

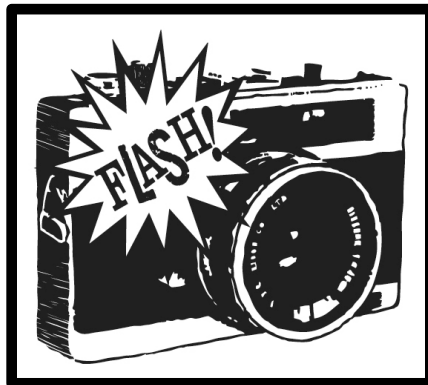


East Side Community  
High School  
Manhattan, NY



# [Snapshot]

**Author:** Matthew Guldin, Retired teacher & dean, 2014



- ESCHS is a 6th -12th grade public school located in Manhattan's East Village neighborhood. While it pulls students from all of Manhattan and a few from the outer boroughs, the majority of its students come from the neighboring community of the Lower East Side.
- Enrollment - @ 550 students, broken in to 2 schools: the 6<sup>th</sup> thru 8<sup>th</sup> grade Middle School and the 9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> High School
- Demographics - 60% Latino/a, 30% African American, 8% Asian American and 2% European American.
- Poverty level - 73% Title I eligible, 22% reduced price eligible
- Faculty - 50
- Administration - 1 principal, 2 assistant principals, 1Dean, 2 Guidance Counselors, 2 Social Workers

# [Testimonial]

**Author:** Matthew Guldin



## **Changing School Culture at East Side Community H.S.: The Need Arises**

The idea/need for the Campaign came out of a distinct rise in the level of disrespectful behavior being exhibited by students to each other and to staff. Teachers implored me to “do something about it”. I took this as a cue to put together all my accumulated knowledge about how to work with young people and adults and began to develop a plan to ensure that everyone got what they all said that they wanted: respect.

The underlying philosophy of the 100% RESPECT! Campaign is that everyone, regardless of age, class, gender, color, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. is equal and does, in fact, deserve 100% respect. It acknowledges, also, that we are all different, and that in the school community we each fulfill certain roles, eg, student, teacher, para - educator, principal, etc.

The second pillar upon which the Campaign rests is that of interactivity. Since we are all very different people, coming together to do a common purpose, (public school in the U.S.) and each of us brings in our (to some degree, at least) differing world views, there is a great need for constant communication between all members of the school community. If we don't communicate with each other how will we really know what the other is thinking or feeling? If we don't talk to each other, we will be left to assume where the other person is coming from. .. and, you know where assuming gets us?!!

In order to bridge all the gaps/divides/different life experiences, that the above social differences put before us, I needed to create structures and activities that would include all members of the school community in the development of what respectful behavior meant to them. That would give us a common language and

goals. I also needed to develop ways that we could hold each other accountable for any violations of the agreements we had collectively defined.

Developing and implementing the 100% RESPECT! Campaign at ESCHS, took place over the course of 4 years, (2006 - 2009). As I was the fulltime Dean of Students, the development of this program was done step by step after school, on weekends, during the summers, etc. Implementation of one piece of the Campaign was undertaken each term as they built one upon the other. During those 4 years, suspensions fell nearly 50%. The tone of the high school as well as the middle school improved significantly over that time, as the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders moved up to the 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

### **Organizing Staff and Students**

But, before we could implement anything, I had to get buy in from the staff and students. To do this, I decided that the RESPECT! Campaign should target the Middle School where the greatest amount of misbehavior was occurring. This would allow us to focus on attempting to transform culture in a discrete half the school rather than try to do all grades at once.

Organizing the staff entailed having many conversations with middle school teachers during which I laid out the basic elements of the Campaign. Most were immediately receptive either due to their agreement with the philosophical/pedagogical approach of the program or because they were desperate to have the situation improve. A few were skeptical of the possibility that a positive discipline program could really work. Others were reticent about the prospect of having to do some critical self reflection during the process. In the end, there were enough teachers actively in favor that we were able to decide to give it a try. With the backing of the M.S. teachers, I asked my principal for a thumbs up. Given our rising suspension rate, which was getting in the way of our burgeoning literacy and college bound focus, he was very open.....as long as I got all of my deaning done first!

As for the students, I reached out to a few student leaders, official and unofficial. This means that some were of the 'goody - goody' type and others were straight off my suspension list. I asked them if they wanted to be leaders in a program that would work to insure that they and everyone else in the building would get 100% RESPECT! I let them know that to really do this, they would have to hold up their end and act as role models giving respect at all times. With their agreement, I outlined the Campaign to them and we set out to visit every advisory class on grades 7 - 9.

Advisors gave us gave us 10 - 15 minutes and in that time we (I travelled with a rotating pair of my student leaders) explained the broad points of how we'd like

to change East Side and asked them to discuss our proposal. If they liked it, they were to choose a 'RESPECT! Rep' who would represent them as they joined us in our efforts. Importantly, I led the initial advisory discussions and then the student leaders took control of the advisory dialogues and I stepped back.

## **Successes**

One instance of the No Excuses Mediation format working well involved a 7th grade female student and a female teacher who were always butting heads/engaging in a power struggle in front of the class. After the instructor wrote the young lady up 3x and kicked her out of class once, I asked if they would like to do a NoXQZz mediation. They both agreed and I worked with each one separately to get down to what was going on within each of them, how it was manifested in class and what they could do differently. When they got together, each, (with some coaching!) was able to admit to what factors were triggering them.

In brief, our 13 year old was in a power struggle with her mother at home and any form of order giving by her teacher set her off. Similarly, the teacher, having been raised in a culture where children were expected to 'do as they were told', could not tolerate any defiance and always met such defiance with a great show of force. With this all on the table, they both were able to apologize to each other and make agreements which would avoid each other's triggers in the future. The next time class met, they told jointly of their successful mediation. This let the class know that neither had 'won'; but that they had both won through the hard work of self - reflection and compromise.

Another example that showed the efficacy of having and using the 100% RESPECT! Guidelines occurred in a 9<sup>th</sup> grade history class. Here, a young man, for a variety of reasons, was resting his head on the desk. This clearly annoyed his teacher and a few times she went over and either woke him up or reminded him that such behavior was violating RESPECT! Guideline # 3 of the Student to Teacher list. Unfortunately, a few minutes later, the teen had his head on the desk again. The instructor, frustrated, blew up and ordered him to leave the classroom and go to the Asst. Principal's office. Now on the spot and being called out in front of the whole class, the young man responded with a string of curses and stomped out of the room.

Later in the day, a student in the class who was a RESPECT! Rep, came and told me about the incident. She asked me to "do something about it", as both people had clearly been in the wrong. I encouraged her to bring the issue up to both the teacher and the student and suggest that they do a mediation with me. Since confronting her teacher was more than she felt ready to do, we compromised and decided that I'd go with her for support when she spoke to her teacher. During

that conversation, our RESPECT! Rep explained how humiliated the male student felt and that she and others in the class felt that Teacher - Student RESPECT! Guideline # 9 had been violated.

Ms. X, who was a strong supporter of the Campaign, quickly understood the error she had made and offered to mediate with her student, which we did the next day. After a successful dialogue both student and teacher were able to stand before the class later in the day to apologize for their causing the class to lose learning time. Importantly, Ms. X, took responsibility for making it in to a public scene by losing her temper when her private entreaties failed. Once again, adult and teen adversaries had worked through a typical classroom misunderstanding. And, with mutually agreed upon behavioral norms as their guide, were able to grow as individuals and teach others through their mistakes!

### **Goals Not Met/Lessons Learned**

The main 'failure' of the 100% RESPECT! Campaign was that it was not continued and expanded after I left East Side. Upon my retirement, with suspensions greatly curtailed and the focus back squarely on academic learning, a new Dean was hired. He, of course, wanted to do his own behavior management program and the school leadership went with that. While the new program never really caught on and the tone of the school slipped back some, East Side's still in very good shape culture wise. But, while the slogans are still on the walls, the structures and activities which embedded the Campaign in the school's daily life are no longer being used. New cohorts of students who enter ESCHS in either the 6<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade don't get introduced to the Guidelines and taught the communication and de - escalation skills as we previously had done. New teachers' orientation upon joining the staff are not focused on communicating better with their students and respecting them to the max. It remains to be seen how long term the positive effects of this social - emotional learning program will be. Such a program must transcend the individual(s) who put it into play; it must be embedded into the very life blood of the school.

The lessons that I learned from developing and implementing the 100% RESPECT! Campaign at ESCHS are many. The major understandings that I have/will take with me to the next schools I work with on transforming school culture are noted below.

- To truly change a school's culture the commitment to doing the work must be deep, broad based and built for the long term. Most importantly, the school's principal and leadership team must be firmly committed to a process which will take at least 4 years (one high school cohort) to put firmly in place. Uprooting cultural norms which have been in place at a school for decades and replacing them with new ones which force people to

move past their comfort zones and relate to each other as equals, is no easy task.

- A school leader will get much ‘push back’ from her/his staff. They must be ready to meet the challenges with clear, reasoned replies and the specifics of alternative practices. They must be able to explain to their staffs that the changes they’re being asked to make are really aspects of their professional development. The faculty and support staff must understand, and work to internalize, that learning new cultural norms will help them in teaching their academic content, clearing the halls, calming the cafeteria, curtailing bullying and more. The list of possible, positive changed behaviors is long. All adults in the building must be willing to do the hard work to get it done. Ultimately, the principal must have the backbone to tell repeatedly resistant/obstructionist staff members that they ‘are free to transfer at the end of the term’. Everyone must be part of this effort because changing an institution’s cultural standards is impossible to do with less than a maximum effort.
- In order to implement such a broad based and school wide shift in relationship patterns, a school must have a staff person designated as their ‘Restorative Justice Coordinator’. The position can/should be funded by the local school district or the state. The R&J Coordinator can be someone chose in house or contracted from the outside. They must possess strong organizational skills, be a good teacher/trainer and be able to relate well with staff, parents and students. Importantly, they must not be saddled with other work assignments: coordinating all that is needed to be done to transform a school’s culture is a full time job.
- Finally, parental support and participation must be gotten as early on in the process as is possible. At ESCHS, once we got the Campaign going, I introduced it to the Parent Association’s Executive Board. They loved it and saw it as something they could use at home to help improve communication with and amongst their kids. I then led a series of Saturday workshops for P.A. members which garnered more parental support. If you have the luxury of advanced planning for a school transformation pilot project, it would be best to get the parents on board from the outset.

In sum, to successfully implement a Positive Discipline/Restorative Justice program in your school, my experience tells me that it must:

1. Be done school wide
2. Have strong visionary leadership
3. Include students, parents, school staff and leadership in on the planning and implementation of the program.

4. Employ a separate RJ coordinator to work with all sectors in the school and organize every aspect of the effort.
5. Challenge everyone to change existing relationship patterns: This is social/emotional learning for students; it's professional development for adults.
6. Be understood to take years to put fully in to place.

## [Tools]





## **The No Excuses Mediation (NO XQZz)**

This is one of our most effective restorative practices: The No Excuses Mediation. In this mediation format, the goal is to have the participants take responsibility for their actions and ‘repair the harm’ or ‘clean up the bad situation that you made’.

Basically, after an incident, the students are worked with by one of the Deans, a Guidance person, their advisor, or anyone else with whom they have a trusting relationship. The goal of the discussion is to talk them through the incident twice—first to let the student vent about it, and the second time, once they’re calm, to reflect upon their behavior and analyze it. Here, you work with them to look for points where they chose to escalate the situation rather than deescalate it, identify what they could have done differently, and brainstorm what they can do to help make things better right now. This type of serious self - reflective conversation gives young adults an avenue in which they can analyze their behavior, and take responsibility for it by doing what they can to ‘make amends’. In other words, they can act like mature adults.

Examples of such repair would be: for vandalism or theft – fixing the damaged object or paying for it; for a fight, – both combatants apologizing to each other for their parts in escalating the conflict and then taking a joint ‘speaking tour’ where they visit classes on their grade and share their insights with classmates about better ways to resolve conflict. In this model, we have created the space in which they can learn and then go out and teach others. This is very powerful. And, therefore, suspensions can be legitimately reduced. In the fight example, a typical 5 day suspension has many times been reduced to one day with the above protocol being followed. And, that one day was usually the day of the fight when students needed to be sent home anyway to cool off.

The major points in a No Excuses! mediation are listed below:

- ✓ The mediator(s) are approached in one of two ways; either 1) adults or teens come to them and request a formal intervention before a problem gets out of control, or 2) students who have been suspended due to an altercation are required to mediate their dispute as part of a ‘consequences package’ in order to return to the classroom.
- ✓ The mediator meets separately with each person involved in the conflict to get all sides of the story. The mediator reviews the process so that everyone is clear about what is expected of them.

- ✓ Each person tells the story free flowingly in order to get out their feelings and give the mediator a sense of the issues involved. The mediator acknowledges and clarifies points along the way. Importantly, the mediator must ask penetrating questions to get at material the students may be holding back and are too embarrassed to admit.
- ✓ The person is then asked to retell the story, and to stop at every point where she or he made a mistake. All are asked to explain why it was a mistake and what they could've done instead. Students may get stuck on feeling that the other party may 'get away' with things because only their misdeeds are being addressed. The mediator assures them that the other's errors will be addressed similarly. All people need to do is concentrate on learning where they went wrong.
- ✓ If and when someone omits or downplays a point that the mediator knows contributed to the conflict, it is the mediator's duty to point this out. It is in such exchanges that many personal discoveries about giving and receiving respect are made.
- ✓ When finished, each person is asked to recap any errors they made, what they could've done differently and if they are willing to apologize for their part in the conflict.
- ✓ If a person involved in a conflict or dispute can admit his or her mistakes and take responsibility for them, we're half way home! If not, the mediator should explain how they are compromising the mediation process. In our experience, almost everyone agrees to go forward as they don't want to be seen as the one who is responsible for holding up the process. Urge them to write down their points so as to be sure to cover everything in the stressful situation that mediation can sometimes be.
- ✓ Repeat this process for all parties to a conflict; it's important not to miss the perspectives of everyone involved.
- ✓ The formal process begins with apologies for errors committed. Often, mediatees are reluctant to be the first to say "I'm sorry". Asking them to be the 'bigger person' and go first or explaining that "the more mature teen usually makes the first move in these types of situations", invariably gets the ball rolling. When doing adult to teen mediations (ATMs), the student is encouraged to go first with an apology. If they can't make that leap for whatever reason, staff is asked to model the process and make the initial apology, even if their role in the negative transaction is clearly less than the students. By acknowledging some amount of error, the adult bridges the power imbalance and sets the stage for the teen to step up.
- ✓ During the mediation, the mediator uses her/his skills to regulate the flow of exchanges and make sure that all issues are covered. The only things out of bounds are blaming/attacking statements. Body language is watched carefully, as it may well undercut a person's words. The mediator makes sure that the students take risks to give and accept sincere apologies. Underlying issues can then be addressed cooperatively, if the parties choose to do so.

- ✓ The mediator works with everyone to make agreements to avoid future problems. Mediatees are told to report any violations of the agreements to the mediator and a check in session is scheduled for a few days/week later so as to allow a collective assessment to take place.
- ✓ If appropriate and where possible, the mediatees can make a public apology to the people who observed the incident. Having two students or a student and a staff member stand in front of a class (or other such grouping) and show that they've resolved their issues maturely and are ready to work together, sends a powerful message to all that problems can actually be talked through to a successful conclusion.
- ✓ If the school's discipline policy allows, (and we think that it should), the duration of out of class suspensions can be decreased for participating sincerely in the No XQZz Mediation and making a public apology.

### **The Defining RESPECT! Activity**

During our RESPECT! Reps meeting, I had them do the first building block activity of the Campaign: the Defining RESPECT! Activity (DRA). In small groups, the Reps compiled lists of what they felt respectful behavior should look like at East Side. We focused on 3 areas of RESPECT!: student to student, student to teacher and teacher to student. When they were done in groups, we put our ideas together to make a master list of our definitions of respect.

Having done this activity, the Reps were now able to work with their advisors and plan a similar activity that they would co - teach in Advisory. The advisors knew that they'd be asked to co-teach with their Rep and doing this lesson sent a very powerful message to the students of the MS: young people's voices and leadership would be taken seriously in this effort.

Once all advisories in the M.S. had completed the activity, the Reps and I met to compile all ideas into 'Best of RESPECT! Lists'. Importantly, teachers' definitions of respect were similarly surveyed in a staff meeting and we included them in our final lists. Our next step was to make sure that everyone was really on board and clear about what type of changes we were talking about making. This was done in our Town Hall meetings.

**Step I:** Committee representatives and teachers explain the objectives to the class:

- We want all people on our grade to participate in defining what respectful behavior should look like at our school.
- You (the advisory) will do what we (the RESPECT! Representatives) did last week in our RESPECT! Committee meeting.
- All advisories on our grade will do this activity so that we can include everyone's ideas on what respectful behavior looks like.
- Teachers ideas will be included as well

**Step II:** How we'll do it

- We'll break the advisory down into groups of 4 and come up with lists of answers to the following 3 questions.
  - 1) What does RESPECTFUL behavior look like between students?  
(Student-to-Student RESPECT!)
  - 2) What does it look like from students to teachers and other adults?  
(Student-to-Teacher RESPECT!)
  - 3) From teachers to students? (Teacher-to-Student RESPECT!)

\*TIP: A good way of guiding this session is to have the headings written on chart paper and up in the front of the room before advisory begins.

- We will work on one question each advisory period
- Each group will take 15 minutes to make their lists of Do's and Don'ts on scrap paper.
- RESPECT! Advisors and RESPECT! Reps circulate through the room and monitor group work.
- When groups are done, they share out their definitions of what respectful behavior should look like in that particular area.
- RESPECT! Advisors and RESPECT! Reps split the tasks of facilitating the discussion and listing the class' best ideas and definitions of respectful behavior on the chart paper.

**Step III:** Follow-up

- We (the RESPECT! Reps) will take out advisory's/homeroom's charts to our next RESPECT! Committee meeting.
- We'll take the best ideas from each advisory and make BEST OF RESPECT! charts for our grade.

- The teachers will input too, in a separate meeting, to make sure that all their ideas and issues are included.
- At a Town Hall meeting a few weeks from now, we can all discuss and then adopt them as our self made rules; our RESPECT! Guidelines.

### **Town Hall Meetings**

The Town Hall meetings were conducted by grade in the school library, with a capacity of approximately 80 – 90 people. They were run by the RESPECT! Reps and emceed by me. Each point of our RESPECT! Guidelines was read by a Rep who also gave an example of what we were talking about. They then took questions from the audience and answered as best they could. Believe me, when I tell you that the ‘bad kids’ asked the most questions; they wanted to be very clear about what behaviors they could or could not do!! Other Reps filled in when necessary and I spoke as a ‘last resort’ to insure clarity on some crucial points.

After all Guidelines were discussed, we took a vote on each of the 3 lists. We didn’t vote count. They were ratified by clear, observable majorities of about 90%. When those who voted no asked if they “still had to follow the rules”, it was clarified that since we were a community and the Guidelines received a very strong majority, we expected all to work with us.

One final note on the guidelines: the 3<sup>rd</sup> category, Teacher to Student RESPECT! Is what really separates the 100% RESPECT! Campaign from other attempts or functioning programs geared at including students in on setting behavioral norms. This project asks staff to change/respond to student feedback on what respectful/disrespectful adult behavior looks and feels like to teens/preteens. Again, it puts students and teachers (and later all adults in the building), on an equal footing. The work that the staff has to do regarding how they relate to their students is seen as staff professional development. Learning what is respectful to teens and altering your behavior accordingly, makes you better able to communicate with your students and opens them to learning, academically and emotionally from you.

The basics for a successful Town Hall are:

- Discussing each point on each of our 3 RESPECT! charts with the audience. This entails stating the Guideline, giving examples and asking for questions.
- Dividing up the leadership/presentation responsibilities among as many student representatives as possible in order to push forward as many leaders as possible.

- Rehearsing with them at least twice so that they are comfortable leading a Town Hall meeting with a large group of their peers.
- The appropriate venue for the Town Hall will depend on the size of a particular grade. (i.e. fewer than 100 teens may be accommodated in the school library for a more intimate feel; with more than that, you may have to move to the auditorium).

## **ESCHS' School-wide 100% RESPECT! Guidelines**

### **Student-to-Student**

1. Treat people how you would like to be treated
2. Don't interrupt your peers
3. Always try to communicate using appropriate language; no cursing
4. No gossiping or spreading rumors
5. No instigating
6. No bullying- physically, emotionally or psychologically
7. No fighting
8. No sexual harassment: physical or verbal
9. Respect each other's personal property and space
10. Don't steal
11. Respect everyone regardless of color, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, age or individual characteristics

### **Student-to-Teacher**

1. Follow all school rules and procedures
2. Come to class prepared with all materials; no excuses
3. Give full attention to the person speaking
4. Try to compromise
5. Take responsibility for your actions
6. No stereotyping of the adults
7. No cursing
8. Speak with a reasonable tone or voice
9. Use positive language and tone of voice (no rolling eyes. "Please", "Thank you")
10. Remember to take care of your personal hygiene
11. Respect teachers' and school's spaces and property
12. No sexual harassment: physical or verbal
13. Respect everyone regardless of color, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, age or individual characteristics

## **Teacher-to-Student**

1. Make lessons interesting
2. Include all students in lessons/ teach to the whole class
3. Listen to your students
4. Always listen to both sides of the story
5. Respect students' ideas: let them express their voices
6. Don't play favorites
7. Don't put students down
8. Encourage students: use more commendable behavior reports
9. Don't shout students out: not about grades, nor personal information
10. Keep professional and personal boundaries clear
11. Remember to take care of personal hygiene (Hey, we work very closely at East Side ☺)
12. Don't be hypocritical: take your own advice
13. Respect students' personal space and property
14. No sexual harassment: physical or verbal
15. Don't stereotype kids by the way they look or dress
16. Respect everyone regardless of color, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, age or individual characteristics