

# The Emerson School Receives National Recognition

By Glenda Montgomery

Portland Oregon, August 12, 2008: When Lynn Collins began looking for a school for her children; she knew that she wanted it to be a place of proactive, inspired learning, not only academically but in the social/emotional realm as well. There are a wide variety of approaches to classroom management. In her search Lynn found that rather than having a system in place to foster “bringing out the best” in children, many schools’ management systems were focused on merely “stopping unwanted behaviors”. She wanted her children to be given knowledge about how to navigate successfully in the world of human interaction as well as the world of academics. She wanted a school that was committed to the growth of the whole child. Lynn found that commitment in The Emerson School, a public charter school sponsored by the Portland Public School district that has recently been recognized as a Positive Discipline Demonstration School, one of only 3 officially recognized in the nation.

The Emerson School has a unified approach to discipline practiced by all teachers in every classroom. It is based on the philosophy behind the internationally known Positive Discipline books by Jane Nelsen, Lynn Lott and others. Tara O’Neil, the school administrator, explained that this approach is based on learning the skills of conflict resolution and problem solving with an emphasis on mutual respect and collaboration. The approach is neither permissive nor punitive but is grounded in kindness and firmness at the same time. The skills are practiced daily by staff and students and are utilized in every classroom’s weekly classroom meeting, where problems are put forth and solutions offered by peers. “On the Oregon Department of Education Staff Satisfaction Survey, every one of our staff members credited our effective, unified approach (to discipline) as being an element of the school which contributes significantly to the overall quality of their classroom environment. This result tells me that using a Positive Discipline approach in our classrooms not only makes The Emerson School a great place to learn, but also a great place to work.”

Lynn Collins began to notice the effects of this unified Positive Discipline approach in her own home. Her children, though in different classes, were learning the same language and skills for problem solving and conflict resolution. She was intrigued to see that what her children learned in one context at school, they were able to apply in a different context at home. “Their ability to problem solve respectfully has blossomed. It is amazing to watch.”

Traditional practices of school discipline often contradict the fundamental mission of education--to engage students in learning. The best environment for learning is one which promotes caring, mutually respectful relationships. Yet the dominant response to inappropriate behavior in schools nation-wide is censure, isolation and punishment. This tends to backfire and breeds the resentment, rebellion and bullying that schools all over America are seeing in their students.

At her son’s last school, Lynn remembers that the common punishment for rowdy lunch time behavior was to take away recess time that day. She couldn’t see how taking away a child’s time to blow off steam outside was going to make their behavior improve. In fact, the punishment was used again and again, clearly showing that it had not solved the problem. At Emerson, the problem of the rowdy lunch behavior would have been discussed at a classroom meeting. The students would have chosen a solution to try that would attempt to solve the problem. Students would participate fully and feel empowered at being able to use critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, mutual respect and cooperation.

Lynn Collins notes that “issues will always crop up when kids get together” but she went on to say that “at Emerson when those issues come up, children feel as though they have tools, resources and an effective system to use to help them work through these issues.” She added that this makes her kids feel safer. Administrator Tara O’Neil explains, “Feeling safe and encouraged is crucial to student success. Emerson students have a history of exceptional academic performance. I think that this is due in large part to the environment of mutual respect that we have created, based on Positive Discipline.”

THE EMERSON SCHOOL, HOUSED IN THE NORTH PARK BLOCKS OF DOWNTOWN PORTLAND, IS A K-5 CHARTER SCHOOL SPONSORED BY THE PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT. THE EMERSON SCHOOL WILL BE RECOGNIZED BY THE NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION, POSITIVE DISCIPLINE AS BEING A “NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL FOR POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IN THE CLASSROOM”. THE AWARD WILL BE RECEIVED AT THE NORTH PARK BLOCKS AT COUCH STREET ON AUGUST 28<sup>TH</sup> AT THE BACK-TO-SCHOOL PICNIC 5:00-6:30.

More about Positive Discipline: [www.posdis.org](http://www.posdis.org) or [www.positivediscipline.com](http://www.positivediscipline.com)

More about The Emerson School: [www.theemersonschool.org](http://www.theemersonschool.org)

More about local Positive Discipline parenting classes: [www.positiveparentingpdx.com](http://www.positiveparentingpdx.com)