

## Colonel John Robinson Elementary School

Grades K–2, Public/Suburban • Westford, Massachusetts • Westford Public Schools

### Keeping the Peace through the Solution Wheel

A school visitor asks the group gathered around him, “What would you do if you were bullied at school?” One by one, the students thoughtfully posit a series of responses, such as ignoring the bully, walking away, telling the bully to stop, or telling an adult immediately. The maturity of the responses seems incredible, considering that the oldest speaker is just a second grader. Without a doubt, Peace-It-Together (PIT), a social competency/character education program at Colonel John Robinson, is a winner, as the little ones demonstrate grown-up problem-solving skills by using the Solution Wheel.

The Solution Wheel, which provides students with nine options to draw on when facing a difficult social situation, is just one strategy that the youngsters master in the social-emotional learning program of this innovative K–2 school, located just northwest of Boston. Unlike traditional primary schools with classes isolated from one another,

a sense of community seems to validate the staff’s theory.

The school’s home-grown program has had an unusual genesis, beginning about ten years ago on a teacher’s back porch as her colleagues shared their frustrations about losing academic time to disciplinary issues. The plan they drafted together, Peace-It-Together, provides the framework for the current program, which has been enhanced by research and additions from several packaged programs. To help in inculcating social skills, the staff has developed a formal and expanding collection of social competency units, and the library provides additional sources, such as literature for students as well as staff resource books.

The school’s motto, *At Robinson School We All CARE!*, emphasizes four core values: community, acceptance, responsibility, and excellence. In keeping with the tenets of the I-Care philosophy, stories that accent the importance of striving for excellence and fostering

acceptance have enriched the curriculum. The teachers assert that the accent on caring has improved behavior during recess time and fostered empathy through service projects, such as working with senior citizens. Parents are

regularly informed about the various programs via newsletters, parent workshops, and individual class notices.

Believing that “caring relationships are the cornerstone of our education system,” Arvidson and her staff have forged a connection, both literal and figurative, between Robinson and its

#### CHARACTER EDUCATION WORKS AT Robinson

- Significant decline in the number of disciplinary infractions recorded since the inception of Peace-It-Together
- Very positive feedback from parents on the social competency program in biennial School Advisory Council surveys
- Increase in the number of children recognized for abiding by the I-Care rules

**Denise G. Arvidson**, Principal

counterpart at the next level (Crisafulli Elementary School, grades 3–5). As a result of an Eagle Scout project, a trail through the woods links Robinson with Crisafulli School; future plans call for joint nature programs and snowshoe lessons as part of the physical education program.

Robinson students have accepted problem solving as a necessary tool for life. When one student learned that he had to leave Robinson School because of a family move to California, his first question revealed his priorities: “Will my new school have a Solution Wheel, or should I bring one with me?”

#### REFERENCE

Mades, M. *Helping, Not Hurting: Teaching the I-Care Rules Through Literature*. Miami, FL: Peace Education Foundation, 2002.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Robinson features a “unique open space environment in which two to three classes operate within a large suite.” Principal Denise Arvidson and her staff believe that “children learn to thrive within a setting that encompasses more than their individual class,” and the ease with which the students have demonstrated