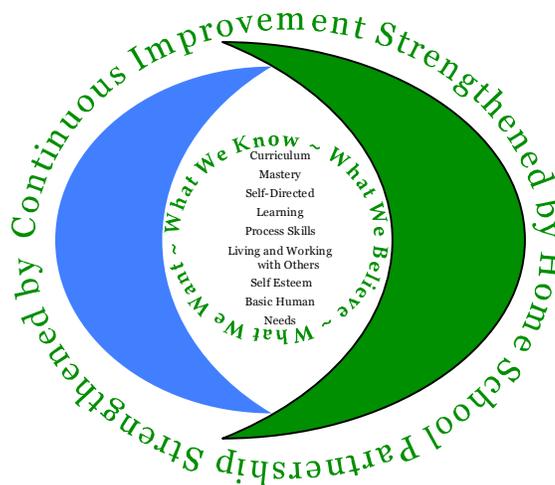


# NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# PARENT TOOLKIT

*A strong home-school partnership ensures that every child can succeed.*

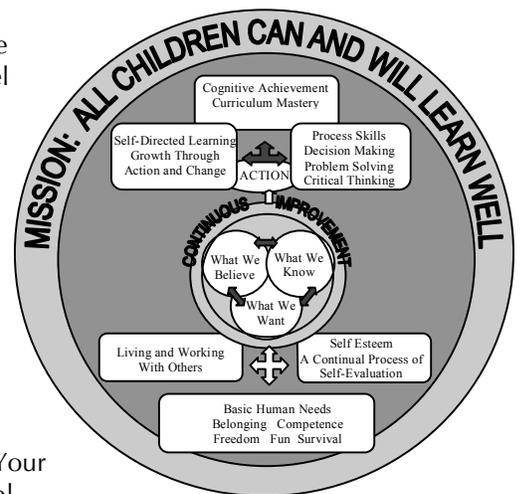
All  
Children  
Can and  
Will  
Learn  
Well



## Grades 7 and 8

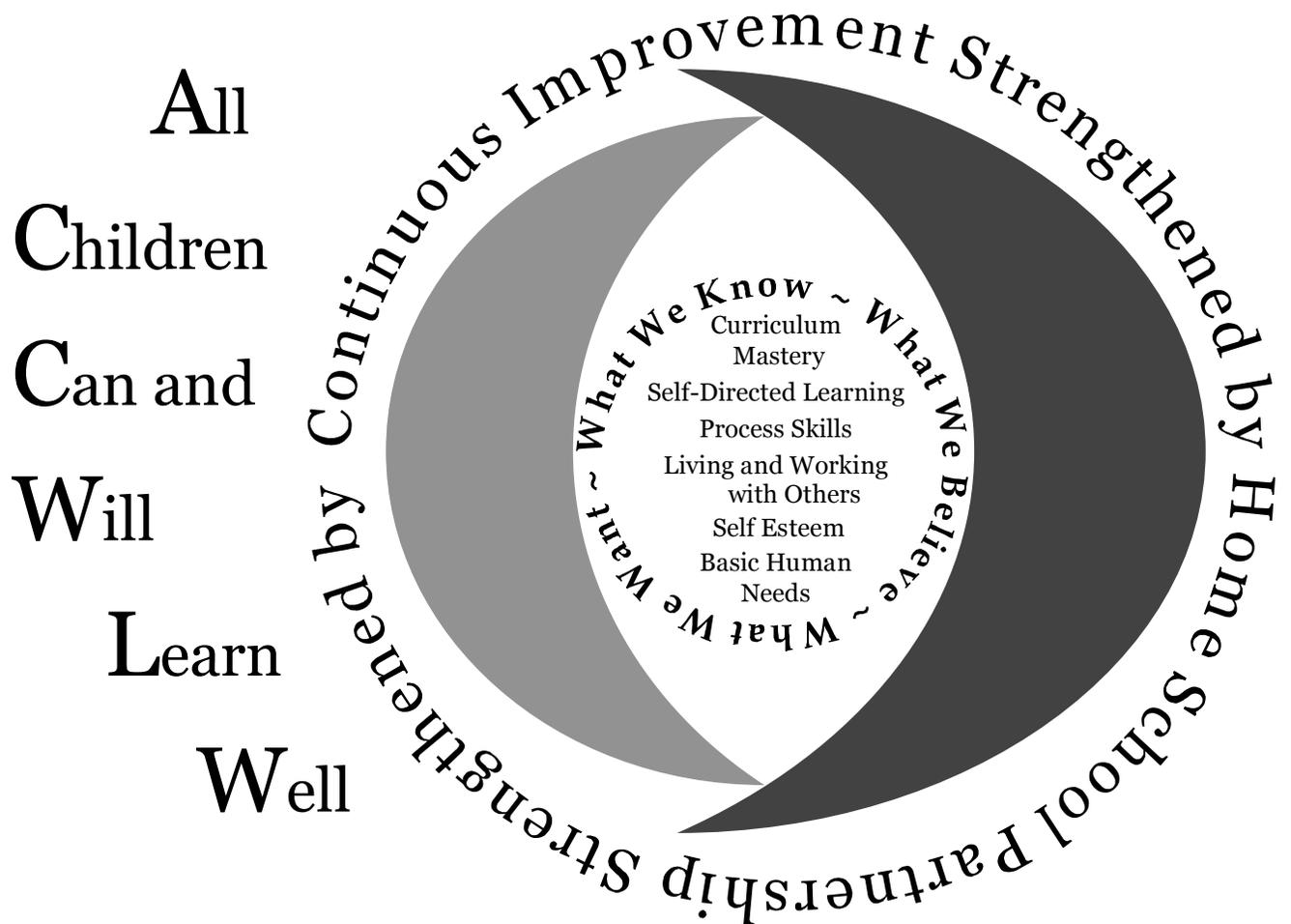
In 1995, the school district collaborated with parents and the community to develop the Newtown Success-Oriented School Model (shown to the right) to represent the core beliefs that are the foundation for nurturing successful learners. These core beliefs, which are based on Glasser's Model and the quality school movement, guide our decision-making in the school district as we work together to create a quality education for our students.

Parental involvement is key to our success in accomplishing this goal. Research has shown that when parents are involved in their child's education, there is greater likelihood of higher achievement. With this in mind, the model has been redesigned to be more "parent friendly" and emphasize our desire to collaborate with parents through a strong home-school partnership. Your involvement and support can make a difference in your child's school performance. This booklet was created to give you a greater understanding of the district's mission *All Children Can and Will Learn Well*. In it, you will find ideas and suggestions about things you can do at home to support your child's school experience.



Quality education is possible if we all work together towards the common goal of continuous improvement in the teaching and learning process. A strong home-school partnership insures that every child can succeed. Parents, teachers and administrators all share the same goal - wanting the best for our children.

## NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS



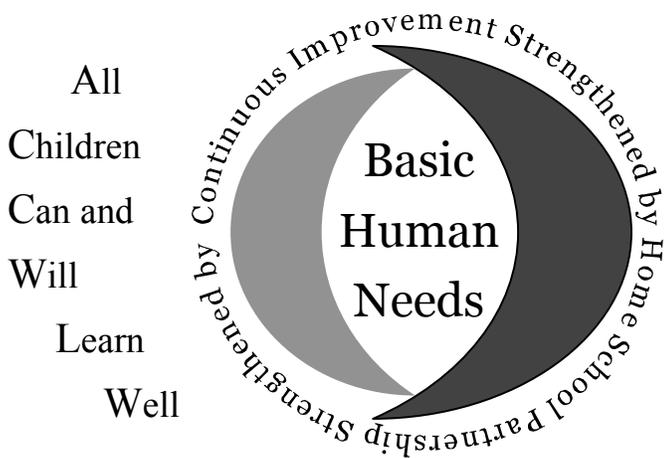
Our success depends on recognizing and understanding what we know, what we believe, and what we want. By meeting our children's basic needs in school and at home, while continuously working to improve the learning environment and curriculum, we will foster the development of students who are responsible, self-directed, and active participants in the educational process.

Together, we will make a difference for our children.

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## Grades 7 and 8 The Middle Years

*Young teens want a close relationship with others, to feel important and able to do what needs to be done, have freedom to make choices, have basic needs satisfied and have fun each and every day.*

Parents and teachers can work together to provide an environment that meets a teen's basic needs. There are so many things we can do at home and at school to give our children a solid foundation. Here are some ways to do that...

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### **Middle school children need to feel loved and have a sense of belonging.**

*At home,*

- Understand always that your role as parent is the most important in your child's development. You are the "#1 expert" on your child, as well as their first teacher.
- Focus on maintaining inter-family communication and shared family time through common meal times, family activities and sharing experiences from the day.
- Initiate positive interactions daily.
- Couple criticism with a compliment. For example, "I like the way you know what your homework assignments are, but you need to complete them as well."
- Tell about your day and ask about your child's day. If necessary, ask specific questions about things you know are happening.

*At school,*

- Provide transition activities for the first three days of school to ease the change for students coming to 7<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Organize students by cluster rather than by subject, so that they stay with a smaller group of students and with teachers who communicate daily with each other.
- Provide mentors by pairing teachers, administrators, and staff with students who need extra support.
- Incorporate cooperative group activities to promote collaboration.
- Have team building activities so that students get to know each other.

### **Middle school children need to feel competent.**

*At home,*

- Work out with your child clear times to do homework and remove all distractions that may make choosing to do homework difficult.

## Basic Human Needs

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### Grades 7 and 8

#### **Middle school children need to feel competent.**

*(Continued)*

*At home,*

- Be available to help with homework when asked, but don't sit with your middle school child. Instead of giving answers, guide your child to seek them in references including the textbook, an information sheet from the teacher, or a teacher web site.
- Support student-directed time management plans. If your child doesn't have a time management plan, help him/her develop one or request help from the school.
- Don't give your child answers or solve the problem – ask questions that help lead him/her to the solution.
- Encourage your child to use his understanding of his learning style when completing assignments.

*At school,*

- Provide regular opportunities for students to self-evaluate their work and reflect on the strategies they used. Have students set goals for future projects that are similar.
- Provide additional support to students who are not achieving and develop individualized success plans.
- Provide opportunities for students to choose projects that address their unique learning styles.
- Have students set goals for success and evaluate their progress at regular intervals.

#### **Middle school children need the freedom to make choices that are developmentally appropriate.**

*At home,*

- Allow your child to experience the consequences of his/her choices if there is no danger involved, then debrief by asking questions about what he/she might do differently next time.
- Provide opportunity for student-initiated family discussions.
- Guide him/her to make appropriate social decisions.
- Know where your children are and who they are with all of the time. If they are going to a friend's house, get to know the parents of the friends and be sure there will be parent supervision.
- Know what your child is doing on the computer – see Computer Safety.

*At school,*

- Have students review their personal mission statements and look at the choices they are making relevant to it.
- Consider providing the training and opportunities for student-led parent conferences.
- Encourage students to seek help from you when they are not clear about assignments or the topic you are studying.
- Use learning lab time to help students fill in the gaps in their learning.

## **Basic Human Needs**

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### Grades 7 and 8

**Middle school children need to have fun! This can include the fun of making new discoveries or of learning something new and interesting.**

*At home,*

- Have some free time every day; be careful not to “over-schedule” your child.
- Provide family fun time that is non-competitive and/or without pressure.
- Encourage their friends to come to your home.
- Help your child be aware of the need for a balance of work and fun and plan for it each week.

*At school,*

- Provide extracurricular activities (clubs, sports) to give opportunities for exploration in an area of interest and in a fun environment.
- Have social events such as dances and take field trips to new places.
- Celebrate the arts with performances and a chance to see each other’s work.
- Provide frequent interactive and/or hands-on activities incorporated into daily classwork.

**Middle school children need warmth, sleep, and good nutrition.**

*At home,*

- Encourage and provide a good breakfast, even if it is only a small amount.
- Set appropriate and consistent bedtimes (9:30—10:00). Be certain all technology and television are turned off.
- Monitor snack and drinks to reduce salt and sugar intake, encourage drinking water.
- Encourage and model regular exercise – help your child identify the types of exercise that are fun for him/her.
- Show affection (but not in front of their peers).

*At school,*

- Handle free/reduced lunch discreetly.
- Have water available and encourage drinking it regularly.
- Call home if sleepiness is noticeable more than once.
- The school nurse provides teaching staff with information about allergies/medical issues.
- Instruct students and staff to use safe procedures when blood is present.
- Have school emergency response plans and practice drills for fire, wind and bus emergency.

## Basic Human Needs

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### Grades 7 and 8



## Computer Safety

Children in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade age range frequently want to interact with their peers more than with their own family. While it is a good idea for them to use the computer, it is essential for you as parents to restrict computer use and stay involved, even if they tell you to “bug off.”

Here are some ideas to consider:

- **Put the computer your child uses in a common area** where you will be able to supervise what is happening. Never put it away from the family in the child’s room.
- **Establish family rules** by age for computer and Internet use. Make sure your child understands why you are establishing these rules. Web sites such as <http://kids.getnetwise.org> or [www.staysafe.org](http://www.staysafe.org) or [www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org) can give you suggestions for rules to establish. <http://www.safekids.com/kidsrules.htm> is a site that has rules ready to print out.
- **Educate yourself** about Internet safety -- [www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org) provides a newsletter for parents to help you stay up to date. You also need to learn about Instant Messaging and the special code that kids are using to communicate with each other without their parents knowing what they are saying. This site, <http://www.amyth.com/Odd/IM-Code.html>, offers a “ handy guide for parents and nerds to know what the young people are talking about online, and other handy abbreviations.”
- **Consider using a filtering program**, a child-friendly browser, or restrict sites your child can go to. Most internet browsers have the ability for you to block access to certain sites. You may list specific sites that you feel are inappropriate for your child to reduce the likelihood of them being exposed to inappropriate content or engaging in social networking (blogs, instant messaging, chat rooms, etc.).
- In this age range, students are beginning to form their own values and take on the values of their peers. Help them recognize that everything they see on the Internet is not necessarily true or valuable so that they begin to understand credibility. One way to do this is join them in a search for a topic they know a lot about, then evaluate the results at each site to see if it is credible. At school we are teaching students to read the URL as one way to determine the credibility of a source. Have your child teach you what he/she has learned.
- **Learn about BLOGS** – A **blog** is a Web site where the host can write whatever he/she wants, then visitors to the site can add comments if they like. You may have heard about MySpace.com which is a blog site used by many kids (and by sexual predators as well.) Talk to your children about the dangers of social networking sites and technology. Anyone they haven't met in person is a stranger, and the rules of talking to strangers should apply to anyone who tries to contact your child via blogs, email, instant messaging, chat rooms, or similar technologies. If your child wishes to communicate with a stranger, ask to speak with them yourself via telephone prior to communication and monitor any and all discussions between your child and the individual. We will offer a parent workshop about Internet safety and blogs or check [http://www.staysafe.org/parents/hot\\_topics/blogging.html](http://www.staysafe.org/parents/hot_topics/blogging.html) for ideas.
- **Teach your child that information on a computer is *public*, not *private*.**

## Basic Human Needs

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### Grades 7 and 8

#### Computer Safety

(continued)

- **Be aware that the Internet can bring about cyber-bullying.** It is easy for students to type in a reaction or a snide remark and hit send before thinking. This site <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org/tweens/index.html> has some suggestions about what to do about cyber bullying.
- **Restrict the amount of time** your child spends on the computer or using computer-type games. Physical activity supports healthy brain development - get them in physical activities as well as spending time reading and various electronic media.

**The three key things to do are EDUCATE yourself, COMMUNICATE, and SUPERVISE computer use.**

### Early Intervention Substance Use and Prevention

Teenagers in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade are beginning to relate more to peers than to adults, they want to explore new experiences, and yet their pre-pubescent brain development does not let them be concerned about the consequences of their actions in the future. As younger children, they thought about one thing at a time and it was easy for you, as parents, to interrupt a potential problem by moving them into another activity. Now their developing brains are allowing them to predict your actions, so they may plot and plan in a way you have not experienced.

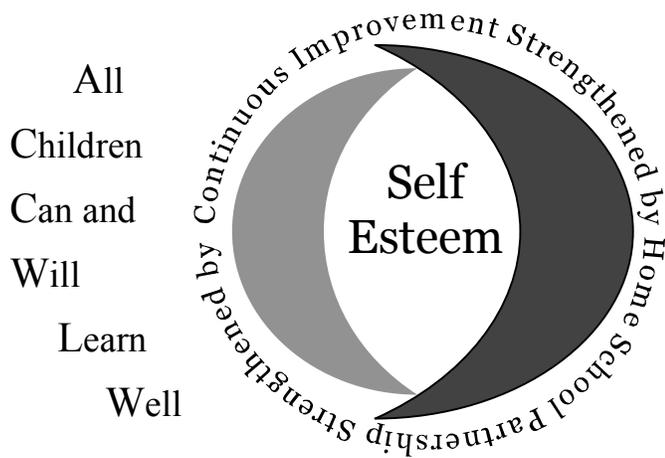
#### **NOW IS THE TIME TO PREVENT LATER DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE.**

Seventh and Eighth grades are the gateway years for substance abuse. In a survey given to students in spring 2005, 10% of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported having tried a cigarette, 24% reporting having tried alcohol, and 2.9% reported drinking three or more drinks when they drank. 4.5% of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported having tried marijuana with 1.6 having used it 3 or more days in the last month. Of most concern is their report that 11.2% have tried inhalants, with 1.1% using inhalants 3 or more days in the last month. It is important for parents to be aware of these problems, to supervise where your child is and what he/she is doing, and to provide ways to have fun without substance use.

Sometimes it is difficult to know what to say to your child. This site, <http://talkingwithkids.org/>, can give you "practical, concrete tips and techniques for talking easily and openly with young children ages 8 to 12 about some very tough issues: **sex, HIV/AIDS, violence, drugs and alcohol.**"

Last year we collaborated with the Parent Connection to have Isabel Burk talk about inhalant prevention. The parents who attended found this workshop very helpful. This site offers her presentation with slides and sound, <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/hyler/>. Ms. Burk's own site <http://www.healthnetwork.org/> offers slide shows that can be purchased and shows the curriculum she wrote for the Virginia Department of Education.

The U.S. Department of Education site <http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content/drgfreept1.html> gives an overview for parents, articles to read, and concrete suggestions of activities to do with your child.



## Grades 7 and 8 The Middle Years

*Teens with high self-esteem are competent, honest, responsible, compassionate and loving.*

A student who has high self-esteem is enthusiastic and shows a desire to acquire knowledge. They stay focused to complete a task and are accountable and responsible for their actions. A confident young teen demonstrates optimism when faced with challenges and works towards self-improvement. They have faith in themselves and their ability to meet challenges head-on. They value themselves.

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Here are some examples of ways that parents and teachers can foster positive self-esteem and help middle school children continue to grow as eager and successful learners.

*At home,*

- Assign manageable family tasks (chores) with which children can be successful. Everyone in a family needs to feel necessary.
- Encourage and support children's individual strengths.
- Model positive risk taking.
- Acknowledge and praise your child's successes.
- Every action shows your belief and demonstrates how to have positive, ethical, and socially responsible behavior.

*At school,*

- Set small, obtainable goals that are cumulative.
- Provide opportunities for students to become connected to a group.
- Create opportunities for creativity and personal expression.
- Encourage students to become risk takers and give them the ability to evaluate their actions.
- Have students be both accountable and responsible for their actions.

### Help Your Child Set Standards and Become Self-Motivated

Middle School is a time when students tend to want to spend all their time interacting with their peers. As parents, you may find that the little child who adored you and saw none of your flaws, now doesn't see anything but your flaws. Reynold Bean in *The Four Conditions of Self-Esteem* describes the conditions we can help develop to enable positive self-esteem: (1) A sense of connectiveness to people, places, and things, (2) a sense of uniqueness and respect for individual characteristics, (3) a sense of power which includes competence, responsibility, confidence, and

# Self Esteem

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## Grades 7 and 8

### Help Your Child Set Standards and Become Self-Motivated

(Continued)

self-monitoring, and (4) models that include order and purpose in life, role models, and clear standards and expectations. As we work together with these very social children, our goal is to help them find the balance between their social life, their family, and their schoolwork. The way you go about this task can affect the results.

First, don't sit with you child and help him/her with schoolwork. It is easy to teach children to be dependent on our help without even being aware that we are doing it. It is instinctive for parents to want to sit with their child to help him/her do homework. They notice what the child is doing wrong, tell him it is wrong, show him how to do it right, then stick with him to make sure he does it correctly. What this process does with a middle schooler is make him/her feel incompetent and picked on. It undermines self-esteem and learning.

Now, what do I do, you say? First, you can collaboratively plan with your child a schedule for schoolwork and fun/social time. Then, stick to the schedule. Allow ½ hour of time for each core subject during weeknights. Then, the way you interact can help your child become motivated and learn to feel competent. PRAISE, PROMPT, and LEAVE.

#### **PRAISE**

To start with, you are going to change the way you approach what your child is doing. Find something specific that he/she is doing right and make a positive comment such as, "Good, you're getting ready to do your homework." or "I see you brought your planner home. Great!" Every time you approach your child to see how he is doing, you are going to START WITH A POSITIVE COMMENT. It is usually about something that he has done right so far. You may have to adjust your goal of perfection and have a goal of improvement from the point where he is, in order to be able to think of a positive comment.

#### **PROMPT**

If your child is doing fine, then just say, "Keep up the good work!" If you have noticed something that needs support or your child appears stuck, give a brief, clear prompt of the next step to take. It should be brief and not start with the words "But," "However," or "Instead of." Begin with, "The next thing to do is..." or "Have you tried checking your notes from class?" Your prompt should be short and sweet – not a long, drawn-out explanation that will only confuse him.

#### **LEAVE**

If you hang around, you are communicating to your child that you believe that he/she will need more help. This leads your child to believe he/she can't do it without you. So you are going to smile, turn, and leave. This is a good time for you to load the dishwasher or check email or fix a cup of tea.

If your child seems unable to do the work without your help, contact the teacher. Homework assignments are reinforcement of lessons taught at school. The teacher may want your child to come in before or after school or work with him during learning lab to clarify the major points of the lesson. For more information about self-esteem, check the website, <http://www.self-esteem-nase.org/reference.shtml>.

All  
Children  
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Well



## **Grades 7 and 8 The Middle Years**

*Young teens continue to learn about themselves and others in everything they do. Parents and teachers can reinforce the value and importance of living and working with others.*

Home and school are the natural environments for middle school children to learn about themselves and each other. What are our goals? Parents and teachers can work together to help them consistently:

Show respect and concern for others.

Understand the impact of his/her behavior on others.

Understand the needs of others and be able to respond to those needs.

Understand and respect individual differences.

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*At home,*

- Have dinner together and talk about the day's activities.
- Involve your family in community service activities and support school-sponsored charitable events.
- Make respect a central part of your family in the way you interact with each other and in the way you interact with others outside the family.
- Teach and model courtesy – customary ways to show respect to older people, people you don't know, and in social situations.
- Watch the news or share reading the newspaper together, then discuss what you saw/read.

*At school,*

- Model respect by showing it to the students, colleagues, and parents.
- Help students to see actions or events from more than one perspective through literature, talking about events that happen in the classroom or school.
- Build a sense of community, so that students feel part of a group through class meetings, special class activities and friendly competitions between clusters.
- Have students identify their learning style and see that their style may be different from others.
- Teach students to be empathetic and recognize how it feels when someone giggles or talks during a presentation.
- Praise students when they are understanding, kind, and patient when another student is struggling to learn something.

# Living and Working With Others

## Grades 7 and 8

*At school,*

- Provide opportunities for group work in classroom (science labs, text-based discussions in class, design a new menu in Family and Consumer Sciences).
- In conflict situations, have a meeting with all involved, and then have each student give his/her perspective of what happened.
- Promote an environment where different opinions or responses are encouraged and respected.
- Continually reinforce that every person contributes to the progress.
- Label students who ride on the performance of others as “hitch hikers” and give them extra opportunities to show their performance.
- Set up class/school projects where students adopt someone less fortunate and plan nice things to do for them.
- Teach students how to communicate concern without “putting people down”.
- Do not tolerate bullying or put-downs.
- Provide frequent opportunities for students to work in cooperative groups. Vary the way the groups are set up so they experience a variety of peers. Encourage students to change the role they play in the group.
- At the end of cooperative activity, spend time debriefing on the effectiveness of how the group worked.



## Bullying and Sexual Harassment

Board of Education Policy 8-605 prohibits bullying in schools. Bullying among children is aggressive behavior that is intentional and is repeated over time. Bullying in seventh and eighth grade usually involves name-calling or not allowing a child be part of a group. Bullying may cause children to feel lonely, anxious, or sick. Sometimes children do not tell the school or their parents they are being bullied.

### **If your child tells you he/she is being bullied.**

- Be supportive and gather information about the bullying. Never tell your child to ignore the bullying. Find out who was involved, what happened, and where it occurred. Do not encourage physical retaliation as a solution.
- Contact your child’s teacher and/or principal. Keep your emotions in check. A parent’s protective instincts stir strong emotions. Give the school person the basic information you have gathered. Expect the person from school to get back to you. If the bullying doesn’t stop, contact school authorities again.
- Help your child become more resilient to bullying. Teach him/her how to seek help from an adult when he/she feels threatened. Help your child to develop a sense of self-worth by developing talents or positive attributes. Encourage your child to make contact with friendly students in his class. Ask yourself, “Is my child being bullied because of a lack of social skills?” If your child easily irritates people, help him/her learn the social rules of his/her peer group.

# Living and Working With Others

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## Grades 7 and 8

### **Bullying and Sexual Harassment**

*(continued)*

#### **What if your child is the bully?**

Children who bully their peers tend to be impulsive, be easily frustrated, lack empathy, have difficulty following rules, and view violence in a positive way.

- Make it clear to your child that you take bullying seriously and that you will not tolerate this behavior. Develop clear and consistent rules – then praise and reinforce your child for following rules. Do not use physical punishment for discipline. Instead, remove privileges or add jobs around the house.
- Provide as much parental or adult supervision as possible. Put an immediate stop to any bullying you observe. Then have the child act in a more appropriate way.
- Emphasize praise and positive feedback. Reward the child for caring and appropriate behaviors.

#### **Sexual Harassment May Occur During the Middle School Years**

Board of Education Policy, State and Federal Laws forbid sexual harassment in schools. Some examples of behaviors that may occur at the intermediate level that may be considered sexual harassment are:

- Staring or leering at parts of someone else's body.
- Comments, gestures or jokes of a sexual nature.
- Displaying of sexual pictures or objects.
- Spreading rumors or commenting about sexual behavior.
- Touching, grabbing, pinching, popping bra straps or elastics.

#### **If you believe your child is being sexually harassed at school, on the bus, or in school activities...**

- Take action and get help from the principal or assistant principal. Ignoring sexual harassment is not an effective way to stop it.
- Whenever possible, guide your child to tell the harasser verbally or in writing what the specific behaviors are that he/she finds offensive and ask him or her to stop.
- Report the offensive behaviors to a teacher, counselor, or school administrator.
- Keep a detailed record of the harassing behavior to share with school officials who investigate your complaint.

We want to help our students form appropriate, respectful ways of relating with each other. Part of this development is being very clear about the behaviors that are not permitted and why. It is also important to help them learn more positive ways of getting attention and relating to each other.

# Living and Working With Others

Grades 7 and 8



## Puberty, Parties, and Going Out

There are two major things you can do to support and protect your child: supervise and communicate. Preteens and early teens want to be independent and develop close relationships with members of the opposite sex (they say, “I’m going ‘out’ with him/her”). Sometimes they tell you that you should not be around, should not supervise, and/or you should not be nosy about their business. However, this is one of the most important times for you to maintain supervision. Your children live in a different world than when you were this age. Technology has changed the way adolescents communicate with each other. They are constantly connected to friends through instant messaging (“IMing”) and often choose to have serious conversations this way. Their socialization with members of the opposite sex progresses very quickly because the awkwardness of talking in person does not exist. The “rules” for developing a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship have been turned upside down. Teens are not as intimidated by saying things via IM because they have the buffer of a computer between themselves and the person they are “talking” to. And believe it or not, they do consider this “talking”.

You should know where your child is, who he/she is with, what they are doing, and what adults are present all the time. If you’re hosting a party, you don’t have to be in the room every minute, but should come and go frequently, refreshing the food or maybe suggesting a movie they might like to watch. If your child is going to a party at a friend’s house, call the parents and have a chat with them about their plans for supervision. Middle school students can be tempted to initially experiment with alcohol at small gatherings with their close friends. They are testing the waters, and any alcohol in the house should not be accessible. Even the most responsible kids can be tempted with easy access to alcohol and little or no supervision. All parents should know that in 2006, the Connecticut State Legislature passed a law similar to the Newtown ordinance which prohibits persons under 21 years of age from possessing alcohol anywhere, including private property. Those that do possess, and those that host parties where underage alcohol drinking is occurring are subject to arrest.

Middle school students generally do not date, instead they go out to a movie or an event with a group of friends. In this case an adult should be along to drive and to deter temptation to leave the group or try something that is not safe. Some parents drop their child off at the Newtown Town Hall to watch a movie with plans to pick them up later in the evening. These movies are not like the supervised dances at the Middle School. Some unsupervised young teens leave the movie and gather in groups in the front and in back of Town Hall, sometimes using poor judgment.

The most protective factor for your child in these transition years is to maintain communication with you. You need to talk about your values and beliefs *over and over again*, despite any discomfort you may feel, so that when they are in a situation and have to make a choice they have some thoughts to rely on. Sit together with your child and watch the latest TV shows that everyone is talking about in school. These shows often deal with many of the same issues your child might experience. It’s easy to ask for their reactions and then share your feelings and beliefs, and theirs, when it’s a character in the show you’re talking about.

# Living and Working With Others

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## Grades 7 and 8

### Puberty, Parties, and Going Out

(Continued)

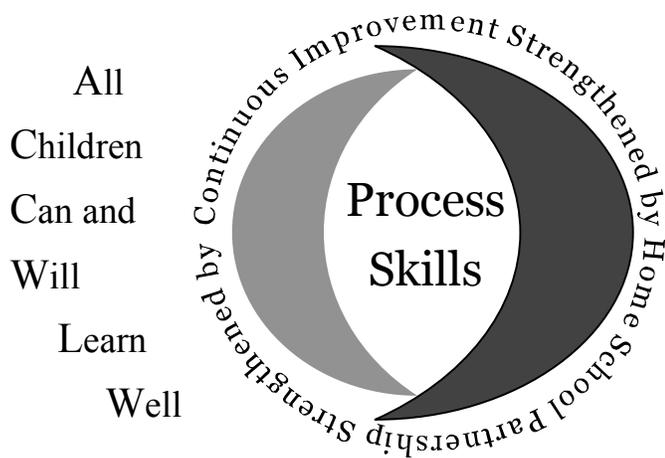
It is especially important that you talk about the changes that happen in puberty and what you expect them to do or not do with their friends and acquaintances. The attitude of today's middle schoolers towards sex can be very casual. You may hear your teen refer to "hooking up", which is a slang term that can mean anything from kissing to more serious sexual behaviors. Many teens today consider oral sex as something that's no big deal and that it's OK to have this as part of their "more than friends" relationship, because many believe "it's not really sex." You know your child best - don't be accusatory and create a relationship that is filled with confrontation. Your awareness of these issues will facilitate communication in an open and trusting way.

If this is your first child in Middle School, you may want to read one of these sources to find out what you might say and get suggestions of how to say it:

*Beyond the Big Talk – Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens from Middle School to High School and Beyond* by Rev. Debra Haffner

*Raising a Child Responsibly in a Sexually Permissive World* by Sol Gordon and Judith Gordon

Or try the web site: <http://www.byparents-forparents.com/article8.html> .



## Grades 7 and 8 The Middle Years

*When teens grow as critical thinkers, problem solvers, and decision makers, they master the curriculum and become accomplished learners.*

Parents and teachers can work collaboratively to teach middle school children how to think critically, solve problems and make decisions. What's the result? Young teens who can imagine, invent, elaborate, predict, reason, reflect, take risks and justify solutions.

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Here are some examples of how parents and teachers can provide ways for children to develop process skills.

**Critical Thinking** – is the analysis of various points of view, the evaluation of data, and synthesizing this with prior knowledge to move towards a conclusion.

*At home,*

- Talk about different points of view. Allow each family member to give his/her point of view or opinion about something that has happened or something that the family is trying to decide.
- Gather data to make decisions. If the child says “everybody is doing it” conduct a survey of his/her friends to see what the data says.
- Discuss the news and advertising, analyzing points of view and looking at the data.

*At school,*

- Have students analyze the point of view of each character in novels.
- Gather data and make a variety of graphs using Excel.
- Have students support their opinions with evidence from the text, give facts, or describe observations.

**Decision Making** – is the process of considering alternatives in order to draw conclusions and make thoughtful choices.

*At home,*

- Have your child generate choices, usually two or three options – it could be what to do in free time, extracurricular activities, or items to purchase. Then help your child weigh the positives and negatives of each choice before deciding.
- Talk about decisions that you are making and what you are thinking.

## Process Skills

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### Grades 7 and 8

#### Decision Making

(Continued)

*At home,*

- Have your child make predictions of what would likely happen next if a particular choice is made, then watch to see what actually happens.
- Role-play scenarios and solutions.

*At school,*

- As a class, brainstorm choices or solutions to a problem, then discuss the pros and cons of each.
- Examine the decision-making of characters in stories. Guide students to make predictions or create alternate endings based on a different key decision.
- Have students generate ideas for projects or performance assessments, then weigh the pros and cons of each option.

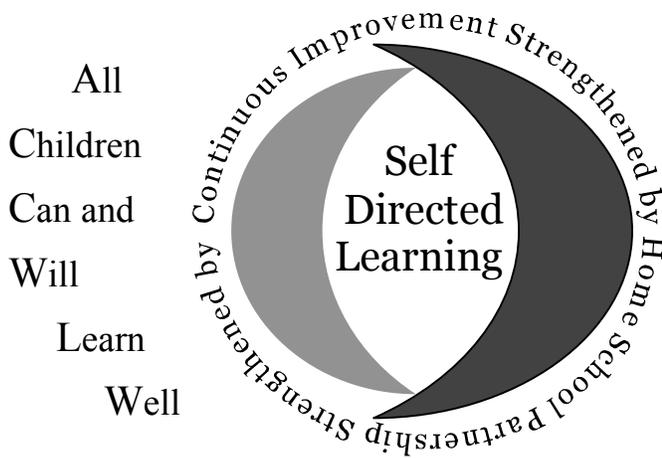
**Problem Solving** - when faced with a situation where no clear answer is evident, students recognize and name the problem, identify and describe the alternatives, generate a set of steps needed to solve the problem, combine the steps into a workable strategy, and draw conclusions.

*At home,*

- Encourage your child to identify problems that exist. Instead of suggesting a solution, ask questions to guide your child to think through the process of solving the problem. Examples of questions include, "What do you think the problem is?", "What are some things you might try to solve the problem?", "Which do you think would be the best choice?"

*At school,*

- Have students learn and use the scientific method: develop a hypothesis, investigate, test, and adjust.
- Encourage students to work together as a class or as a small group to solve problems that occur in the classroom, the lunchroom, or in school.
- Provide open-ended problems that have many possible solutions in math, science, and social studies.
- If there is a problem with two students, use the restitution process – help the offending student(s) generate ways to "repair the damage" caused by the problem.



## Grades 7 and 8 The Middle Years

*Young teens continue to grow as self-directed learners by actively participating in the learning process and taking responsibility for their learning.*

In order for students to learn, they must be actively engaged in the learning process. When this occurs, children become imaginative, open-minded, confident, curious and independent.

The skills and attitude of a self-directed learner are essential to the development of a student's self esteem and his/he desire to succeed.

A self-directed learner will:

- Observe the world and interpret it though discussion and critical thinking.
- Seek opportunities.
- Find and use resources.
- Set goals and make plans to achieve those goals.
- Self-evaluate and learn from experience.
- Persevere.

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Some ways to foster growth as a self-directed learner:

*At home,*

- Provide a comfortable setting and the materials your children need for daily assignments. Give them a work area free of distractions.
- Offer help in understanding directions when they need it.
- Plan collaboratively with your child a schedule that provides time for study and time for social activities and play. Then stick with the schedule. He/she will need your support to resist the temptation to be social. Be aware that the teachers help them develop plans for long-term assignments. Find out what the plan is and praise efforts to follow the plan.
- Support in a way that does not build dependency – PRAISE, PROMPT, AND LEAVE – as seen in the Self-Esteem section.
- Encourage your middle school child's efforts to explore his world.

## Self Directed Learning

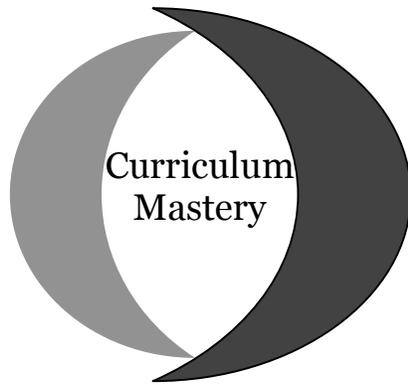
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### Grades 7 and 8

*At school,*

- Give students opportunities to examine their efforts and accomplishments. Have them reflect on their work and ask what they might change, if anything.
- Incorporate the use of different resources into assignments. Have them use the library, newspapers, magazines and the Internet.
- Have students set goals and plans for long-term assignments.

All  
Children  
Can and  
Will  
Learn  
Well



## Grades 7 and 8 Curriculum Overview

*Curriculum mastery, also referred to as cognitive achievement, results from quality instruction, an opportunity to learn, prior knowledge, and a willingness to persevere.*

Curriculum mastery is a continuous process that begins in kindergarten and continues throughout your child’s formal education. The essential knowledge and skills that your child acquires becomes the basis for new learning. Enduring knowledge is our shared goal. Standards and objectives are used in every subject at every grade level and aid in measuring progress. Mastery of the curriculum depends not only upon a student’s ability, but also by the effort and persistence of our children, their parents and teachers.

Presented on the following pages are summaries of the content standards and expected performances for Grades 7 and 8.

### Seventh Grade Curriculum Overview

This table gives some general information about what is taught in the seventh grade program. The specific objectives are listed in the curriculum documents posted on the district website [www.newtown.k12.ct.us](http://www.newtown.k12.ct.us). Our district is committed to helping every child learn well through differentiating the curriculum whenever possible.

<b>Art</b>	Students have art once each week for the full year. The program focuses on aesthetic awareness of visual and tactile qualities including elements, principles, and processes, use of a variety of art media, and explaining why a piece of art is effective. Students study and compare a variety of works from Ancient, Renaissance, Impression, Modern, and Contemporary periods.	
<b>Health</b>	Safety	Students learn to recognize risky situations including child abuse, taking dares, and basic first aid.
	Social/Emotional	Students learn to cope effectively with stress including bullying, cliques, rumors, personal life changes, puberty, and develop strategies to work in a group.
	Substance Use/Abuse	Students analyze their personal factors that put them at risk for substance abuse and the way the media influences their choices. They develop personal coping strategies and become aware of resources to help with drug/alcohol related problems.

## Seventh Grade Curriculum Overview

<b>Health</b>	Healthy Body	Students relate what they put into their body to wellness, develop choices for physical activity to relieve stress, prevent disease, and be fit, and look at food choices based on nutrients, serving size and calories.
	Disease Prevention	Students link understanding of the respiratory and circulatory systems to the immune system and HIV.
	Growth and Development	Students respect that each person grows at his/her own rate, develop strategies for coping with situations that are uncomfortable, and discuss the intellectual and emotional changes of puberty.
<b>Information Literacy</b>	Gather Information for a Specific Purpose	Students do research in a variety of content areas, developing a plan in advance of the search, using specific search strategies and a variety of resources.
	Analyze and Evaluate Information	Students combine ideas to make generalizations, analyze author's bias, and give proper credit using MLA citation.
	Evaluate both the Process and the Product	Students monitor and adjust their research and reflect on the process, thoroughness, and quality of the product.
<b>Mathematics</b>	Algebraic Reasoning: Patterns and Functions	Students solve problems using a variety of algebraic methods, use graphs, tables, equations, and verbal descriptions to represent and analyze changes in linear and nonlinear relationships, and maintain equivalence in equations to determine solutions.
	Numerical and Proportional Reasoning	Students represent real-world situation and solutions to problems using the appropriate symbolic form (fractions, decimals, percents). They use scientific notation of powers of ten, percents to make comparisons between groups of unequal size, and extend the operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division to negative numbers
	Geometry and Measurement	Students describe and classify polygons according to their transformational properties, use strategies to determine the surface area of three-dimensional objects, and use estimation-and-measurement strategies to solve problems involving the areas of irregular polygons and volumes of irregular solids.

## Seventh Grade Curriculum Overview

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<b>Mathematics</b>	Working with Data	Students formulate questions, design surveys and samplings, organize and analyze data and defend the analysis. They find and interpret measures of central tendency and compare and determine experimental and theoretical probabilities.
<b>Music</b>	Students elect to take a band instrument, a string instrument, chorus, or participate in music technology twice each week. They also have an instrument specific lesson once a week during their learning lab.	
<b>Physical Education</b>	Students have physical education twice each week and participate in Project Adventure classes as one of the rotation classes. They work on specific motor skills, complex movement sequences, fitness, game skills, and social skills. The Project Adventure program is designed to foster trust, cooperation, support, appropriate risk, communication, problem solving, and teamwork.	
<b>Reading</b>	Read for Information and Understanding	Students create generalizations, distinguish important information from minor details, and analyze author's bias.
	Read for Critical Analysis and Evaluation	They defend, qualify, or dispute differing interpretations of a text, returning to the text to support reasons with relevant references.
	Read for Aesthetic and Personal Response	Students identify techniques used by the author to affect the reader and explain why it contributes to the reader's understanding and experience.
	Read Strategically	Students use knowledge of text structure/pattern and characteristics of the genre to develop a plan for reading. They use knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon roots and affixes to determine the meaning of words and phrases.
<b>Science</b>	Student study energy transformation, the structure of organisms (cells, multicellular organisms), energy in earth's systems, technology in food production, and health as related to human body systems.	
<b>Social Studies</b>	Students study U.S. history from the focus of how people organize themselves – Colonization through the development of the U.S. Constitution.	
<b>Technology</b>	Students select and apply technology tools for information analysis, research, problem solving and decision-making. They sort, organize, interpret, and display information using spreadsheets and databases and displaying the data as various types of graphs. They revise documents using spell check, grammar check, and a thesaurus, create multimedia presentations, and use telecommunications to collaborate. Students learn about safe use of the internet and the legal consequences of hacking and violating copyright laws.	

## Seventh Grade Curriculum Overview

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<b>Writing</b>	Technical Practical Writing	Students compose literary analysis, math explanations, persuasive letters and essays, and lab reports. They support a thesis with clearly presented evidence and appropriate technical vocabulary.
	Range and Versatility of Writing	Students compose to explain, inform, describe, persuade or narrate an experience including reader's response journals, expository, narrative, and persuasive pieces.
	Reflective Writing	Students analyze their writing using models and rubrics, set specific goals for improvement, and develop a plan to achieve the goals.
	Writing Strategically	Students initiate use of organizers, revise content, syntax, and word choice, make associations and connections, and consult a variety of sources.
	Mechanics/Conventions of Print	Students write in cursive using capital letters, commas, quotation marks, apostrophe, colon, and semi-colon appropriately. They spell commonly used words correctly, have subject/verb agreement, appropriate verb tense and correct pronoun references.

## Eighth Grade Curriculum Overview

This table gives some general information about what is taught in the eighth grade program. The specific objectives are listed in the curriculum documents posted on the district website at [www.newtown.k12.ct.us](http://www.newtown.k12.ct.us). The district is committed to helping every child learn well through differentiating the curriculum whenever possible.

<b>Art</b>	Students have art once each week for the full year. The program focuses on aesthetic awareness of visual and tactile qualities including elements, principles, and processes, use of a variety of art media, and explaining why a piece of art is effective. Students study and compare a variety of works from Ancient, Renaissance, Impression, Modern, and Contemporary periods.	
<b>Health</b>	Safety	Students develop practices to keep themselves safe (including sexual abstinence). <i>Note: Parents may request that their child not attend these classes.</i>
	Social/Emotional	Students learn ways to cope effectively with stress (depression, suicide, eating disorders, perfectionism) and think about the emotional implications of choices they may make.
	Substance Use/Abuse	Students evaluate their personal risk and protective factors for substance abuse, develop strategies to recognize and resist subtle pressure, and link early drug/alcohol use to the adolescent body.
	Healthy Body	Students identify stressors and develop personal plans for coping with stress in a healthy way, develop a plan for healthy eating, and apply the concepts of total wellness.
	Disease Prevention	Students learn how diseases are transmitted and develop strategies for prevention of communicable (STD, HIV) and non-communicable diseases. <i>Note: Parents may request that their child not attend these classes.</i>
	Growth and Development	Students recognize that choices they make can affect their development and examine genetics as a factor in growth and development. They explain how conception occurs using appropriate names for body parts. <i>Note: Parents may request that their child not attend these classes.</i>

## Eighth Grade Curriculum Overview

<b>Information Literacy</b>	Gather Information for a Specific Purpose	Students do research in a variety of content areas, developing a plan in advance of the search, using specific search strategies and a variety of resources.
	Analyze and Evaluate Information	Students combine ideas to make generalizations, analyze author's bias, and give proper credit using MLA citation.
	Evaluate both the Process and the Product	Students monitor and adjust their research and reflect on the process, thoroughness, and quality of the product.
<b>Mathematics</b>	Algebraic Reasoning: Patterns and Functions	Students identify relationships that are linear and nonlinear and compare and contrast their properties using tables, graphs, equations, and verbal descriptions. They solve problems using various algebraic methods and properties.
	Numerical and Proportional Reasoning	Students compare and order integers, powers and roots, extend scientific notation to very small numbers. They solve problems involving fractions, decimals, ratios, percents, and repetitive patterns and iterations with very large and very small numbers.
	Geometry and Measurement	Students explore the relationships among sides, angles, perimeters, areas, surface areas, and volumes of congruent and similar polygons and solids. They model geometric relationships and use concrete methods to find the volumes of solids and use what they have learned to solve problems.
	Working with Data	Students collect, organize, display, compare and analyze large data sets, constructing a variety of data displays. They make and evaluate statistical claims and justify conclusions with evidence.

## Eighth Grade Curriculum Overview

<b>Music</b>	Students elect to take a band instrument, a string instrument, chorus, or participate in music technology twice each week. They also have an instrument specific lesson once a week during their learning lab.	
<b>Physical Education</b>	Students have physical education twice each week and participate in Project Adventure classes as one of the rotation classes. They work on specific motor skills, complex movement sequences, fitness, game skills, and social skills. The Project Adventure program is designed to foster trust, cooperation, support, appropriate risk, communication, problem solving, and teamwork.	
<b>Reading</b>	Reading for Information and Understanding	Students extrapolate and combine relevant information from texts to create a summary, use prior knowledge to support generalizations, and develop generalizations from multiple texts.
	Reading for Critical Analysis and Evaluation	Students consider text from a variety of perspectives, defend, qualify or dispute differing interpretations, and analyze how author's bias influences meaning.
	Reading for Aesthetic and Personal Response	Students identify techniques used by the author to affect the reader, explaining how and why these techniques and devices affect the reader. They relate text to other cultures, belief systems, and historical periods.
	Reading Strategically	Students recognize text structure/pattern and characteristics of the genre. They verify word meanings by definition, restatement, example, comparison, or contrast. They identify the central idea, purpose, or theme of a given text, articulating the thoughts, opinions, and questions that arise while reading.
<b>Science</b>	Students study forces and motion (inertia, unbalanced forces, objects moving in circles), heredity and genetic information, characteristics of an organism, earth in the solar system, and the design of structures to withstand loads and destructive forces.	
<b>Social Studies</b>	Students study U. S. History from the first president through 1900.	

## Eighth Grade Curriculum Overview

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<b>Technology</b>	Students select and apply technology tools for information analysis, research, problem solving and decision-making. They sort, organize, interpret, and display information using spreadsheets and databases and displaying the data as various types of graphs. They revise documents using spell check, grammar check, and a thesaurus, create multimedia presentations, and use telecommunications to collaborate. Students learn about safe use of the internet and the legal consequences of hacking and violating copyright laws.	
<b>Writing</b>	Technical Practical Writing	Students write research and literary analysis, developing a thesis statement and supporting with accurate use of a variety of sources and appropriate technical language.
	Range and Versatility of Writing	Students compose journals, essays, narrative, drama, and research papers. They compose to explain, inform, describe, persuade, or narrate and experience.
	Reflective Writing	Students use samples of writing and rubrics to analyze their writing, set specific goals for improvement and develop a plan to carry out the goals.
	Writing Strategically	Students use organizers before they write and revise for content, organization, tone, syntax, and word choice.
	Mechanics/Conventions of Print	Students write in cursive using capital letters, commas, quotation marks, apostrophe, colon, and semi-colon appropriately. They spell commonly used words correctly, have subject/verb agreement, appropriate verb tense and correct pronoun references.

District Quality Council is a committee made up of parents, teachers, administrators, and a Board of Education member who provide leadership for implementation of the Success-Oriented School Model. This document is a product of many hours of work by the following committee members:

Teri Alves, Teacher  
Kathy Boettner, Asst. Principal  
Lisa Chaloux, Parent  
Karen Craig, Parent  
Kristen Delgado, Teacher  
Stephanie Demore, Teacher  
Al Finelli, Teacher  
Michelle Hankin, Parent  
Alice Jackson, Asst. Superintendent  
Mark Mahoney, Teacher  
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Helen Miller, Teacher  
Jeanetta Miller, Teacher  
Fran Peters, Parent  
Peg Ragaini, Career Center  
Michael Regan, Director Pupil Personnel  
Carla Tischio, Teacher

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Summer 2006

**NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
**CORE BELIEFS**

**TRUST**

confidence in the actions of others

**RESPECT**

preservation of dignity and acceptance of individual differences

**FLEXIBILITY**

exploration of alternatives, adaptation to new situations  
acceptance of change

**RESPONSIBILITY**

accountability for individual and collective action  
self direction

**INCLUSION**

the opportunity to learn is an entitlement that will not be  
determined by individual differences  
high expectations and high standards for all

**INTERDEPENDENCE**

community, parents, teachers and students working together for success  
students, parents and teachers learning from each other

**COMMUNICATION**

open exchange of thought  
clear definition of goals and expectations

**SUCCESS**

continuous improvement and quality achievement

**RISK TAKING**

daring to take action  
the right to make mistakes