

Second Step Interview with Emily Funston

By Christina Barnard, DELTA Coordinator

Second Step, the social emotional learning curriculum that teaches students empathy and anger management, is making a difference in Knox County. This school year **all** of the county elementary and middle schools are implementing Second Step. We interviewed Emily Funston, the principal of Fredericktown Elementary School, about the impact Second Step is making on her students.

Why do you use Second Step at your school?

We probably would not have searched it out, so it started with the grant. And then we continue to use it because it works!

What changes have you seen in students and their behavior since implementing Second Step?

[There have been] two major changes. First of all, we hear the little boys and girls, and the big ones too sometimes, actually using Second Step language in their conversations with each other, with their teachers and at home. So we know...they're listening to it because it resonates.

Another thing that we have noticed [is that] we have very fewer boys and girls coming through the Guidance Counselor's and Principal's offices... It has given the children some language and behavior to use to resolve conflict, to consider the other

person in their behavior, especially on the playground.

I have now sometimes two or three days in a row where not one student is brought to or sent to me. And that's a huge difference. Second Step really has made a significant cultural difference in my building.

Why do you think using Second Step is important in schools today? Why is social-emotional learning important?

Because it is a gate into a person's mind. [Think of] a child who is distressed because he is afraid to go to the bathroom because somebody is going to hurt him or because he doesn't have anyone to sit with at lunch. I don't think those boys and girls are really very focused on the educational part of their day – just like all of us [wouldn't be]. To us as adults, these crises may look unimportant, but when you're eight, they're not unimportant. It gives children tools to get through the day.

What makes Second Step different than other programs?

Research did not bear out the fact that [other programs] had any impact on boys and girls. Research tells you that [programs that focus on substance abuse prevention alone] don't work. My primary reason for liking [Second Step] is that I'm living with it and it works!

Note: Second Step is evidence based. Research can be found online at cfchildren.org.

Is there anything else you would like to add about Second Step and its implementation?

The only thing I would like to say is...thanks. It was a great gift. We appreciate it and we use it every day.

From Ms. Funston's responses it is plain to see the importance of Second Step in the lives of school children around the county. The DELTA project will continue connecting schools with programs that promote effective communication skills and healthy relationships.



First grade students participating in a Second Step lesson