

Miller Place

UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

CHARACTER EDUCATION SUPPORTS MILLER PLACE STUDENTS OF ALL AGES

Across Miller Place, Long Island and the country, children, adolescents, and young adults are faced with challenges previous generations have never encountered. For this reason, the Miller Place School District has proactively implemented diverse character education programs, experiences, and services to support their Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and emotional intelligence.

Character Education is a vital and integral part of every student's education. A successful character education program is embedded within our daily curriculum and instruction; arts, athletics and music programs; and extra-curricular activities. As early as kindergarten, students are taught lessons in the importance of respecting their peers, adults and their own bodies. Over the course of 13 years, Miller Place students are provided with comprehensive, ongoing character education programming. Guest speakers, student assemblies, and parent forums are a few examples of programs offered, but to truly impact a student's character, these principles need to be integrated into daily instruction and learning experiences.



The Board of Education and administration have developed this newsletter to highlight the information, resources and insight through which the District supports students in the traditional classroom setting and beyond. From their first days at Andrew Muller Primary School through graduation from Miller Place High School, students experience integrated programming that encompasses character education, responsibility, decision making, and much more to support them as they learn, grow and advance toward adulthood. Social-Emotional Learning is also supported through extra-curricular involvement, and through individual and group mentoring experiences for students of all ages to succeed.

The various programs and services the District provides are age-appropriate and specifically targeted. These opportunities are listed in more detail inside this newsletter. Additional intensive support is guided by counselors and school psychologists for students as appropriate; students coping with tragedy, personal crisis, disciplinary problems or mental illness are provided with the necessary support to help them stay safe, healthy and focused on the future.

We hope that you read through this newsletter to learn more about how the District supports all students in addition to the many resources readily available at our schools and throughout our community. The home-school connection, the partnership between educators and parents, is vital to our shared successes.

ANDREW MULLER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Be Safe, Be Happy, Learn A Lot

At Andrew Muller Primary School (AMPS), students are provided with early opportunities for character education, including lessons specific to character education every month that are integrated into curriculum. Lessons are based on **Character Counts** themes and incorporate the “**Too Good for Violence**” curriculum. At AMPS, these lessons are focused on helping students understand how to become better friends and citizens, make kind choices, and visually and verbally recognize the feelings of others while responding appropriately. For character education to successfully instill core principles in Miller Place students, it needs to start as part of the District’s early education and stay consistent.

Specific programs are designed to reinforce positive character education. This starts in every classroom, as class rules on the first day of school are discussed, a class **Constitution** is drafted; students discuss how to be a good friend by being a **Bucketfiller**, teaching students to express how they would like to be treated and how they should treat others; and rules are enforced to provide early boundaries and proper behavior during school. New students to the District are supported as they become part of the community through the **Newcomers Group**, helping new students learn about their peers and make new friends. A behavior counselor is also available during lunch and recess to coach students and mediate social situations. **Buddy Benches** are in place on both playgrounds for students to go if they can’t find someone to play with, and students learn strategies to approach a peer sitting on the bench. Character Education assemblies are held regularly throughout the year, promoting **personal responsibility**, teaching **anti-bullying**, and building a positive school community. Likewise, the walls across the building promote **tolerance and diversity**; people of diverse backgrounds are depicted on posters, hallways are named after pro-social qualities, and diverse customs are made into hands-on occasions with holiday celebrations from around the world. Targeted after-school programs, including **Friends to Friends**, gives students a chance to interact with peer mentors. **Pin Pals** is offered twice a week to support the acquisition of social skills for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and students of divorced families are provided with the **Banana Splits** program.

Fundraising and charity initiatives are organized as well, notably the annual **Thanksgiving Food Drive** and **Giving Tree Drive**, donating gifts to children and families less fortunate during the holidays. Other fundraisers are organized to benefit members of the community experiencing medical hardships or to raise money for specific medical causes, including **Whip Pediatric Cancer** and **Autism Awareness**. Professional development is also provided for educators to ensure they are tuned into students’ mental health and support pro-social skills. Additional programs and services are available for students as needed. Individual and group counseling is provided by trained staff and individual positive behavior supports are provided for students in need.

THE GREAT BODY SHOP

Weekly lessons are part of the health curriculum on making safe, healthy choices. Other health and hygiene education, including dental hygiene, are part of the curriculum for students at AMPS.



MONTHLY CHARACTER EDUCATION LUNCH

Every month, each class recognizes a few students who exemplify strong character education principles. These students are awarded with a special lunch with Principal Laura Gewurz! This early positive reinforcement is intended to bring the school community together, build trust and inspire students to think about character in everything they do.

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY AND KINDNESS PROGRAM

This month-long initiative promotes the importance of student safety while riding the bus. Bus drivers rate student behavior for a month and report back to the school. A visual graph is constructed and students earn rewards based on good behavior.

LADDIE A. DECKER SOUND BEACH SCHOOL

Every Student Matters...Every Moment Counts

At Laddie A. Decker Sound Beach School (LADSBS), it is vital to reinforce the early character education principles students learned at AMPS while bridging the gap between childhood and adolescence through more age-appropriate opportunities. For one, the **School Climate Survey**—a computer-based survey administered in the fall and spring to all students—ensures all LADSBS students can share their feelings about school safety, bullying and any areas of concern privately. **Character Education Assemblies** that promote personal responsibility, anti-bullying and building a positive school community are organized for students school-wide.



Start with Hello Week is a week-long initiative put forth by the Sandy Hook Promise Organization to combat isolation and promote an inclusive school community using positive affirmations and activities. It starts with simply saying “hello” to another student and opening up to new friends. **Everyone Counts Day** asks students and staff to wear shirts with numbers as a reminder that everyone is important at LADSBS. **Great Body Shop** health curriculum continues building-wide at LADSBS as well, promoting healthy decision making. **Mix It Up Lunch Activities**, inspired by a national campaign launched by Teaching Tolerance, encourages students to identify and question cross-social boundaries through fun and engaging activities during lunch. Similarly, **Newcomers Lunches** are organized to introduce students new to the school community to their peers, learn more about them, and encourage them to make friends with other students. These new initiatives are integrated with monthly character education lessons. **The P.E.A.C.E. Team** also assists and advises Mrs. Arancio on character-related activities and classroom lessons taking place throughout the school year, encouraging students to work collaboratively and generate their own ideas for making LADSBS a safer, friendlier place. **Give Back Day**, a **Service Club** initiative, encourages students to recognize and honor the heroes in the community, and **Clean-Up Day** invites students to participate in a spring beautification program.

Students are also encouraged to think bigger for schoolwide charitable drives. While there are of course the annual **Thanksgiving Food Drive** and **Angel Tree Drive** like at AMPS, the **Heifer Project**, for example, encourages students to collect money to purchase livestock for families in different countries. Other fundraising at LADSBS includes JDRF, Pennies for Patients, St. Charles HUGS Program, St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital, Pediatric Cancer, Autism Awareness, and food/gift collections for local families.

ATHLETES HELPING ATHLETES

This collaborative mentoring program with MPHS athletes gives an opportunity for students in fifth grade to work with high school athletes and promote positive choices.



SCHOOL BUS SAFETY PROGRAM

This program is presented to all students during P.E. classes and emphasizes the importance of student safety while riding the bus. Students are given bus slips on which they can report any concerns or problems that may arise on the bus. The slips not only allow students the ability to report concerning behaviors; on the reverse side of the slip, students can positively nominate their bus for Bus of the Month.

HOMEWORK BUDDIES

The Homework Buddies program brings MPHS National Honor Society and Service Club members to LADSBS at the end of the school day to aid students with academics and homework. The high school students also teach effective study skills and habits to the students at LADSBS.

NORTH COUNTRY ROAD MIDDLE SCHOOL

Preparing Students for the Challenges of Tomorrow

At North Country Road Middle School (NCRMS) students are no longer children, but adolescents. Their attitudes and priorities are shifting, and it is incumbent upon educators to keep students engaged through proactive and integrated character education opportunities. **The Positivity Challenge**, for instance, is a month-long project during which faculty members nominate students that positively impact the classroom environment. **The Bad Case of Stripes** skit, based on the story by David Shannon, gives students a lens into someone insecure about who they are and the temptation to change in order to fit in; it's not just about being confident in your own skin, but also accepting all people for who they are.

Assemblies and other programs are organized throughout the year, making character education a daily part of life at NCRMS. On the first day of school, all students meet with their teachers to discuss expectations for the year, including a review of the District's **Code of Conduct**, with an emphasis on the Dignity for All Students Act, in addition to attendance and eligibility policies. With this strong support system in place on day one, students are given the opportunity to ask questions and get comfortable as members of the school community. The **Friend to Friend** program, in cooperation with the **North Shore Youth Council**, is a mentoring opportunity for students from MPHS and NCRMS that provides a platform for middle school students to become mentors for students at LADSBS as well. In home and careers classes, students learn about personal empowerment to prevent bullying in the school community. Officer George Lynagh visits NCRMS, in addition to AMPS and LADSBS, to give age-appropriate presentations; students learn about the impact drugs and alcohol have on our community, including the dangers of gateway drugs, over the counter and prescription medication, and the heroin/opiate epidemic. This event is part of our partnership with the **Suffolk County Police Department** and the implementation of **PoliceSmart**, a program that provides education to local schools about pressing issues in our community.

Charity work is abundant across NCRMS, and programs are integrated with character education to provide added opportunities for learning. **Ride For Life** has been a strong partner: Chris Pendergast visits the school each year to speak about his battle with A.L.S. With the assistance of Michael Dinowitz, the campaign manager for Ride for Life, Mr. Pendergast speaks of his mission to find a cure for the disease that has affected him for the last decade. Along with the **Whip Pediatric Cancer** initiative, Ride for Life teaches students about the people behind the causes and inspires them to get involved, however small, to make a difference.

LION'S QUEST

The North Country Road Middle School has joined schools across the nation by adopting a program titled *Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence*.



This program is a comprehensive life skills and prevention program that helps middle school youth, parents and teachers cope with the physical, emotional and social challenges of early adolescent years. The program focuses on important competencies including positive social attitudes; respect; responsible decision making; and prevention of negative behaviors, including violence, drugs and alcohol. The program is integrated during Language Arts, Physical Education, Health and Family/Consumer Science classes, but the goal is that positive outcomes permeate beyond the classroom into every aspect of the NCRMS school climate.

PROJECT WISDOM

On a daily basis, Principal Matthew Clark relays a thought-provoking message via the PA system to students and staff. The Project Wisdom Program stresses that true success is rooted in respectful, responsible and caring behaviors. These inspirational messages shared on a daily basis encourage reflection on the part of the students and have a direct impact on positive character development.

STEPHEN HILL – SPEAK SOBRIETY

Stephen Hill gives a heartfelt presentation about his personal struggles with substance abuse, highlighting the benefits of living a clean and sober life today. With a remarkable ability to relate his story to the students in the audience, Mr. Hill acknowledges the everyday pressures and temptations that middle school, high school and college students are faced with, offering guidance to successfully overcome these challenges. Gateway drugs, decision making under the influence, criminal records, stigma, peer pressure, bullying, anxiety and depression are among some of the topics discussed throughout the presentation, and there's always time to field questions, as keeping an open line of communication with young people is vital.

MILLER PLACE HIGH SCHOOL

Excellence and Beyond

At Miller Place High School, students are approaching graduation and adulthood. While undoubtedly they are young people still in need of guidance, direction and support,



they are also unquestionably more independent and faced with new challenges. The character education initiatives at AMPS, LADSBS and NCRMS have instilled in them the virtues and values vital to be a responsible citizen in our ever-changing society. There is still much more for them to experience and learn in high school and beyond, however, as they mature into the next generation of leaders.

The Body Project is an evidence-based program organized by the National Eating Disorders Association that promotes positive and healthy body image while educating about many eating disorders. Similarly, **Project Success**, a school-based substance abuse prevention and early intervention program, uses effective interventions to reduce risk factors, substance use and substance abuse. And **The Save-A-Life Program**—a comprehensive safe driving awareness program for MPHS students—informs, educates, and demonstrates the potentially deadly consequences resulting from poor choices and destructive decisions made by the operator of a motor vehicle. The program specifically places emphasis on distracted and impaired driving, improper driver behavior and seat belt usage.

Initiatives like **Mental Health Awareness Week** make it a schoolwide effort to promote a positive learning environment that supports all students as individuals and teaches students how to tackle complex challenges through assemblies, presentations and a poster contest. The **Positivity Challenge**, like at NCRMS, recognizes students for their positive disposition and character. **Natural Helpers** holds pledge and ribbon campaigns to raise awareness and promote positive mental health. The “**How to Help a Friend**” panel discussion, presented by our student assistance counselors, coordinates a panel of students to meet with small groups to discuss the importance of mental health; the corresponding “How to Help a Friend” presentation dives into various aspects of mental health, giving young people the knowledge and resources to support their peers who might be in crisis.

Extracurricular clubs and activities are extremely important. They allow students to make their own choices and invest their time and energy in specific issues and causes. At MPHS, students have access to organizations that make an impact in their community through charity drives and educational/awareness initiatives. **The Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA)** holds bi-monthly after-school meetings to provide

NATURAL HELPERS

Natural Helpers meet in small, bi-weekly groups for skill building and learning opportunities regarding relevant issues including eating disorders, depression, self-harm and the dangers of drugs and alcohol. A 13-hour training is organized at Camp de Wolfe in Wading River for a total of 30 students and three staff members. The group also organizes a **high school to college transition workshop**, at which MPHS Natural Helpers alumni meet with current MPHS seniors to discuss the transition to college life.

OUTSTANDING ACTS OF KINDNESS AND OUTSTANDING ACADEMIC RECOGNITION (OAK AND OAR AWARDS)

OAK Award: Students are recognized, or “caught,” in the act of being great. Through selfless behaviors, they help someone in need with no expectation of material return and demonstrate the sense of spirit we hope to achieve in our school community.

OAR Award: Students who have risen to the educational challenges presented to them are recognized for meeting their long-term goals or exhibiting unbelievable improvement.

support and promote tolerance. GSA projects to date include **National Coming Out Day**, a gender awareness bulletin board campaign, and LIGALY presentations.

In the last year, the **Service Club** at MPHS supported **Dig Pink**; donated time and funds to support the Student Government’s **Safe Halloween** and multiple **PTO events**; organized and donated for multiple food drives; and collected various items for **Brookhaven Interface**, the **Seeing Eye Dog Foundation** and **Rotary International**, in addition to cellphones for soldiers and clothing for local churches. Students also held a baking competition to benefit a charity of their choice and supported **Wear Red Day** (American Heart Association) and **Red Nose Day** (preventing childhood poverty). The club also made 24 holiday cookie tins for residents at a local veterans’ home, created almost **1,000 Positivity Packets for Mental Health Awareness Week**, made goodie bags for our varsity playoff teams, and volunteered countless hours as **Homework Buddies** to support students at LADSBS.

Miller Place Union Free School District

7 Memorial Drive, Miller Place, NY 11764

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COMMUNITY RESOURCES

*Besides all the programs and services taking place throughout the District,
there are multiple community resources that provide help, support and guidance:*

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Afsp.org

516-869-4215

The AFSP is the leading national nonprofit dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide, in addition to reaching out to people with mental illness and those impacted by suicide.

Long Island Crisis Center

Longislandcrisiscenter.org

516-679-1111

The Long Island Crisis Center provides 24/7 free, high-quality, non-judgmental and confidential support and empowerment at critical times of crisis.

Mather Hospital

Matherhospital.org

631-476-2775

Mather provides inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services for people of all ages. It is the only acute care hospital in Suffolk with an adolescent psychiatric unit and partial hospitalization program.

Mobile Crisis Unit

631-952-3333

Team members are available to make home/community visits to assess situations, provide short-term therapy and make referrals or arrangements for hospitalization. Workers remain assigned to cases until the individual has been connected to an appropriate agency or service.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Suicidepreventionlifeline.org

800-273-8255

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a network of local crisis centers providing free and confidential emotional support to people in distress, 24/7.

North Shore Youth Council

Nsyc.com

631-744-0207

The North Shore Youth Council is a prevention model dedicated to helping families and young people through anti-violence, anti-drug and alcohol-free projects.

Response of Suffolk County

Responsehotline.org

631-751-7500

Response of Suffolk's mission is to provide unconditional support, compassion and respect for callers in crisis. By helping callers cope, Response seeks to prevent self-destructive behaviors.

South Oaks

South-oaks.org

631-608-5610

The South Oaks Child and Adolescent Center of Excellence is an experienced facility that treats a mix of behavioral, emotional and substance abuse problems.

Stony Brook Hospital CPEP

Stonybrookmedicine.edu/patientcare/cpep

631-444-6050

This psychiatric emergency program provides emergency services to people in urgent need of psychiatric evaluation 24/7.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

SEL is the process that children and adults alike used to effectively learn, internalize and apply the attitudes, knowledge and skills vital to:

- Understand and Manage emotions
- Set and Achieve positive goals
- Feeling and Show empathy for others
- Establish and Maintain positive relationships
- Make responsible decisions

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others, comprising three skills:

- Emotional awareness
- The ability to harness emotions and apply them to solve problems
- The ability to regulate personal emotions and influence the emotions of others