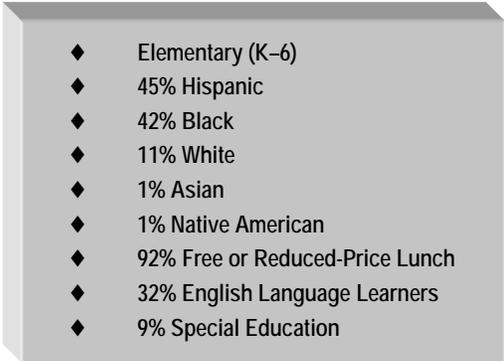


## Pinnacle School No. 35

194 Field Street  
Rochester, NY 14620  
Principal: Robert Kuter

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Since 2005, Pinnacle School No. 35, a public school in Rochester, New York, has implemented a multi-tiered social, emotional, and behavioral approach for “hard to reach” children and their families with good results. Between the 2005–06 and the 2006–07 academic years, there was a 54% reduction in suspensions, from 109 to 59 students. Suspensions continued to fall dramatically again in the 2007–08 academic year; there were only 26, less than one quarter of the number two years earlier. The principal, Robert Kuter, reports there is an especially noticeable decrease in suspensions in “repeat offenders.” This is partly a result of a new district policy in 2008–09 eliminating out-of-school suspensions.

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- ◆ Elementary (K–6)
  - ◆ 45% Hispanic
  - ◆ 42% Black
  - ◆ 11% White
  - ◆ 1% Asian
  - ◆ 1% Native American
  - ◆ 92% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
  - ◆ 32% English Language Learners
  - ◆ 9% Special Education

### Core Programs

Often, children come to School 35 feeling stressed due to extremely challenging life circumstances. For example, they may experience multiple homes or caregivers, violence that affects their families and neighborhoods, or incarceration of a parent or sibling. There also are children from many different countries who are English language learners and children who move several times a year but are always bused back to School 35. All of these circumstances can take a priority over academics. Administrators, teachers, and staff at the school understand that children affected by poverty and violence often become students who have difficulty calming down, trusting, and learning. These students’ emotions and behaviors adversely affect their education and the progress of the learners around them.

In the last five years, the school has implemented three prevention programs: a social-emotional learning curriculum, a program for students with chronic aggressive/disruptive behavior, and a program for students having difficulty with transitions. The first, a social-emotional learning curriculum, is taught twice weekly from trained teachers at every grade level. The curriculum teaches children about:

- managing their feelings,
- decision-making and peer relations,
- being responsible and caring for others, and
- solving problems.

Teachers give instruction in several formats:

- stories,
- writing activities,
- quizzes,
- acting out hypothetical situations,
- brainstorming solutions to problems,
- practice of social skills with peers, and
- group discussions.

For example, “feelings faces” help resolve conflict; children flip through them to identify how they and the other children are feeling. Compliments are read during announcements by “kids of the week,” followed by a social and emotional message of the day read by the principal. In problem-solving meetings, students use “real-life” student problems in a group setting to brainstorm ideas for solutions and practice problem-solving strategies. Teachers facilitate games where one person can win and games where everyone must cooperate to win, pointing out the difference between competition and cooperation.

Two other programs target specific student populations. Children in the intermediate grades who are exhibiting aggression or need positive social interaction skills are recommended for an after-school program run by the University of Rochester’s Pediatric Links to the Community. The school also implements a third evidence-based program, the Primary Prevention Project, which identifies young children showing emerging school adjustment difficulties. This program focuses on early intervention to enhance behavioral skills and school adjustment.

### **Education of the Whole Child**

School 35 faculty have seen attendance rates climb and gains in test scores and believe that addressing the education of the whole child via social and emotional skills has resulted in these increases. Along with the three core programs, the school has implemented additional strategies to assist students in managing their emotions and on focusing and building community in their school environment.

- Buddy Teachers are teachers who can just be a friend to the student or allow children a place to have a time-out and move away from a potential problem in order to complete work.
- Brochures promote staff attention to shy or withdrawn students. Students are interviewed, photographed, and their “bios” distributed to staff who can then make meaningful, positive connections with the children.
- One-on-one play therapy is used for kindergarten through second graders who may be having trouble with transitions in life such as divorce or a move.
- School celebrations reinforce the mission to celebrate diversity. For example, children highlight the many different cultures in the school for a “We Are One” day.
- Older children can assume leadership roles by filling out applications and interviewing for positions in the library, mailroom, technology department, or to tutor younger students.

## Collaboration

The principal and vice-principal, Rachel Windler-Freitag, engage in ongoing collaboration to seek out all possible ways to meet children’s academic and social and emotional needs. Similar to an authentic “it takes a village” way, they reach out for and encourage assistance from the community. Thirty-eight volunteers tutor 125 children on an individual and weekly basis. The assistant principal, teachers, and specialists also collaborate on an Intervention Team. In this team, staff members use data and discuss strategies to identify needs, monitor progress, and implement additional strategies if warranted. The Intervention Team helps teachers to feel less isolated as they address behavioral concerns. They know they will have a chance to talk to colleagues and work through difficulties. As Mr. Kuter explains, “Not one program is effective in and of itself. It takes a number of different approaches, dealing with a number of different issues in order to be successful.”

Because more children are staying in the classroom and because they are calmer and more focused, in the last four years, School 35 has made significant academic gains. If the school sustains its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for one additional year, it will no longer be designated a School in Need of Improvement (SINI). Between 2006–07 and 2007–08, in third through fifth grades, the number of children passing the state’s language arts and math assessments increased by more than 20%.

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