



## **Project SAVE**

**2024-2025**

**Character Education Initiative  
Prevention and Intervention  
Multi-Tiered Systems of Support  
Social Emotional Learning**

“A classroom environment created by a focus on character allows for more uninterrupted instruction time.”

“Character Education is the umbrella for which we address violence prevention.”

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### I. Introduction

From the *Safe Schools against Violence in Education* (“Project SAVE”) public forums, led by the previous Lieutenant Governor Mary O. Donohue, this definition of CHARACTER EDUCATION was disseminated:

“Character Education is the deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and acts upon core ethical values.” It is based on the following premises:

1. Destructive behaviors have a common core: the absence of good character.
2. People do not automatically develop good character. Intentional and focused efforts must be made to foster the character development of the young.
3. Good character consists of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.
4. The core ethical values are not mere subjective preferences. They are rooted in our human nature and express our common humanity.

Character is defined comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior. “The two great goals of education: growing academically and becoming the best people we can be!”

Character Education shall instruct students on the principles of:

- Honesty
- Tolerance
- Personal responsibility
- Respect for others
- Awareness and sensitivity to discrimination and/or harassment as defined in the Dignity for All
- Students Act
- Civility in relation to people of different races, gender, national origins, ethnic groups, religions, religious practices, physical or mental abilities, sexual orientation or weight
- Observance of laws and rules
- Courtesy
- Dignity, and other traits which will enhance the quality of students’ experiences in, and contributions to, the community
- Safe and responsible use of the Internet and electronic communications

## II. Strategic Plan

**At ESM, we recognize the critically important connection of building the internal thinking habits of our students and staff with skill development that empowers all for success today and tomorrow.**

Increasing Student Connectedness:

- Adult Support
- Belonging to a positive peer group

- Commitment to Education
- School Environment

Identifying dispositions as critically important for our students comes from our long-term alignment with Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Stephen Covey's dispositions work connects our dispositions with the way we see our world, which then impacts what we do, which in turn shapes our results.

We focus on building the positive dispositions of our students and staff through multiple practices at ESM, including the teaching of 7 Habits of Happy Kids, the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, and the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Our curriculum at ESM includes targeted Habits of Mind in our instructional units that are framed with the Thoughtful Classroom instructional framework. Our instructional and leadership staff all use Harvey Silver's Thoughtful Classroom framework and resources. Through the Positivity Project, Responsive Classroom, PBIS and Richard and Becky DuFour's Professional Learning Communities, we prioritize our teaching, reinforcing and celebrating positive dispositions in our students and staff.

**A. Dispositions: The internal motivation to:**

- Be open minded and flexible in thinking
- Listen with understanding and empathy
- Desire continual learning: Persist and persevere
- Manage choices and impulsivity
- Understand and manage personal relationships
- Think about thinking
- Be brave and take responsible risks
- Think interdependently with clear communication
- Create, innovate, imagine
- Be curious and question; Find humor
- Be grateful and respond with wonderment and appreciation
- Desire integrity and honesty

**B. Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People:** Consistent focus on a number of critical factors build a common vision and sustains trust and commitment with our community, including the deep implementation of Stephen R. Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (Cover, 2004) These habits provide structure for putting our beliefs into actions.

**1. Be Proactive**

*Recognize how choices based on personal experiences or beliefs can profoundly impact your effectiveness, both positively and negatively.*

- Involving our students, staff and community in the planning, implementation and monitoring of our priorities in the ESM strategic plan

- Staying focused on our “Circle of Influence”, which are those things we can influence
- Modeling and teaching positive behavior

## **2. Begin with the End in Mind**

*Develop a clear definition of what is and is not important to you by creating the most important road map you'll ever have.*

- Having an unrelenting focus on what is best for our students; now and in their future
- Consistently communicating, building and maintaining our ESM vision, mission and beliefs
- Continually reflecting on and evaluating existing programs, our team and individual actions, and next steps for improvement based upon our ESM vision, mission, beliefs and priorities within the ESM Strategic Plan

## **3. Put First Things First**

*Increase the balance and fulfillment of your professional and personal life by investing a few minutes each day in the same planning process used by many of the world's most successful people.*

- Aligning school and department improvement plans and personal growth plans to the ESM Strategic Plan
- Aligning all of our decisions and actions with our mission, vision and beliefs
- Aligning the budget to the ESM Strategic Plan
- Intentional focus on learning, creative thinking and relationship building

## **4. Think Win-Win**

*Build a team that finds faster and better solutions through clear expectations, shared responsibilities, and an understanding of priorities.*

- Seeking mutually beneficial relationships by valuing and respecting others' ideas
- Approaching all partnerships with students, parents, families, staff and our community with mutual respect to meet common goals

## **5. Seek First to Understand, Then Be Understood**

*Develop the skills of effective communication that lead to greater influence and faster problem solving.*

- Communicating with each other to align decisions and actions with vision, mission and beliefs
- Developing and sustaining collaborative partnerships with families and community-based partners
- Expanding and strengthening collaborative partnerships with higher education institutions and employers to extending learning opportunities for our students and build capacity for our employees

## **6. Synergize**

*Value and celebrate differences and understand how they contribute to more innovative and intelligent solutions.*

- Through combining strengths of our students, staff and community, positive teamwork and collaboration, greater results are achieved than we could have achieved independently.
- Deep and consistent implementation of Professional Learning Communities helps us achieve more than any of us can do individually

**7. Sharpen the Saw**

*Maintain and increase your newfound effectiveness by continually renewing yourself mentally and physically.*

- Celebrating our successes, balancing and renewing our resources, and focusing on service

**8. Find your Voice and Inspire Others to Find Theirs**

- Emphasizing students’ voices, aspirations, and ideas in continually shaping our ESM Strategic Plan and guiding reflections
- Empowering parents/caregivers and family members to embrace partnership and continuous learning as a priority

**C. Social Emotional Core Competencies - Universal Programming - Tier 1**

The District will focus on social emotional learning to help students learn the essential skills that affect every area of their lives, including how to manage emotions and how to establish and maintain positive relationships.

In accordance with New York State’s approved ESSA Plan, the District will “ensure that all students have access and support for their social emotional well being.”

The focus will be on the core competencies: (see graphic next page)

**III. Multi-tiered Systems of Support - Universal Programming**

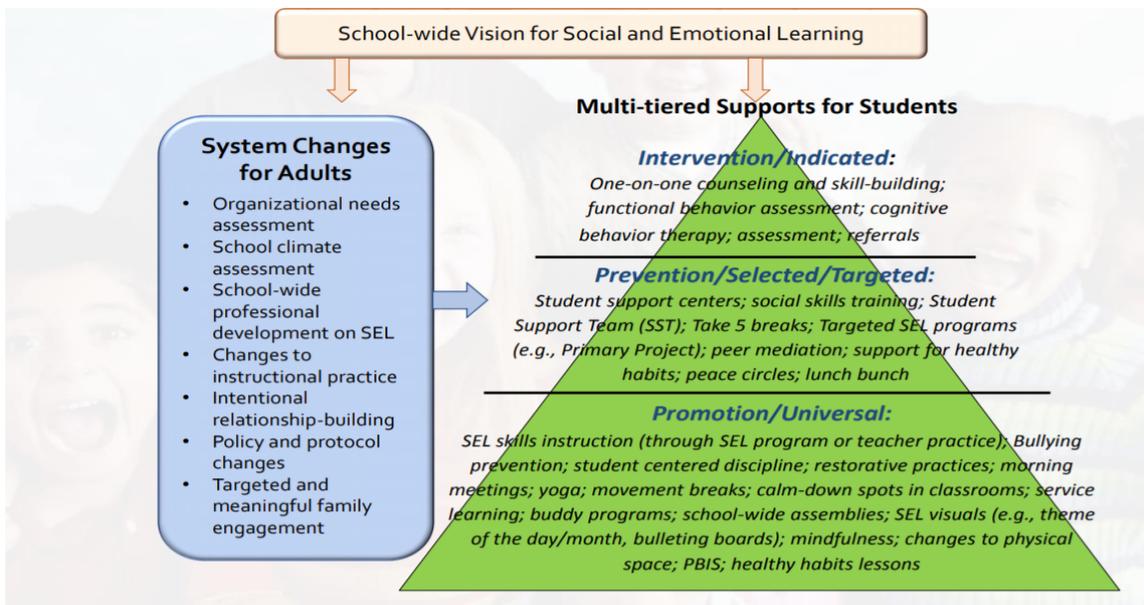
The ESM School District Embraces a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS). MTSS is embedded into the “Plan, Do, Study, Act” portion of our strategic plan. We believe that all students benefit from Tier 1 support, some students need Tier 2 support and a few students need Tier 3 support. The district employs various strategies and evidence based practices and programming to address the needs of students.

# Social Emotional Five Core Competencies

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making



CASEL, 2018



NYS Board of Regents 11/2017

- A. **Positive Behavior Interventions and Support** is a systems approach to promoting a positive school climate while preventing and responding to school and classroom discipline problems. PBIS develops school-wide systems that support staff to teach and promote positive behavior in all students. By reducing behavioral problems, PBIS creates safe learning environments where teachers can teach and students can learn.

## Core Elements of PBIS:

- School-wide discipline practices
- Active leadership and ongoing participation of the Principal
- Cultivation of staff commitment for consistent implementation
- Team-based planning and problem solving
- Use of building-based discipline and academic data to make decisions
- An instructional approach to behavior and classroom management
- Classroom management and behaviorally based interventions
- Functional assessment-based behavior support planning
- Comprehensive plans for individual students with intensive needs
- Active participation of families, students and teacher faculty and staff.
- Integration with mental health and other community supports

**PBIS Addresses:**

- High rates of problem behavior that interfere with learning
- Ineffective and inefficient disciplinary practices
- Lack of supports for staff to address problem behavior
- Lack of general and specialized behavior interventions
- Negative school climates
- Reliance on crisis/reactive management

**B. Bullying Prevention - Tier 1 and 2**

Bullying Prevention is addressed proactively as part of our district wide PBIS initiative, and our secondary restorative practices initiative. There is ongoing staff development such as Mental Health First Aid, Dignity Act Training, Trauma Informed Training, and Crisis Response Training and Restorative Practices Training.

**At the Elementary Level:**

At the request of teachers, support counselors go into classrooms and provide skills, training and bully prevention lessons.

When bullying is identified as a problem for certain children, they are asked to join a social skills group where they work through a bully prevention curriculum. These groups run weekly for six to eight weeks.

Respect for others is a regular part of all school wide assemblies.

There is a support counselor at each elementary school, available for any student who is being bullied.

At Fremont, Minoa and Woodland Elementary Schools, the Manlius Police Department provides presentations on bully prevention.

### **At the Middle School:**

Bullying is discussed at the beginning of the year when school counselors go into each classroom.

School Wide Assemblies on Bully Prevention.

Small group interventions on bullying using the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (best practice evidence based model).

Our School Resource Officer provides classroom lessons on bullying, particularly around cyber bullying.

There are three school counselors and a support counselor at Pine Grove. They are available to any student who is bullied.

### **At the High School:**

- Parent Advisory Committee - presentations of Social Emotional Learning and Mental Health
- Sources of Strength - Peer Leadership Program
- Restorative Practices - promotes the development of positive relationships and staff Presentations, PBIS, ALL staff trained in DASA, Counselors complete DASA forms and submit to administrator for follow up, bully prevention included in the foundations lab by school social worker, and peer mediation available to students.

Small group interventions are also in place, as well as individual intervention when necessary.

We have five school counselors, one school social worker and a Director of Counseling, Youth Development and Leadership. Building Administrators, school social workers and school counselors are available to provide support to any student who is bullied.

At all levels, buildings have implemented Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support. This model builds a positive school climate through teaching expected behaviors for all students. It builds on recognizing and rewarding students who are meeting expectations.

The Dignity Act emphasizes the importance of tolerance, acceptance and respect for others by all members of the school community. The role of teachers and building staff include, but are not limited to the following responsibilities:

1. Maintain a climate of mutual respect and dignity for all students regardless of actual or perceived race, color, weight, national origin, ethnic group, religion, religious practice, disability, sexual orientation, gender or sex, which strengthen students' confidence and promote learning.

2. Confront issues of discrimination and harassment or any situation that threatens the emotional or physical health or safety of any student, school employee or any person who is lawfully on school property or at a school function.
3. Address personal biases that may prevent equal treatment of all students in the school or classroom setting.
4. Report incidents of discrimination and harassment that are witnessed or otherwise brought to a teacher's attention in a timely manner.

The district is also involved in the Covey training which provides a foundation for students to practice the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

### **C. Second Step - Skills for Social and Academic Success - Tier 1 Elementary and Middle School**

The program directly teaches skills to students that strengthen their ability to learn, manage emotions, have empathy and solve problems. The program also includes a strong home and school connection that provides tools to engage families with fun activities to encourage interaction between students and their family members. These activities provide students with further practice of the lesson skills and concepts and gives parents the language to use to support student success.

The Second Step Program promotes:

- School success
- School connectedness
- Safe and respectful school climate

The Second Step Program prevents:

- Problem behaviors
- Peer rejection
- Impulsivity
- Antisocial behavior
- Low academic achievement

### **D. Positivity Project - Tier 1- Pine Grove and Minoa Elementary**

Both Minoa Elementary and Pine Grove are Positivity Project (P2) Partner Schools. P2 promotes Positive Psychology within the school setting, teaching students that relationships are the cornerstone of health, happiness, and resilience. Teachers provide instruction every week of school on one of 24 character traits and then use time every day to engage students with those concepts. The Positivity Project is about human decency and promotes wellness and community. The goals of the program include making children aware that every student possesses all 24 character strengths, and to boost both self-confidence and self-awareness. Furthermore, P2 helps children better understand and value personal differences in one another.

The program nicely dovetails with PBIS, providing foundational character education within the classroom and through monthly assemblies.

### **E. Restorative Practices - at Middle School and High School**

Restorative Practices includes ways of building and fostering relationships between students and between students and adults. It is a way of creating a community and culture of trust and understanding. Restorative practices provide students and adults with an intentional, inclusive and respectful way to think, talk and respond to one another.

#### **F. Primary Project - Tier 2**

Primary Project is a national evidence-based program that helps children in pre-k through third grade adjust to school, gain confidence, social skills, and focus on learning. Through play, Primary Project addresses children's school adjustment difficulties and increases their chances for success. Primary Project is a district-wide tier II intervention in all of the elementary schools:

- East Syracuse Elementary
- Fremont Elementary
- Minoa Elementary
- Woodland Elementary

#### **Goals:**

- Detect school adjustment difficulties early
- Children develop a school-based, trusting relationship with an adult
- Reduce social, emotional, and school adjustment difficulties

#### **Benefits:**

- Reduces negative adjustment behaviors
- Students develop positive coping strategies
- Allows school mental health professionals to focus on children who need more intensive interventions

#### **G. Sources of Strength**

A high school best practice youth mental health promotion and suicide prevention program designed to harness the power of peer social networks to create healthy norms and culture, ultimately preventing suicide, violence, bullying and substance misuse. This model strengthens multiple sources of support, or protective factors for young people so when times get hard, they have strengths to rely on.

#### **H. School-Based Mental Health Therapy – Tier 3**

Allows school mental health professionals to focus on children who need more intensive interventions

**Arise Child and Family Services** – Mental Health clinicians in all school buildings K-12.

- Improve emotional, behavioral and social functioning
- Improve student outcomes
- Provide assessments
- Provide therapy (individual, family & group)
- Crisis services to families
- Psychiatric services, including medication evaluation & management

#### **IV. Fostering Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)**

In Partnership with Syracuse University, ESM Administrators are examining literature and district data points around diversity, equity and inclusion.

During the 23-24 school year, ESM administrators participated in a book study with other Onondaga County School Districts through Syracuse University. The book was titled Five Practices for Equity Focused School Leadership.

Continued DEI work will include looking at the feasibility of:

- Use of enhanced arts to teach about diversity;
- Providing TED talks for parents and students on DEI;
- Identifying data points for culturally responsive strategies.

DEI Training

- More staff training on diversity, equity and inclusion;
- Parents University/Parents As Learning Partners used to talk about DEI;
- Provision of training to parents and students on DEI.

**V. Current clubs and activities that foster connection to school.**

**A. Central High School Clubs and Activities**

Accounting Club
Air Force Cyber Security Competition
Art Club
Athletic Strength Club
Book Club
Career Builders Club
Chemistry Club
Cosmetology Club
Covey Training
DECA
ESports
Feats of Clay Club
Festival of Nations
Foreign Language Honor Society
French Club
Future Chefs of America (FCA)
Game Design
Gymnastics Varsity Girls' Team
Key Club
Latin Club
Marching Band
Masterminds
Math League
Mock Trial Team
Model United Nations
National Honor Society

NYS Business & Marketing
NYS School Music Association (NYSSMA)
Outdoor Adventure Klub (O.A.K.)
Physical Education Adventure Klub (P.E.A.K.)
Prism (People for the Rights of Individuals of Sexual Minorities)
Science Olympiad
Show Choir
Ski Club
Sources of Strength
Spartan Garage Auto Tech Club
Spartan Junior Honor Society
Spartan Pride/PBIS Club
Spartan Sound Machine
Spartan Stage
Sports Management
Stage Band
Stage Crew
Student Council
Student Forum
Three Steps Forward
Unified Sports
Video Club
Winter Guard
Winter Percussion Ensemble
Yearbook
Youth Development & Leadership (YDL)

**B. Pine Grove Clubs and Activities**

Anime/Manga Club
Art Club
Battle of the Books
Chess Club
Clay Club
Coaching Boys to Men
Culture Club
Drama Club
Fearless Queen's Princess Glow Up Program
Game Club
International Festival
iStaff
Jazz Band
Lego Club
Marching Band
Math Club
Prism Club
Science Olympiad/Lego Robotics League

Ski Club/Snow Boarding Club
Spartan Stage
Student Council
Technology Club
Winter Guard
Yearbook Club
YDL-Youth Development and Leadership

**C. East Syracuse Elementary Clubs and Activities**

All District Chorus/Band
Art Club
Banking at School
Cornell Cooperative Extension's SNAPPED Program For Healthy Living Strategies
Drama Club
First Lego League
Jump Rope for Heart
Kindergarten Helpers
McMahon Ryan Lessons for Bullying Prevention, Internet Safety and High Five Safety
Musical
NYS Mentoring Program
Rocket Club
Safety Patrol
Science Fair
Senior Citizens Program
St. Matt's Pantry Food Drive
Science Fair
Treblemakers
Video Announcement
Yearbook
Yoga
YDL - Youth Development & Leadership

**D. Fremont Elementary Clubs and Activities**

5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Mentors
All District Chorus
American Heart Association
Art Club
Battle of the Books
Book Buddies
Fremont Musical
Learning Fair
Lunch Bunch Cafe
Morning Announcements- Project Wisdom
PTO Dance Program

Robotics Club
Rocket Club
Safety Patrol
St. Matt's Pantry Food Drive
Treblemakers
WFRE TV
YDL - Youth Development & Leadership

**E. Minoa Elementary Clubs and Activities**

American Heart
Book Cooks
Bus Buddies
Drama Club
Flag Duty
Game Club
Jr. Crew
Learning Fair
Library Helpers
Maker Space
Morning Announcements & Pledge (daily book raffle)
Positivity Project
PTO Dance Program
Robotics
Safety Patrol
School Store
Student Council
Weekly Video Announcements Cast and Crew

**F. Woodland Elementary Clubs and Activities**

All District Chorus
American Heart
Art Club
Banking Board
Book Club
Drama Club
Learning Fair
Library Helpers
Morning Announcements
PTO Dance Program
School Store
STEAM Club

**V. Recommendations**

1. Annual review of district wide character education program and strategic plan.
2. The Character Education Plan will continue to align with the District's Strategic Plan.

3. School information officer to highlight character education projects in the ESM Bulletin, newspaper, television, and radio.
4. Continue to provide universal social and emotional lessons via Google Classrooms in the event that distance learning continues in the future.
5. Continue to foster positive relationships - connect students with trusted adults, build community in classrooms. Connect disconnected students, support new students.
6. Continue to provide opportunities for mentoring and role modeling. Provide more support at transition grades 5th to 6th and 8th to 9th.
7. Parent Communication and Involvement: provide more communication regarding resources available, more training for parents on Mental Health (MH), educate parents on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and MH resources, include parents in district planning meetings.
8. Continue to provide teacher training and modeling on MH/SEL.
9. Explore community partnerships to expand SEL and MH resources including more clinicians.