

I AM A NORWALK TRUCKER!

By Mr. Gary Swartz, Principal, Norwalk Middle School

New to Norwalk Middle School this year is our Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) matrix. As educators we focus on our reading, writing, and arithmetic. When most of us were younger, we knew these as the Three Rs. All teachers and administrator in our district want our students to excel in the classroom in terms of the standards set before us by the state. In addition to our learning standards, our PBIS team has decided to focus on a different set of the Three Rs; we are focusing on Ready, Respectful, and Responsible. We see these as the soft skills needed to be successful in the classroom and in the world outside of the school walls.

The PBIS team defined what it means to be ready, respectful, and responsible in every situation in and out of the school. The team defined these three characteristics in a matrix. This matrix lays out expectations for students in the classroom, the cafeteria/recess, the hallway, the restroom, the bus room, the school events, and the community. The teachers take about fifteen minutes each week during their hour-long class to discuss with the students what it means to be ready, respectful, and responsible in each of these environments. In addition to the instruction, students are given rewards when they are “caught in the act” modeling the behaviors in the matrix and going above and beyond being a good Trucker.

In the educational setting, the lack of the new Three Rs creates an atmosphere that is not conducive to learning. Students will struggle if they are not responsible enough to get their homework completed. They will struggle if they are not ready to learn when they enter the class. Finally, they will struggle if they are not respectful to their teachers and their peers. By teaching these soft skills to the students we are hoping to create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning, leading to all students being successful not only here but also successful at NHS and beyond.

When talking to employers in our community, the biggest issue they see in prospective employees is being ready to work, responsible at work, and respectful of others. Many prospective employees are lacking these soft skills needed to be successful in the work environment. As adults, our students may have all of the education and training they need to be successful as employees; however, without the soft skills, they will not garner success. It is our goal to prepare these students with the educational tools and the soft skills needed for success.

To remind the students of our expectations of being ready, responsible, and respectful, a student comes to my office every morning to read the Trucker Pledge. The pledge reads: “I am a Norwalk Trucker! As a Trucker, I will always be ready to learn and do my best; I am respectful of my peers, my teachers, and others in my school and community. I am responsible for my education and actions, and I should always be a positive example for all to see. I am a Norwalk Trucker!” The pledge is a shortened version of our matrix. It is a great way to start our day, and many students have the pledge memorized and are living it.

KEEP ON TRUCKIN’