

Application deadline: April 21, 2025

Applicant's name: Lynn Hartzell

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Number of years in education: 25 years

Grade or subject taught: 5th Grade

School: Warwick Elementary School

School Address: 1340 Almshouse Road, Jamison, PA 18914

Principal's name: Brian Finger

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Social Emotional Wellness in the Classroom

Each year, regardless of grade level, we initiate the school year with a thorough exploration of Social Emotional Wellness. This foundational work, paired with the structured Second Step Lessons, involves reading a selection of picture books and engaging in lessons that foster and strengthen our classroom community. By starting each day with positive affirmations and holding daily morning meetings, students feel a sense of connection while embracing our unique differences. Establishing a classroom culture where students feel safe, valued, included, and heard is essential before we delve into academic subjects.

Community Building Activities

Our community building activities include various hands-on experiences with different partnerships and groups. To enhance these activities, we occasionally introduce challenges, such as having one group member refrain from talking or using only one hand. Our differences can be transformed into strengths, especially when students who speak multiple languages support newcomers across grade levels. Throughout the year, we consistently emphasize the importance of learning from mistakes and celebrating our individual differences.

While it is important to read books and conduct community-building lessons, the key lies in demonstrating to students that we are trusted adults who care about their emotional and physical safety. When students genuinely feel this support, they are empowered to share their concerns, worries, and questions. They learn to distinguish between tattling and

reporting, understanding that if someone can't fix a situation in thirty-seconds or less, it shouldn't be said to them or about them. Moreover, if we wouldn't feel comfortable discussing a situation with a victim's parent or guardian, we should reconsider our actions. Although even adults are continually learning this lesson, it is vital that our actions and words remain positive, and that we take a moment to think before we act or react.

Active Listening and Support

It is crucial for all students to understand that as trusted adults, we are not only listening but will also intervene when necessary. Students need to know that teachers can guide them through challenging situations and provide mediation when needed, at times involving other staff members for additional support. Conversations should explore the antecedents of issues and how we can move forward positively from each unique situation. During these discussions, we also consider how each person felt or how they might have felt based on the circumstances, which invites others to better understand perspective. Quick follow-ups with students demonstrate that we remember and care.

Weekly Check-Ins

Understanding that not all students feel comfortable expressing their voices, we implement weekly check-ins that feature open-ended questions. Students have the autonomy to choose which questions they wish to answer and can recognize a peer or adult for exemplary contributions. These positive acknowledgments are called “Shout-Outs” and are shared not only within our classroom but also with the classroom of the student or adult being recognized. This simple yet impactful practice empowers students to notice and appreciate the positive events occurring around them every day. We emphasize “The Ripple Effect” of these positive recognitions, encouraging students to actively seek out the positive qualities in others while also acknowledging how these actions impact and influence the wider community.

Additionally, on the weekly check-ins, students are encouraged to share their concerns—whether academic, social, or personal—creating opportunities for meaningful, private conversations with their teacher. Having a voice allows students to go from feeling powerless to powerful. When students understand that their physical and emotional safety is a priority, they are more inclined to share openly and learn how to promote a safe environment for themselves and their peers.

Digital Footprint Safety

In our classroom, we also recognize that all students have laptops, and many also use phones, smartwatches, and gaming systems. We prioritize discussions about digital footprints, emphasizing the importance of making responsible choices regarding our

devices both in and out of school. This responsibility extends to our communication with others, the content we search for or share, our online interactions, and the potential impact of our actions on those around us. To empower students, we provide clear steps to follow when they encounter any issues online. It is crucial for them to communicate with a trusted adult about any situation that arises. Additionally, to bolster our commitment to online safety, NOVA comes to the classroom to deliver an informative lesson on this important topic.

Recommended Picture Books

- **The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi:** Unhei, a new student, asks her classmates to create a name for her instead of sharing her own. As she explores different names, she realizes the significance of her own. This multicultural story emphasizes the importance of names.
- **Those Shoes by Maribeth Boelts:** Jeremy desires the trendy shoes that everyone wears, but his grandma emphasizes needs over wants. After his shoes fall apart, he becomes determined to find them, even if it means settling for a pair that's too small. This book is excellent for discussing wants versus needs and developing empathy.
- **Duck! Rabbit! by Amy Krouse Rosenthal:** This book illustrates the importance of perspective, encouraging discussions on how to see things from another's viewpoint, especially when disagreements arise.
- **The Book of Mistakes by Corinna Luyken:** This book highlights how mistakes can lead to creativity and inspiration. It is perfect for encouraging a growth mindset at the beginning of the school year or addressing frustration during projects.
- **What Were You Thinking? A Story About Learning to Control Your Impulses by Bryan Smith:** Focusing on impulse control and friendship, this story shows how Braden learns to manage his impulses after a poor decision hurts a classmate.
- **After the Fall by Dan Santat:** This tale follows Humpty Dumpty after his fall, exploring the challenges of recovery—both physical and emotional. It's ideal for discussions on resilience.
- **Grow Happy by Jon Lasser, PhD:** Kiko illustrates that happiness can be cultivated, emphasizing social support, good choices, and problem-solving as tools for nurturing happiness.

- **Brave Every Day by Trudy Ludwig:** Camila and Kai, both nervous about a field trip, find support in each other. This story is perfect for discussing new experiences and differing emotional expressions.
- **The Invisible Boy by Patrice Barton:** Brian feels invisible until a new student, Justin, includes him in a project, showing how inclusion can change lives.
- **Miles McHale Tattletale by Christianne Jones:** Miles learns the difference between tattling and reporting through a classroom game, gaining insight into when it's appropriate to speak up.
- **Your Fantastic and Elastic Brain by JoAnn Deak, PhD:** This book teaches children about growth mindset, emphasizing the value of mistakes and new challenges in learning.
- **Mr. Peabody's Apples by Madonna:** This story illustrates the harm caused by rumors and highlights the importance of truth and the power of words.
- **Out of My Mind by Sharon Draper:** This narrative offers insight into the life of a girl with cerebral palsy, emphasizing her desire for acceptance and inclusion in her peers' activities. It's essential reading for understanding diverse abilities in the classroom.

Evidence:

[Empathy Over Apathy](#) Video (student interviews)

Parent Feedback (attached as PDF)