

# Focus Group Feedback from Elementary and Middle School Teachers

Review of Kindness in the Classroom® Curriculum

## II. Background and Purpose for the Focus Group Study

In the Fall of 2018, the Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) Foundation completed an updated version of the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum entitled Kindness in the Classroom, a curriculum designed to decrease negative behaviors and promote a school environment of kindness and caring. Three focus group studies were implemented to gather feedback from elementary and middle school teachers who work with children in the targeted age groups for this curriculum.

## II. Methodology

The focus groups were recruited to consider curriculum “fit” for age, learner diversity, and teacher input on content and ways to enhance the teacher and student experience.

In the week prior to the focus group, each participant was asked to allot one hour of time to read the relevant elementary or middle school content from the “Caring” unit of the Kindness in the Classroom curriculum. This review consisted of one lesson and project section for each grade in the elementary school focus group study and four mini-lessons and one project for the middle school study.

## III. Focus Group Findings

### Elementary (K-5)

Both elementary focus groups felt comfortable with the age targeted for each of the grades in the “Caring” unit of Kindness in the Classroom. Teachers representing their specific age group and grade felt that the content was a good match for the students that they worked with. Teachers that have a broader range of students (i.e., Physical Ed, Special Ed, English as a Second Language) agreed that the content was a fit for their students. They noted that the language didn’t “play down to them” as other curricula sometimes does, and that the curriculum was based in the reality that they were living right now. Noted in both groups was the fit for fifth graders, who were dealing with rumors and gossip amongst their friends, and fourth grade who are needing to learn how to articulate and manage stress.

Teachers in both focus groups talked about the adaptability and relatability of the content of particular grade levels.

#### Positive Aspects of K-5 Curriculum—What is Unique

When asked about what was unique about the RAK curriculum, participants stated that RAK is a system-wide curriculum, and that they enjoy the full school experience of being able to talk about RAK in a “common language” with everyone on campus. The students love the RAK curriculum, which is encouraging for further use. The topics are positive, relevant and very “hands-on” for students. They see it as a curriculum that is well laid out, easy to understand/teach, and that their students love it. They also commented that the KIC curriculum offers a unique opportunity to address social emotional learning in a prevention-oriented, proactive manner.

Both elementary school focus groups liked the “Self Care” section offered throughout for teachers, making a point of saying that it was a unique approach to start with the teacher’s social emotional health, and giving tips on how to be in touch with your own health in order to be a good messenger to others about the same.

They noticed that the curriculum has a “building relationships” focus, that allows for growth in the development of human connection. An ESL teacher said that this is a way that many of her students can feel a sense of accomplishment, not readily available in some of the more traditional courses. A 4th grade teacher talked about the community that you feel in the classroom and a safe place to try out what you learn.

Both groups like the extension of the school learning to the home environment, offering ways to extend projects beyond the classroom, and bolstering learning with families and in the home setting.

The six kindness concepts of the curriculum make sense to teachers: caring, courage, inclusiveness, integrity, respect, and responsibility. A few teachers referenced liking the Kindness Framework loop of “inspire, empower, act, reflect, share,” stating that they liked this framework and the activities described for each word.

The curriculum is effectively taught “through a kindness lens.” Both focus groups agreed with this and said that it is a unique and needed offering.

## Middle School (6-8)

Middle school focus group participants agreed that the lessons and activities overall were a fit to the ages that they served, acknowledging that they always adapt lessons to the students that they have in their current classrooms and that there would need to be some adaptations for the curriculum as well.

Overall the teachers liked the structure of the curriculum, which allows for addressing maturity level differences, personality leanings (e.g., extraverted/introverted personalities), and learning styles with the “mini lessons” and individual to large group activities.

Similar to the elementary school focus groups, participants in the middle school focus groups talked how they liked how the curriculum addresses diverse learning styles and “multiple intelligences” by making the curriculum activities varied and including art, theater, stories, writing, and creativity along with more traditional curriculum activities. Many people said that they were happily surprised to find activities like writing gratitude cards and “compassion haikus,” along with things that students can do with social media and smartphones.

Positive Aspects of the 6-8 Curriculum: What is Unique?

Teachers like that experts in the field of social emotional learning have already done the research and developed a curriculum that seems to be very hands on and multi-dimensional enough to meet the varied learning and emotional needs of students.

The lessons do not require a lot of preparation. There is a root or “skeleton” menu that can be adapted to teacher/student needs throughout the school year. The sequencing and layout of the mini-lessons are intuitive and easy to find/reference.

They thought that the teacher focuses on “self care” prior to each set of lessons was unique and astute, stating that they needed to be in touch with themselves before they could be a role model of “self care” to others.

They felt that the curriculum seemed sound, well thought out, and laid out in a functional, visually pleasing and organized way. They were surprised that this product of such high quality was distributed for free.

They liked how there were active-learning lessons with hands-on projects that were relevant to their school and current school values/beliefs.

They talked about how kindness is a needed focus for everyone and that as a schoolwide integrated curriculum there would be a shared sense of language and community.

Teachers referenced many benefits that the KIC curriculum would bring to the students, including increased self awareness, awareness of others, and coping skills/tools. They felt that the students would see it as a genuine, authentic experience where they play a central role in learning about themselves and ways they can interact with the world. The students ultimately will have a personal connection to the topic as a result of this unique “organic” not didactic way to learn.

The curriculum is effectively taught “through a kindness lens.” Focus group participants said that kindness was noted throughout the KIC curriculum.

### **IV. Summary Comments**

Though representing different age ranges, SEL experience, and RAK experience, the three schools represented in the focus groups had surprisingly similar responses to the updated RAK Kindness in the Classroom curriculum. All three saw it as a positive curriculum that meets a “kindness gap” in the school community. All three saw the value in integrating it into a full school curriculum schedule, needing school leadership support, but knowing that it would be valuable for the students and themselves as teachers.

All three focus groups found that the curriculum is comprehensive, useful, and can be adapted for student ages and diverse learners.