis) happening daily across Brilla schools. This document can be used in its entirety as a thorough introduction to Character Initiatives at Brilla Schools, or in part to support deepening one's understanding of specific components of Character Initiatives.

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[1] A Brilla Classical Education is the pursuit of wisdom and virtue through the contemplation of cultural referents - both past and present - across humanity.

A note:

Our Character Initiatives Theory & Praxis comprises equal components that are both static and dynamic.

As a result, it is both final and living. Approximately once a year, we will place a strategic lens on the dynamic components to ensure it doesn't get dusty nor become irrelevant. Approximately once every two years, the same will be done for the static components. After all, we are always learning.

Static example: Dignity, morality, intentionality and facilitation being the four critical components that underpin our Character Initiatives theory.

Dynamic example: How we leverage and implement Love and Logic in order to reinforce virtuous behavior is a good thing in and of itself.

Theory and Vision

We commit to a robust character education program defined as "character initiatives" focusing on explicit and implicit formation[2] in service of understanding moral truths, honoring each person's freedom, and supporting all to lead a flourishing life. Dignity, morality, intentionality, and facilitation underpin our Character Initiatives theory. Our entire school community — scholars, staff, and families — engage in Character Initiatives, which is infused throughout the culture of our schools. This comprehensive approach calls all members of our community to prioritize living a life of deep meaning and purpose that is both academically excellent and character rich. We do this by focusing on opportunities for all members of our community to:

- build understanding that one's character is always developing and evolving;
- demonstrate understanding of virtues by making moral choices;
- engage in opportunities to live and to develop these virtues;
- grow in good character through intentional reflection on virtues and moral habits;
- celebrate living a life of truth and goodness; and
- leverage the example of classical, historical, and contemporary figures who are models of good character.

Brilla Public Charter Schools focus on teaching the whole child, instilling a deep sense of character through the Core Virtues of courage, justice, wisdom, and self-control, while setting a high bar for academic performance and teaching content that has withstood the test of time. Brilla's commitment to holistic child development is paralleled with its commitment to creating a joyful community for families and staff. In order to achieve results for students, Brilla staff model the intellectual and social competencies Brilla Public Charter Schools desire for all of their scholars to become young men and women of good character and spirit, and to be prepared for excellence in high school, college, and beyond.

> The Character Initiatives "**Domain**" is defined as the explicit and implicit formation of the entire school community — scholars, staff, and families — in service of understanding moral truths, honoring each person's freedom, and supporting all to lead a flourishing life. This is all underpinned by dignity, morality, intentionality, and facilitation.
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> Character Initiatives "**Content**" is defined as anything related to the planning, capacitation, and execution of student-facing content such as Morning Meeting, Character Studies, QMOTD, and Crew. Character Initiatives content lives within Character Initiatives as a domain.
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> **Character Initiatives Team Vision Statement:** We will explore, curate, and facilitate resources and experiences to develop good, long-lasting individual character growth that nurtures living a life of deep meaning and purpose. Our approach will strive to infuse all parts of our schools' culture, routines, curricula, and ethos in ways that challenge what we already know, and expand our experiences and beliefs in order to strengthen our individual and organizational moral compass

Dignity, morality, intentionality and facilitation - four critical components that underpin our Character Initiatives theory - require attention and deep understanding.

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[2] Processes that develop a person's capabilities and potential, build human capital, witness the Transcendentals, and enhance the quality of life and the realization of human flourishing.

Dignity

- We believe in the special value of every person. This understanding informs the way we interact with, and relate to, others.
- By honoring the dignity of each person, we recognize that all are called to become the happiest, freest version of themselves. Honoring the dignity of others helps us accomplish our shared mission.
- We believe that giving of self and understanding there is a context greater than self are integral elements supporting one's own dignity and that of others.

Morality

- We believe there are objective moral truths and that an open mind is not an end to itself, but a means to finding truth.
- Growing in virtue and character is a good in itself and we seek to help children and adults develop virtue because we believe doing so supports excellence[3] and flourishing[4].
- We intentionally use the term "virtue" and not "value." Virtues lay the foundation for acting in a morally good manner. We learn virtue primarily through habit and practice rather than only through reasoning and instruction.

Intentionality

- To be most successful, character education must be approached holistically such that it infuses a school's very ethos -- its culture, routine, and curricula.
- Social emotional learning supports the habituation of moral behavior and is an important complement to our holistic approach.
- Children learn how to act and who to be by observing and understanding the example of influential adults, through reflecting on their own personal experiences, and through direct instruction.

Facilitation

- Developing virtue in our adults is critical to developing character in children. Accordingly, we facilitate spaces for our staff and families to own, explore, and invest in personal growth focused on the development of virtues, as well as expanding their experiences and beliefs.
- We collaboratively reflect on identity, purpose, and performance by asking: "Who Am I?", "Why Am I?", and "How am I doing at living my purpose?" This process helps all community members develop a greater awareness of who they are in the context of external circumstances.
- Our classical approach further supports character education. The classical emphasis on Socratic dialogue encourages the understanding and development of the virtues. Moreover, our staff explore with their students how they can be witnesses in their own lives to the Transcendentals of Truth[5], Beauty[6], and Goodness[7].

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[3] The acquisition and development of intellectual, moral, and civic virtues, excellence specific to diverse domains of practice or human endeavour, and generic virtues of self management. (Adapted from: The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtue and The University of Birmingham)
[4] Human flourishing is the widely accepted goal of life. To flourish is not only to be happy and good, but to fulfill one's potential as both an individual and part of the whole. (Adapted from: The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtue and The University of Birmingham)
[5] Truth is the mind being in harmony with reality.
[6] Beauty is anything morally good that gives delight, pleasure.
[7] Things and persons who help flourishing and are of value.

Core Virtues

Our core virtues—Courage, Justice, Wisdom and Self-Control—are based on the four cardinal virtues of classical antiquity. Our core virtues are infused across curricula, referenced regularly in classroom instruction, intentionally studied and modeled by faculty and staff, and showcased in tangible and deliberate ways. This is especially integral in light of living our commitment to the classical tradition.

The classical tradition, academic excellence, and character initiatives are intentionally integrated in service of the virtues. For example: Individual exemplars and texts include historical and contemporary models chosen and identified from primary source material that shaped Western civilization (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas), that are uniquely representative of U.S. history and culture (e.g., Declaration of Independence, works of Frederick Douglass, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), and exemplify virtue expression in a multitude of ways. Academic instruction highlights figures who have lived the virtues in a heroic way, providing a variety of role models for our scholars. In addition to studying classical, literary, and historical figures, our scholars and staff are also identified, recognized, and celebrated when they, themselves, exemplify these virtues (providing real world models).

Brilla's core virtues, mirroring the cardinal virtues of classical antiquity, lay the foundation needed for the introduction of sub-virtues. Each sub-virtue explicitly connects to all four core virtues. We establish a shared language and understanding of each core virtue and sub-virtue.

Sub-Virtues	Heroism	Initiative	Mercy	Patience	Diligence
Empathy	Honesty	Integrity	Moderation	Perseverance	Orderliness
Gratitude	Humility	Kindness	Responsibility	Respect	Modesty

*At 7th grade, 'modesty' replaces 'orderliness.'

Shared Language

In alignment with the holistic nature of our mission we establish a shared language and understanding of dignity, community, and love. This shared language and understanding across our community allows us to communicate and collaborate effectively while pursuing lives of deep meaning and purpose.

Love: To will the good of others.

Dignity: The special value of every human person.

Community: A group of people sharing space, interests, or work[K-4]. A shared environment to experience peer and group relationships[5-8].

Virtue: Character traits that enable human beings to respond appropriately to situations in any area of experience, guided by the overarching intellectual virtue of practical wisdom or 'good sense'.[8]

[8] Adapted from: The Jubilee Centre for Character & Virtue and The University of Birmingham

Character Initiatives at Brilla

The overall Brilla model is organized along three pillars (Formation, Engagement, Execution), articulated in the Brilla Essential Practices. To learn more about the Brilla Essential Practices *Learn more about the Brilla Essential Practices.*

Character Initiatives are part of the Formation pillar of the Brilla schools model. The Formation pillar represents the deliberate effort to help all members of the school community to develop in mind, body, and spirit through instruction in the classical tradition, a robust character education program, and an explicitly joy-filled environment. The goal of formation is to equip all members of the school community with the dispositions necessary to lead free, flourishing lives. Character is further defined as the explicit and implicit formation in the service of understanding moral truths, honoring each person's freedom, and calling all to a flourishing life.

There are four practices within the Character sub-pillar:

1. **Explicit Instruction in the Four Cardinal Virtues and Related Sub-virtues.** In order to help all members of the community to lead a flourishing life, everyone should receive explicit instruction in the four cardinal virtues of classical antiquity (courage, justice, wisdom, and self-control).

2. **Develop an implicit culture of strong character and virtue.** In order to help all members of the community to lead a flourishing life, everyone is guided by approaches and strategies that implicitly contribute toward a rich culture grounded in strong character and virtue. Like a plant, culture is constantly tended to, and is never fully "set" or "finished." Every member of the community — staff, students, and families alike — has a powerful role in building and strengthening character and virtue.

3. **Love and Logic**. In order to reinforce that virtuous behavior is a good thing in and of itself — and that all members of the school community should avoid non-virtuous behavior regardless of prescribed consequence — we implement the Love and Logic approach.

4. **Social Emotional Learning (SEL).** Explicit and implicit engagement in service of pro-social development and human agency (freedom, intelligence, fallibility), grounded in concepts of the good. Schoolwide practices and policies, family and community partnerships, and SEL curriculum and instruction aim to strengthen relationships and well being.

Character Initiatives at Brilla encompasses our entire school community: scholars, staff, and families. Components of Character Initiatives are infused throughout the culture of Brilla. This comprehensive approach calls all members of our community to develop character through collaboration, reflection, and authentic experiences in order to live a life of deep meaning and purpose. Explicit exposure and direct instruction are necessary in order to cultivate enduring understandings of virtue. This cultivation and deepening of character focuses on the capacitation of each individual to be aware of and consistently consider truth, right and wrong, and dignity. The focus is on developing each person's moral compass focusing on dignified behaviors and habits considered good. We therefore reject "commodification" of behaviors (such as points, currencies, or merits and demerits), insisting rather that *being* good and *doing* good are ends in and of themselves. We encourage dignified engagement including precise and descriptive praise and correction.

Scholars

Throughout elementary and middle schools, Brilla scholars have a consistent experience of Character Initiatives that grows with them in a developmentally appropriate way. There is dedicated time throughout the day in all grades to focus on Character Initiatives in a variety of forms — all with the goals of helping students to develop: healthy relationships with peers and adults; strong communities at the classroom, grade, and school level; and to provides scholars with resources and experiences to develop a flourishing life.

Below is an outline and brief descriptions of how our core components of Character Initiatives are experienced throughout the school year. We have, whenever possible, distinguished between the elementary and middle school experience to both highlight the overlaps and point out developmentally appropriate modifications.

In elementary school, there are six distinct times guided by Character Initiatives throughout the day: Bird Call, Morning Meeting, Character Studies, Recess, Celebrations, and the Quietest Moment of the Day. Middle school students begin their day with Crew or Character Studies, which incorporates elements of Responsive Classroom's morning meeting, and developmentally appropriate variations of components of our Elementary School Character Studies block — specifically designed for middle school-aged students. The basic outline of the daily and weekly character experience is outlined below:

Bird Call

Students and teachers begin the day with Bird Call. Bird Call is a way to build community and foster shared identity across all Brilla schools by having both students and teachers participate in a consistent daily ritual that fosters shared identity and encourages the use of core virtues throughout the day. Typically, Bird Call consists of chants (for class spirit, Cardinal Values, college matriculation year, or celebrating school identity), the pledge of allegiance, birthdays and other recognitions, and a brief description of the virtue or sub-virtue of the week.

Roosting Rally

"Roosting Rallies" are held weekly (typically on Fridays) and are usually school-wide. They include elements of Bird Call while also being an opportunity to specially recognize certain students who have been models of virtues and sub-virtues throughout the week.

Morning Meeting

Grounded in Responsive Classroom, Morning Meeting, "is an engaging way to start each day, build a strong sense of community, and set children up for success socially and academically. Each morning, students and teachers gather together in a circle...to interact with one another during four purposeful components."[9] During this time, scholars acquire language competence and begin to establish a deeper understanding of virtues, one another, and community. A central focus of Morning Meeting is to build classroom community through inclusion in discussion and activity. Morning Meeting follows the structure outlined below:

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[9] © 2019 Responsive Classroom.

Greeting: All members of the classroom community greet one another by name.

Sharing: All members of the classroom community share information about important events in their individual and collective lives.

Morning Message (Elementary Only): Students read and interact with a short message written by their teacher(s). The message is crafted with the virtue of the week in mind, strives to preview relevant academic work or school community events specific to that day, and/or contemporary/historical context.

Group Activity: All members of the classroom community participate in a brief, lively activity that fosters group cohesion, collaboration, and/or collective problem-solving to help scholars practice social and academic skills.

Character Studies & Crew

At least 20 dedicated minutes per day is dedicated to Character Studies (K-4) or Character Studies / Crew (5-8). During this time, scholars and staff build a rich vocabulary and deepen knowledge through exposure to a virtue, social emotional learning skills, restorative practices through community circles, or celebration and reflection. Each of the components of the character studies block is described below:

Virtue Lesson (1x/week): On the first day of the week, scholars are introduced to that week's virtue. Together with the teacher(s), scholars define and unpack the virtue through an engaging lesson. At each middle school grade level, students meet and learn about 2-3 contemporary and/or historical role models per trimester whose life stories explicitly connect to our core and sub-virtues. Students participate in deep dive studies of contemporary or historical figures as exemplars of virtue. In this process, students explore tangible ways to access each exemplar as a model.

Social Emotional Learning (2x/week): At Brilla, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Character Education are intimately linked and embedded in our Character Initiatives approach. This fusion acknowledges and celebrates the relationship between social emotional competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making) and the whole person. Two days a week are dedicated specifically to Social Emotional Learning content and developing scholar's emotional skills and toolkit. Curriculum is sourced externally from the Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC), Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PAThS), and/or Thriving Learning Communities (TLC). In elementary schools, SEL is skills and tools based, and scholars access coping skills, social interaction methods, and foundational language to name, express, and manage emotions. As students master these skills and methods they transition to a strengths-based SEL program at the end of 6th Grade. Students then become more aware of their strengths, thoughts, feelings, and opportunities for growth and higher order thinking, and fine tune their capacities to explore relationship and community building in different ways.

Crew (Middle School Only) (2x/week): In 5th-8th grades Crew focuses on relationship building, academic progress monitoring, pro-active circles and character development.

Journaling & Reflection (Middle School Only): In 5th-8th grades journaling and reflection opportunities allow for collaboration with both the High School Placement and Fine and Applied Arts (FAA) teams with a common goal of preparing students to actively reflect on and prepare for who they desire to become in high school, college, and beyond. This is usually connected to the virtue lesson of the week.

Community Circle

At least once per week, the class participates in weekly whole-group community circles grounded in proactive restorative practices. The purpose of these circles is to build healthy communities, increase social capital, decrease antisocial behavior, repair harm, and restore relationships. Each time participants meet for community circle, they review the five agreements and commit to honoring each of them. The agreements are:

- Speak from the heart;
- Listen from the heart;
- One voice;
- Assume the best; and
- Keep the space safe.

Based on situational content, restorative circles, conferences, and/or problem solving circles can address any of the following, and can happen both during Crew and at other times throughout the day as needed:

- New or departing members of the community
- Trauma / Current events outside of the school
- Detrimental violations of community
- Change management

Learn more about Brilla's Community Circle

Quietest Moment Of The Day

The Quietest Moment of the Day is a 2-5 minute guided reflection that happens four times per week, Monday through Thursday, before or after packup at the end of day. Quietest Moment of the Day consists of an intentional set of movements to guide reflection:

1. Calm Self - Allows scholars and staff to center mind and body, ideally resulting in a silent, if not quiet classroom where all participants can focus on self.
2. Gratitude - Prompt that encourages scholars and staff to consider individuals, moments or opportunities they are grateful for.
3. Daily Review - A moment to replay the day. Considering the moments that are most important, mindful of daily schedule and calendar.
4. Personal Assessment - Centered around virtue, scholars are asked pointed questions about the way they and their peers have practiced being their best selves.
5. Look Forward - Thinking of the time coming ahead, scholars make a commitment to be their best for the rest of the day and consider the ways they can practice the virtue of focus in the upcoming day.
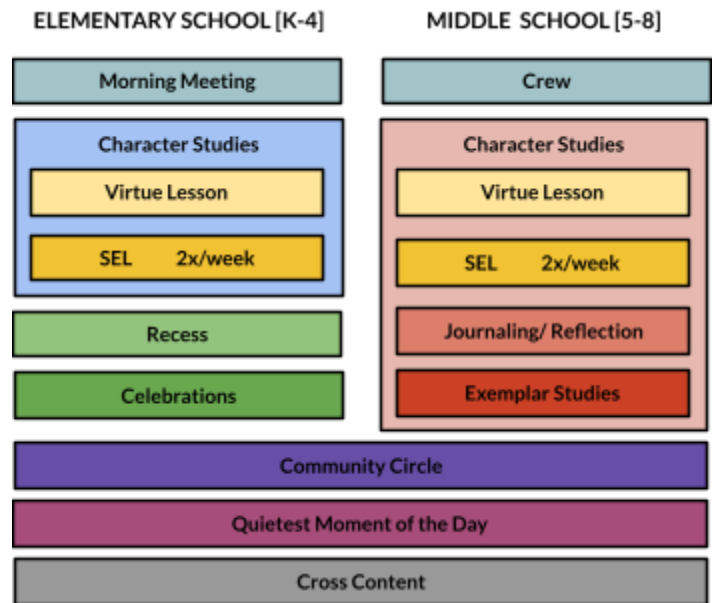
Celebrations

We embed chants, cheers and celebrations into our school day to help build community, celebrate accomplishments and create joy all around. Celebrations are a great tool we use on a weekly basis to celebrate student achievement beyond the basic, "Good Job." Celebrations help build student confidence, build morale, bring a sense of fun, and build community.

Once a week on Fridays, K-4 classrooms have a 10-minute scheduled time for weekly celebrations. These ensure a weekly opportunity to model, teach, and encourage scholars to give and receive affirmation. This scheduled opportunity is not optional and requires classroom teacher(s) to prepare ahead of time in order to ensure the practice and authenticity of the chosen celebrations. *Learn more about Brilla's Celebrations*

Implicit Character Infusion Opportunities

In addition to dedicated instructional time, Character Initiatives are also implicitly infused in Elementary School through events, school aesthetics, student awards, all academic contents, and recess activities. Middle School students participate in additional responsive forms of Character Initiatives: centering and, as-needed, community circles.

Teachers across content areas and across instructional responsibilities act as models of character and infuse virtue and SEL work into non-character specific instruction throughout the day; virtues and all components of Character Initiatives are shared language and an integral part of our model and culture.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL [K-4]

- Morning Meeting
- Character Studies
  - Virtue Lesson
  - SEL 2x/week
- Recess
- Celebrations

MIDDLE SCHOOL [5-8]

- Crew
- Character Studies
  - Virtue Lesson
  - SEL 2x/week
- Journaling/ Reflection
- Exemplar Studies

- Community Circle
- Quietest Moment of the Day
- Cross Content

Recess: In grades K-4, there is a suggested weekly recess goal informed by both the virtue scope and sequence and research around scaffolded play. Due to different school logistics (variation in time, space, and management structures) recess currently has a recommended structure, not a required structure.

Centering: In grades 5-8, staff is trained in and encouraged to leverage time for Centering, focused on transitions and mindfulness. Centering is a 2-3 minute exercise (especially beneficial after Crew, FAA, and lunch) that is designed to honor both the students and the community's need for resets and processing the changing of spaces.

Awards, Events, & School Aesthetics: Students are also celebrated for embodying virtues through a variety of methods of recognition. Scholars practice both giving and receiving affirmation through the following:

- One "Scholar of the Week" per school who demonstrates exemplary character; scholars of the week are eligible to be the Cardinal of the Year.
- Classroom "Mascot of the Week," nominated by peers.
- Annual "Shine Awards," an end of year, invitation-only celebration that recognizes scholars with/for Virtue Awards and Cardinal of the Year
  a. Cardinal of the Year (COY): One COY per school is chosen, by secret ballot provided to the entire staff, to receive this honor.
  b. Virtue Awards: After soliciting formal nominations from all grade level teams, four scholars per school are identified and recognized by their school leader. Each school celebrates one scholar per core virtue (Courage, Justice, Wisdom, Self-Control).
- Throughout our buildings and in each classroom, there are images and bulletin boards highlighting core and sub-virtues and student, historical, and contemporary models of virtue. Character Initiatives boards are a great point of pride in classrooms. We celebrate our virtue work in this space and students look forward to seeing their faces and names up there. It is important that the layout of the bulletin board does not result in the appearance of sub-virtues being "aligned" to any specific core virtue. Instead, our core virtues are the foundation on which all of our sub-virtues are

built. Layout options must support an understanding that sub-virtues link across core virtues. *Learn more about Brilla's Classroom Character Initiatives Bulletin Boards*
- Building Quotes
  a. Quotations must be aligned to Brilla values and, when possible, explicitly linked to Brilla virtues
  b. Quotations must be attributed to a diverse set of figures: saints, classical figures, historical figures; at least half of all quotes should reflect the racial background of the student population

Staff

In order to facilitate authentic character education with children, it is necessary for professionals to own, explore, and invest in personal growth and development. Therefore, all staff — instructional, operational, support, and network based — participate in character formation focused on their own personal growth. This personal growth and development should focus on challenging what we already know and expanding our experiences and beliefs in order to strengthen our individual moral compass.

In addition to this internally focused work, instructional staff also participate in regular instructional and pedagogical professional training[10] and development specifically focused on how to teach components of Character Initiatives, including the guidance of scholars' social emotional development.

Further, Brilla's explicit Equity[11] & Inclusivity[12] work such as the efforts of the Equity & Inclusivity Coalition and training around Equity & Inclusivity are accompanied by the Chief Character Initiatives Officer. *Learn more about Brilla's Equity & Inclusivity Coalition*

At Brilla, equity is about ensuring each individual's access to the tools, skills, support, and resources he or she specifically needs to flourish; and inclusivity is a way to honor the dignity of all members of the community by creating a warm and welcoming environment which celebrates individuality while still adhering to the programmatic mission and vision.

There are several development opportunities of varying frequency directly connected to Character Initiatives.

Weekly Opportunities

Morning Reflection & Journaling: Time for personal reflection on upcoming virtue to be addressed with scholars. (10 minute journaling & sharing). Opportunities to pause and ponder in a positive manner that is personal, provides the practice of stepping away from the busy-ness of the day in a reflective space, allowing all staff to begin the day in a calm and shared manner.

Grade Level Meeting (GLM) Brainstorms: Grade level brainstorm that looks ahead at the upcoming core/sub-virtues scholars are focusing on. Goal is to discuss how to bring the definition to life across content in a way appropriate for the age group while also discussing what it looks like/sounds like/feels like when scholars of said age group are developing a strong understanding of the core/sub-virtue. (Grounded in the idea of unit internalization/unpacking).

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[10] Processes that develop a person's skills and competencies.
[11] Equity is about ensuring each individual's access to the tools, skills, support, and resources he or she specifically needs to flourish.
[12] A way to honor the dignity of all members of the community by creating a warm and welcoming environment which celebrates individuality while still adhering to the programmatic mission and vision.

Regular Opportunities

Staff Formation (MIP, Data Day, Development Day, etc,): An opportunity for virtue reflections and community discussions to challenge what we already know, expand our experiences, expand our beliefs, and develop our own moral compass as a larger group. This is a facilitated discussion in response to contemporary writings, character exemplar videos, etc. and often utilizes the I.P.P. reflection process.[13]

Workshops: Training and development opportunities around curriculum, skills, and strategies like Love & Logic, Human Dignity Curriculum, Responsive Classroom, Equity & Inclusion, Restorative Practices, and more. Workshops are developed and facilitated by both internal staff and external providers.

Observations & Walkthroughs: Character Initiatives team member(s) observes a component across a grade level, school, or network and provides written feedback that highlights noticeable kudos, trends, gaps, and opportunities to campus-based leadership.

Brilla Bunch: Brilla Bunches are small, intentional communities populated by staff across different levels of expertise, roles, and campuses. The purpose of regular Brilla Bunch meetings is to best position the entire Brilla community to ensure a supportive infrastructure, empower members to be resources to one another, and complement the broader ways staff are supported. Each intentional small group community is encouraged to deepen the individual and collective understanding of moral truths, honor each person's freedom, and ~~the~~ call to a flourishing life.

Guiding Teams: Guiding Teams are composed of 5-12 professional staff that gather to further invest in, explore, and fine-tune our own development in and approach to Character Initiatives. (i.e. book club/study, predetermined relevant topic, etc). This is optional, offered as appropriate/needed, and has a turnover of participants making it possible for widespread involvement and buy-in.

Annual Opportunities

Summer Onboarding & Training: The Character Initiatives Team provides a series of professional development sessions that establish and refresh staff/teacher knowledge of the Character Initiatives approach, components, skills, and processes. These sessions include but are not limited to:

- Character Initiatives Theory & Praxis
- Virtue / Sub- Virtue Deep Dive
- Morning Meeting
- Crew
- Dignified Engagement[14]
- Social Emotional Learning
- Wellness and Flourishing

In addition to time dedicated to staff development, there are also staff-specific events and awards that mirror how we recognize and appreciate scholars who exemplify Character:

Development Days: The Development Days provided by the Brilla Public Charter Schools network ensure that staff of all skill levels and positions receive targeted, high impact professional learning. Themed after the

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[13] *I.P.P. Process: Facilitated reflection on identity, purpose, and performance by intentionally asking: "Who Am I?", "Why Am I?", and "How am I doing at living my purpose?" establishing a critical awareness of circumstances and realities.*

[14] Dignified Engagement is a practice grounded in the special value of every human person. This person-centered approach fosters a community where all members are both valued as unique individuals and also responsible for the collective flourishing of the community.

network-wide strategic priorities, facilitators connect and deepen staff's awareness of and progress towards excellent execution of Brilla's Essential Practices. The Development Days bring to life Brilla's Characteristics of Professional Learning.

The Development Days professional learning sessions' end goal is to improve the dynamic relationship between content, staff knowledge and skill, and student engagement. Understanding that the instructional core is made up of three components, the student, the staff member, and the content, Brilla Development Days aim to improve the quality and level of student learning by targeting the importance of the task and student achievement at the center of the core.

Employee of the Month: No fewer than 4 and no more than 7 staff members are recognized each year as the Employee of the Month. Open to all salaried Brilla staff members, the Employee of the Month is nominated by their peers based on their embodiment of the Brilla virtues and commitment to the Brilla mission. The staff member is then celebrated by all teams in various ways (using Love Languages as a guide).

Staff Cardinal of the Year: At the end of the school year, all of the Employees of the Month qualify to be voted on as Staff Cardinal of the Year, the all-around most exemplary team member.

Staff SHINE Awards: Staff SHINE Awards is an opportunity to celebrate and recognize staff who have achieved excellence in uplifting the Brilla mission, vision, values and/or virtues. This is an inclusive event for all Brilla Staff, honoring a select few staff members who have demonstrated exceptional excellence in 5 celebrated and awarded areas.

Family

Beginning at the moment of recruitment, continuing through enrollment and for the duration of the Brilla experience, the value and importance of Character Initiatives is communicated to parents side-by-side with the value and importance of Academics.

Our comprehensive approach, calling all members of our community to prioritize living a life of deep meaning and purpose paired with our prioritization of families as the first educators[15] of their children, informs and guides Character Initiatives with and for families. Recognizing and honoring this mutually beneficial partnership includes aspects of giving and receiving. We invite families to partner with us and guide what we offer, while also extending resources and opportunities for families to deepen their capacity and knowledge.

When considering families as the first educators, we name and recognize that there is a difference between a "teacher" and an "educator" (i.e. non-teaching staff and families are educators, though they may not be employed as teachers per se). As educators, families don't just sign up and wash their hands of the education of their children, they participate in the education of their children and we all walk together as partners. Adults at Brilla may not always be the first to introduce certain topics to scholars. Further, there may be times of disagreement between a Brilla educator or teacher and the family's approach to a topic or situation. When appropriate, we honor families in educating their child so long as it is not objectively harmful.

All content for parents and families have the child in mind and are grounded in an intent to unify, align, and enhance - not diminish their personal approach/parenting style. Content topics include: Love & Logic methods

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[15] The special right of families to choose the best path of formation and education for their child grounded in partnership and a lived philosophical agreement between school and family.

affective language; behavior responsiveness and discipline skills/best practices; developmentally appropriate and dignified engagement, etc. Character Initiatives for families are incorporated into:

- Back to School Night
- Coffee & Conversations
- School based newsletter
- Parent University
- Annual Character Initiatives Family Dinner & Listening Session
- Parent Teacher Conferences
- Network-Wide Family Workshops

Monthly Newsletter

Each month as part of the school-wide newsletter, a small section on Character Initiatives is included with the purpose of bringing one of the core or sub-virtues into focus for families. i.e. *"We kicked-off our school year focusing on dignity and building classroom communities. With a focus on the special value of every human person we build strong friendships and healthy habits to get into the rhythm of our year together. This month we will look at our core virtues: courage, wisdom, justice, and self-control. When you see your child modeling these, please name it and celebrate. A celebration can be as simple as a high-five or a happy dance!"*

Coffee & Conversations

As part of monthly Coffee & Conversations, character leads at each campus share a brief, 10-minute reflection and activity in which they present an upcoming virtue or sub-virtue, its definitions, and provide an opportunity to explore what that looks like, sounds like, and feels like for students and families at home.

Parent University

Character content is included in Parent University, in which families have the opportunity to engage in content directly related to their child's development, the time of year, and other relevant concerns or questions expressed by families. Topics and best practices highlighted include Love and Logic, Anti-Bullying, how to have crucial conversations with children, the Restorative approach, boundary setting, and more.

Bulletin Board

Each campus has one school-wide bulletin board (typically near the entrance and easily viewable by families at drop-off and pick-up) which contains relevant and timely virtue content, usually celebrating the previous academic year's Cardinal of the Year.

Network-Wide Family Workshops

The Character Initiatives Team provides optional formation opportunities for family members to grow in virtue and moral development through reflection, community-building, and explicit instruction in the virtues and Transcendentals. These are organized and arranged in partnership with the Family Involvement Committee (FIC) and campus-based leadership.

Annual Character Initiatives Family Dinner and Listening Session

Once per year, campus-based leadership identifies a select number of families who are then invited to a "Family Dinner" and Listening Session. The objectives of this event are to build community among families and across campuses and collect qualitative data on how families understand, view, and value the Character Initiatives approach at Brilla. Guiding questions are posed to families (i.e., "How has character initiatives at Brilla impacted your scholar this year?" "Which core or sub virtue has your child modeled this year? How and when?"). Families respond and discuss, and qualitative data is collected to further improve and inform our Character Initiatives approach.

Social Media

The weekly Character Initiatives component of campus-based social media posts help to foster a sense of community, understanding and shared identity for students and staff, as well as give students the opportunity for families to see their fellow Brilla stakeholders and engage with the shared definition of our virtues, sub-virtues, and shared language. The content also provides an opportunity for students, staff, and family members to model and exemplify these virtues, sub-virtues, and/or shared language in a way that leverages it being showcased and seen by their peers.

Roles and Responsibilities

At scale, the Character Initiatives Leadership Team consists of Character Initiatives staff of Brilla Schools Network of the Charter Management Organization and one campus-based leadership member per Brilla School. In addition, one grade-level staff member per grade per school is assigned and empowered to focus on Character Initiatives at the grade level. All members of the Character Initiatives Team strive to:

- Champion Character Initiatives at Brilla and ensure that all aspects of the Brilla model are implemented with fidelity, excellence, and joy;
- Seek regular feedback, solicit input, and engage in courageous conversations in order to better themselves and others;
- Understand and communicate that one's character is always developing and evolving;
- Demonstrate an understanding of virtues by making moral choices and taking advantage of opportunities to live and to develop these virtues;
- Reflect on good character through intentional reflection on virtues and moral habits;
- Celebrate living a life of truth and goodness;
- Identify and recognize classical, historical, contemporary, and future character exemplars;
- Demonstrate a commitment to personal growth and development focused on challenging what we already know and expanding our experiences and beliefs in order to strengthen our individual moral compass.

Brilla Schools Network

Chief Character Initiatives & Culture Officer: The Chief Character Initiatives Officer (CCICO) is responsible for the vision and direction of Character Initiatives & Culture for Brilla Public Charter Schools, responsible for developing curriculum, facilitating instruction, and measuring progress in virtue formation, social-emotional development, student behavior, and joyful & inclusive culture. The CCICO plays a leadership role in supporting a culture of joy & rigor which honors the dignity of each member.

The CCICO provides leadership and expertise to both Seton Education Partners, including El Camino, and Brilla Public Charter Schools. The Brilla Schools Network is growing and the CCICO also contributes to regular strategic planning sessions required to guide this growth. The CCICO is responsible for the vision and direction of all components of Character Initiatives & Culture across stakeholder groups, especially with regard to sourcing, creating, executing, and assessing said components (i.e. moral, virtue, social-emotional, equity and inclusivity, restorative, etc). The CCICO aims to ensure a culture where adults and students have dignified, pro-community interactions grounded in love.

Senior Director of Character Initiatives & Culture: The Senior Director of Character Initiatives & Culture (SDCIC) is responsible for capacitating the vision and direction of Character Initiatives & Culture for Brilla Public Charter Schools. This responsibility includes being a primary thinker with regard to strengthening and further developing content, curricula, processes, and systems that influence facilitation, instruction, and progress measurement of Brilla's Character Initiatives and Culture (e.g. virtue formation, social-emotional development,

student behavior, and joyful & inclusive culture, overall engagement, and ethos). The SDCIC plays a leadership role in supporting a culture of joy & rigor which honors the dignity of each member.

The SDCIC provides leadership and expertise to both Seton Education Partners, including El Camino, and Brilla Public Charter Schools. The SDCIC is the primary coach of all components of Brilla Culture across stakeholder groups, especially with regard to sourcing, creating, executing, and assessing joyful & inclusive culture events and ethos. The SDCIC aims to ensure a culture where adults and students have dignified interactions grounded in love.

Director of Elementary Character Initiatives: The Director of Elementary Character Initiatives (DECI) is responsible for strengthening curriculum, facilitating instruction, and measuring progress in virtue formation, social-emotional development, and student behavior across four elementary school campuses. The DECI plays a leadership role in supporting a culture which honors the dignity of staff, students and families network-wide. Further, the DECI is responsible for executing and assessing Character Initiatives (i.e. moral, virtue, social-emotional, equity and inclusion, restorative practices) across all stakeholder groups.

Director of Middle Character Initiatives: The Director of Middle Character Initiatives (DMCI) is responsible for strengthening curriculum, facilitating instruction, and measuring progress in virtue formation, social-emotional development, and student behavior across middle school campuses. The DMCI plays a leadership role in supporting a culture which honors the dignity of staff, students and families network-wide. Further, the DMCI is responsible for executing and assessing Character Initiatives (i.e. moral, virtue, social-emotional, equity and inclusion, restorative practices) across all stakeholder groups.

Character Initiatives Lead - El Camino: There is one Character Initiatives Lead at El Camino Faith Formation Programs, directly managed by the Director of Programs and supervised by the appropriate member of the Brilla Schools Network Character Initiatives team. In collaboration with the Superintendent of Programs, the character initiatives lead is responsible for establishing, maintaining, and implementing the vision for character initiatives across all aspects of his/her assigned portfolio. The Character Initiatives Lead is the main liaison between the El Camino Leadership Team, each El Camino Manager and the Brilla Schools Network.

Campus-Based Leaders

Elementary Schools Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach (Character Initiatives Lead): There is one Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach (Character Initiatives Lead) per building at Brilla Charter Schools, directly managed by the principal or Assistant Principal and developed in their content by the appropriate member of the Brilla Schools Network Character Initiatives team. In collaboration with the campus-based leadership, the Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and enhancing the vision for character across all aspects of the campus. The Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach directs, coaches, and supports grade-level Character Initiatives Liaison(s). The Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach also serves as the instructional coach for a specified roster of teachers. Further, the Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach is the main liaison between the school and the Brilla Schools Network Character Initiatives team. Campus-Based Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coaches have an active role in the health of both the Character Initiatives domain and Character Initiatives content. (Character Initiatives content lives within Character Initiatives as a domain).

Middle Schools Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach (Character Initiatives Lead): There is one Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach per building at Brilla Charter Schools, directly managed by the principal or Assistant Principal and developed in their content by the appropriate member of the Brilla Schools Network Character Initiatives team. In collaboration with the campus-based leadership, the

Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach is responsible for implementing, monitoring, and enhancing the vision for character across all aspects of the campus. The Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach drives student accountability and behavior support. The Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach directs, coaches, and supports grade-level Character Initiatives Liaison(s). The Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach also serves as the instructional coach for a specified roster of teachers. Further, the Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach is the main liaison between the school and the Brilla Schools Network Character Initiatives team. Campus-Based Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coaches have an active role in the health of both the Character Initiatives domain and Character Initiatives content. (Character Initiatives content lives within Character Initiatives as a domain).

Grade-Level Teachers

Character Initiatives Content Liaison: The Character Initiatives Content Liaison (CCL) is the Character Initiatives champion on a grade level. The CCL is responsible for preparing and providing materials, highlights, and tips for their grade level team on how to execute that content in their classroom on a weekly basis, as well as message anything grade appropriate coming to/from the Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach. The Character Initiatives Content Liaison assumes the responsibilities for this role in addition to being a classroom teacher.

For grades where there are multiple Character Initiatives Content Liaisons across the network, only one CCL per grade will revise or manipulate content for said grade for all schools in the network. This CCL will be identified collaboratively by the School Leaders and network Character Initiatives leaders. They are responsible, under the guidance of the Character Initiatives Curriculum & Instructional Coach in their building and the corresponding network Character Initiatives leader, for applying a critical lens to all grade level Character Initiatives content and providing materials and training for teachers in how to execute that content in their classroom on a weekly basis.

Definitions

Core Virtues

[*Spanish Version*]

Courage: Doing what is right in the face of fear [K-1] and finding the strength to persevere, [2-3] and having a willingness to venture when unsure. [4+]

Justice: Fairness. [K-1] Giving to each what is due, [2-3] consistent with one's dignity. [4+]

Self Control: Actively monitoring voice and body [K-1] by considering their impact [2-3] and exercising power over impulses. [4+]

Wisdom: Making thoughtful choices [K-1] demonstrated in word and action [2-3] with knowledge of the things that matter. [4+]

Sub-Virtues

Diligence	Steady, earnest and energetic effort.	**Kindness**	Caring for each other in all we do and say.
Empathy	Understanding and sharing another's thoughts and feelings.	**Mercy**	Choosing to respond with love, even when it's not easy.
Gratitude	Thankfulness for the gift of life and the gifts in life.	**Moderation**	Striving for balance in one's life.
Heroism	Taking noble action for a good cause.	**Orderliness***	Keeping oneself physically clean and neat and one's belongings in good order.
Honesty	Truthfulness: loving the truth, telling the truth, and living truthfully in word and deed.	**Patience**	Maintaining calm and control when completing a task or experiencing challenge.
Humility	Looking at one's own strengths and weaknesses while appreciating the gifts of others.	**Perseverance**	Sticking to it — even when you'd rather give up.
Initiative	Independently finding opportunities for thoughtful action.	**Respect**	Choosing to treat others and self politely and kindly, in acknowledgement of dignity.
Integrity	Living life faithful to good principles and high ideals.	**Responsibility**	Fulfilling one's just duties.
Age Specific Sub-Virtue		*Modesty**	Purity of heart in action.

*At 7th grade, **'modesty'** replaces **'orderliness.'**

Shared Language

Dignity	Community	Love
The special value of every human person.	A group of people sharing space, interests, or work.[K-4] A shared environment to experience peer and group relationships.[5-8]	To will the good of others.

Equity: ensuring each individual's access to the tools, skills, support, and resources they specifically need to flourish.

External Resources

We utilize both externally and internally developed curriculum and programming to support Character Initiatives at Brilla. This combination makes our programming both uniquely "Brilla," as well as grounded in the most proven and innovative practices out there. Character Initiatives are a part of a holistic collaboration between the Character Initiatives and Student Services teams at Brilla to provide a cohesive experience for all students in social emotional learning (SEL) and character development. We utilize the CASEL competencies to vet all external programs and as a lever for evaluating the implementation of our comprehensive Character and SEL programs.

CASEL Competencies

The CASEL Competencies, or the CASEL 5, address five broad and interrelated areas of competence and highlight examples for each: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. CASEL's SEL framework fosters knowledge, skills, and attitudes across five areas of competence and multiple key settings to establish equitable learning environments that advance students' learning and development.

Human Dignity Curriculum

Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC) an innovative program that focuses on personal development and informed decisions related to students' sexuality based on an understanding of themselves and in respect of their own human dignity and the dignity of others. Each lesson focuses on the "big picture" theme of how a proper understanding of the human person leads to human flourishing—helping students to understand and develop healthy habits, good decision-making skills, and a strong sense of meaning and purpose.

The HDC is intended as an alternative to existing programs, often confused and inadequate, while still meeting guidelines established by the UN and WHO.

Core Themes (Grades K-12)
- Human Dignity
- Hierarchy of Living Beings/ Powers of Living Things:
  - Vegetative (nutrition, growth, reproduction: basic physical existence)
  - Sensitive (senses and emotions: relation with the world)
  - Rational (intellect and will: self-awareness and determination)
- Intentional Actions
- Human Freedom
- Persons as Subjects vs. Objects
- Friendship & Heroes

Love and Logic

Love and Logic is a research-driven, whole-child theory founded in 1977 by Jim Fay and Foster W. Cline, M.D. It provides practical tools and techniques that help adults achieve respectful, healthy relationships with their children through a behavior management system grounded in a cycle of empathy, shared control, reasonable consequences, and shared thinking. The language framing used in this system activates students' frontal cortex, which, over time, facilitates greater self-management and self-regulation.

PAThS Curriculum

The PAThS curriculum is a comprehensive program for promoting emotional and social competencies and reducing aggression and behavior problems in elementary school-aged children while simultaneously enhancing the educational process in the classroom. This innovative curriculum is designed to be used by educators and counselors in a multi-year, universal prevention model. Although primarily focused on the school and classroom settings, information and activities are also included for use with parents.

It has become clear over the last two decades that high quality SEL needs to be at the core of the school curriculum to best achieve the educational goals we want for our students, and science has recently explained why. Imaging and other basic research from social cognitive neuroscience has ascertained that the human brain is largely evolved for processing emotional and social information. This is the "default" mode of thinking. Moreover, the neural systems that underlie nonsocial reasoning, cognitive working memory, and what we term "general intelligence" (i.e., those used with traditional education) are separate from the brain regions that process social reasoning, social working memory, emotions, and mentalizing, and these two systems are often at odds with one another.

Historically, we have asked students to turn off their default social-emotional brain networks while at school, a difficult task at best. This makes school onerous for many children, because the brain is largely built to focus on the social world. This also results in our students utilizing only part of their brains while in the classroom. Alternatively, when we teach children through the use of both social and nonsocial neural systems, as achieved with the implementation of the PATHS® program, learning is easier, much more enjoyable, and far more effective. In other words, using the PATHS® curriculum, and thereby engaging both neural systems, is literally teaching the whole child.

Over the past 35 years, more than 40 published research studies (by ourselves and others, both nationally and internationally) have documented the effectiveness of the PATHS® program and show that the PATHS®program is the best choice for achieving optimal educational success. A wide variety of results has consistently shown improvements in seven major goals of education needed for the development of healthy, happy children and future adults:

- Improved academic achievement
- Decreased emotional suffering & behavioral problems
- Increased happiness, health, and emotional well-being
- Improved emotional literacy, self-control, & problem-solving skills
- Healthy relationships and social skills
- Preparation for the future: Workforce
- Skills for the future: Life satisfaction, good health, & citizenship

This is the most prodigious evidence base for a specific SEL curriculum available by far. In other words, using the PATHS® program as a core aspect of education in the classroom is far more effective for reaching educational goals than traditional education has ever been or ever could be.

An updated version of the PATHS® curriculum was released in early 2011 which is organized into separate grade-specific classroom kits for PreK/Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4. and Grade 5/6. Replacement components are also available. For further information on ordering curricular materials, please go to https://pathsprogram.com/.

The PATHS® program is designed to be taught two or more times per week for a minimum of 20-30 minutes per day. Systematic, developmentally-based lessons, materials, and instructions are provided to facilitate emotional literacy, self-control, social competence, positive peer relations, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. Key objectives in promoting these developmental skills are to prevent and to reduce behavioral and emotional problems.

Responsive Classroom

Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based approach to teaching that focuses on engaging academics, positive community, effective management, and developmental awareness. Our workshops, books, and resources help elementary and middle school educators to create safe and joyful learning communities where students develop strong social and academic skills and every student can thrive.

Independent research has found that the Responsive Classroom approach is associated with higher academic achievement in math and reading, improved school climate, and higher-quality instruction. It has been described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as one of the most "well-designed evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs".

Four Key Domains of Responsive Classrooms
1. Engaging Academics: Adults create learning tasks that are active, interactive, appropriately challenging, purposeful, and connected to students' interests.
2. Positive Community: Adults nurture a sense of belonging, significance, and emotional safety so that students feel comfortable taking risks and working with a variety of peers.
3. Effective Management: Adults create a calm, orderly environment that promotes autonomy and allows students to focus on learning.
4. Developmentally Responsive Teaching: Adults use knowledge of child development, along with observations of students, to create a developmentally appropriate learning environment.

Restorative Practices

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) outlines the following articulation of restorative practices:

- All humans are hardwired to connect. Just as we need food, shelter and clothing, human beings also need strong and meaningful relationships to thrive.
- Restorative practices is an emerging social science that studies how to strengthen relationships between individuals as well as social connections within communities.
- Though new to the social sciences, restorative practices has deep roots within indigenous communities throughout the world.

Knowledge and use of restorative practices is in line with our prioritization of dignity and deepens what we've begun by grounding ourselves in Love & Logic. We teach and train staff into restorative practices theories and actions.

THEORY	Social Discipline Window; Psychology of Affect & The Compass of Shame; Fair Process
ACTION	Proactive and reactive circles (community, listening, problem solving); small impromptu conferences; affective statements; affective questions

Learn more about the connections between CASEL Competencies (SEL) and Restorative Practices

Social Thinking Curriculum

The Social Thinking Curriculum is utilized by the Student Services and Social Work team in order to facilitate students' understanding of themselves and their social relationships.Because we believe it is integral for students to develop an understanding of themselves and their social relationships , we have decided to implement the Social Thinking Curriculum. The curriculum focuses on four main areas:

- Self-regulation
- Social emotional learning
- Executive functioning
- Perspective taking
- Social problem solving

A person's social thinking ability has a considerable effect on his or her relationships and success in school and at work. It affects the person's social skills, perspective taking, self-awareness, self-regulation, critical thinking, social problem solving, play skills, reading comprehension, written expression, ability to learn and work in a group, organizational skills, etc. The tools taught break down complex social concepts (like perspective taking) into understandable and doable parts that can be applied in any setting.

Improving a person's social thinking begins with improving self-awareness. Only as individuals gain awareness of their own thoughts, emotions, and intentions can they become increasingly aware of the thoughts, emotions, intentions, and actions of others. As a result, they are better able to use the information they've gained from their social thinking to inform many things they do throughout the day. Improving a person's social thinking will help improve their social skills (social behavior), reading comprehension, written expression, narrative language, ability to work as part of a group, ability to make and keep friends, etc.

1. ***Social thinking is our meaning maker. We observe and listen to interpret the perspectives of others.*** The first step to improving social thinking is to keenly observe the social world that surrounds us.

2. ***When seeking to engage or simply share space with others, we use social thinking to adapt our social behaviors (social skills) effectively as a means to meet our social goals.*** To do this, we must learn strong self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control. We must learn how to adapt our physical posture depending on the context, how we use our eyes to better understand others and communicate, and provide tools for conversational language to relate to others.

3. ***Our social thinking and social skills directly impact how others feel about us. This impacts how we are treated, how we feel about others, and ultimately - how we feel about ourselves!*** At the end of the day, our social experience is an emotional experience. The purpose of social thinking is to produce social behavior that gives others the emotional experience you intend to give. The Social Thinking Methodology teaches people to be more aware of their emotions and better predict and relate to the emotions of others.

Thriving Learning Communities

Thriving Learning Communities (TLC) applies the science of character strengths to the practice of teaching and learning. This research-based approach to improving students' social and emotional learning (SEL) skills through the lens of character strengths impacts school culture, accelerating the change process through the powerful combination of three critical elements: The science of character strengths; Social and emotional learning addressing five interrelated sets of competencies (CASEL, 2005) — self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills, and decision-making; Flexible K-12 curriculum, tools, and parental resources supporting customization and innovation.

Zones of Regulation

Zones of Regulation is a systematic, cognitive behavioral approach used to teach self-regulation by categorizing all the different ways we feel and states of alertness we experience into four concrete colored zones. The Zones framework provides strategies to teach students to become more aware of and independent in controlling their emotions and impulses, manage their sensory needs, and improve their ability to problem solve conflicts.

By addressing underlying deficits in emotional and sensory regulation, executive functioning, and social cognition, the framework is designed to help move students toward independent regulation. The Zones of Regulation incorporates Social Thinking® (www.socialthinking.com) concepts and numerous visuals to teach students to identify their feelings/level of alertness, understand how their behavior impacts those around them, and learn what tools they can use to manage their feelings and states.

The Four Zones: Our Feelings & States Determine Our Zone
- The Red Zone is used to describe extremely heightened states of alertness and intense emotions. A person may be elated or experiencing anger, rage, devastation, or terror when in the Red Zone.
- The Yellow Zone is also used to describe a heightened state of alertness and elevated emotions, however one has more control when they are in the Yellow Zone. A person may be experiencing stress, frustration, anxiety, excitement, silliness, the wiggles, or nervousness when in the Yellow Zone.
- The Green Zone is used to describe a calm state of alertness. A person may be described as happy, focused, content, or ready to learn when in the Green Zone. This is the zone where optimal learning occurs.
- The Blue Zone is used to describe low states of alertness and down feelings such as when one feels sad, tired, sick, or bored.

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