



Resilient Identity

By **Rebecca Heller**, Director of Wellness, Grades TK-12

STEP ONTO THE PRIMARY OR LOWER SCHOOL and you can feel the joy all around you. Watching our young students engaged in the classroom, being guided by outstanding teachers, creating beautiful works of art, singing and making music, coding and solving problems, letting out energy and learning new skills on the field or in the gym, making friends in the classroom and during recess, or eating nutritious meals from Helfand’s Harvest, it is no coincidence that happy and healthy kids make good students. Evidence-based research out of the field of positive psychology shows more and more the role that positive well-being plays in all aspects of our lives. At Viewpoint, we want to ensure that our student’s social, emotional, and physical health are all cared for.

One of the major goals of our wellness initiative is to connect our programming from TK through Twelfth Grade. One of the themes we are exploring with all ages is emotional intelligence. As anyone who has been around young children knows, children experience BIG emotions. Children tend to feel more intensely as they are exposed to new situations that they haven’t had the opportunity to navigate before. One of the lessons that we have been working on with Primary and Lower School students is talking about how all feelings are valid—we are allowed to feel all the feelings, that is part of being human—but then what do we do with them? Teaching the

students skills like “name it to tame it,” based on the work of Dr. Dan Siegel, is the idea that if we name the feeling we can already begin to relax our nervous system. First, we talk about naming the feeling accurately, “am I mad or am I frustrated” and what is the difference? The technique of naming our emotions to regulate our nervous system has a solid foundation in neuroscience. By bringing the emotions out of our amygdala, the “barking dog” of the brain that goes into alert when we are feeling those big feelings, into the prefrontal cortex, or our “wise old owl,” our systems can already begin to relax. Knowing that a feeling is only temporary also allows us to move on more quickly. At a follow-up lesson on mindfulness, we talk with students about how we can use the superpower of breath to calm minds and bodies when those BIG feelings occur. Additionally, practicing yoga with students during their physical education class introduces students to an activity that connects mind and body. If we can keep our mind and breath calm in a hard asana (yoga pose), then we can potentially take this practice off the mat when we experience other hard things. These lessons spiral up into the Middle and Upper School where we encourage students to feel, think, and then act. Exploring feelings and emotions with our youngest students sets them up for emotional intelligence into their older years, helps them cope with the BIG feelings, and creates resilient identities.

