

## Social Inclusion Initiative

NCS has a school culture that supports social inclusion.



In August 2013 NCS embarked on a program with Dr. Kim John Payne to implement his international work to build Social Inclusion Programs within school communities. What does Social Inclusion mean in practice for teachers, parents and students? To start, it means we acknowledge that struggle and conflict between people are inevitable in relationships and necessary for human growth and development. We believe that when conflict is guided instead of avoided, it allows maturation and development of the social-emotional intelligence of each child. Peace is not the absence of conflict. Conflict is the path to self-development. It means that we have realized that an attitude of blame-identify culprit-punish, only sends conflict underground and offers no opportunity for self or community-growth.

We choose instead an environment of accountability without blame. The primary goal is to improve the social health of the entire school community before any social crisis has occurred. Additionally it creates support systems to navigate social challenges when they arise. The strength of utilizing this program in our school is that it directly coincides with our pedagogical view of how children grow and develop, their needs and capacities at each stage, and the curriculum we present accordingly.



Practicalities of the work: we create the foundation and set the stage for optimal success of each child and class. To do this we create a school/classroom environment that is calm, consistent and predictable and we ask families to foster this at home. This involves implementing routines and rhythm, balancing “stimulating” activities/days with “calming” activities/days. We practice politeness and courtesy as a base for developing empathy, impulse control and perspective taking (understanding other points of view).

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We set high standards, and insist on a school culture of respect. Teachers work tirelessly to instill these values via the curriculum (stories), activities (plays, outdoor education), and as a common understanding with the parents. They continuously work in an implicit manner with the group as a whole.

As a faculty we have created a Student Support Team to lend support to teachers and students struggling to find their way. There are four members of this group: Director, Chair of the Social Inclusion Committee, Chair of the Discipline/Guidance Committee and the Chair of the Learning Support/Care Committee. When things go awry and conflict occurs there are tools and explicit support. These guide students through a process in a manner that provides an opportunity for growth and restoration of the situation. While the Social Inclusion tool varies depending on the situation, it always involves 3 primary parts:

Accountability – students assume responsibility for their actions and acknowledge the impact on others.  
No Blame – blame inhibits learning and growth and dissuades students from actively participating in examining their behavior.

Making Things Right – this step requires the student's willingness to restore a relationship with another. It necessitates more than a simple apology but instead, a genuine gesture and commitment of retribution and future actions.

### **Some of the tools used are:**

DADD (Disapprove, Affirm, Discover, Do-over) – This strategy can be used to redirect unwanted behavior and social interactions.

Crossing the Line Exercise – this exercise is presented to the students as: “Joking around crosses the line and becomes teasing when....” – this creates common language, understanding and agreements among the students and adults.

Support Circle Meeting – a meeting between the adults to determine level of support a student might need.

As a community we must begin to recognize that social and emotional learning is a prerequisite for academic success, and provide an environment and structure where students can learn constructive responses to social conflict. The beauty of the Program is that it calls upon each of us to look within and rise to a new level of compassion and understanding. Like a candle lit in the darkness, each positively guided conflict will cast a glow over the entire community.