



Integrated Curriculum and Coaching Make Significant Impact at a NYC Public High School

INTRODUCTION

Schools are prioritizing community well-being like never before. They recognize that young people thrive academically when they feel connected and emotionally healthy, and social, emotional and mental well-being support reduces the risk of a range of negative outcomes - from mental illness to decreased risky behavior to school absenteeism.

They are also aware serious mental health concerns among children and adolescents have risen in recent decades. Yet mental health and well-being is just one of many competing demands on schools' resources, which creates pressure to offer a quick fix and move on.

School counselors, who play a key role in helping students work through challenges, are outnumbered 424:1 on average. "The counselor-to-student ratio is ridiculous at most schools," said John Avritt, a Robin coach and Master Resiliency Trainer and Performance Expert at the R2 Performance Center at Fort Hood, Texas. "The counselors are task-saturated and overwhelmed. They can't stay up to date with what's going on with their students."

At Robin, we honor the courage and commitment it takes to truly pause and foster deep conversations with students. We partner with schools to support the development of healthy skills, habits, and mindsets – both in and out of the classroom.

Robin's integrated coaching and curriculum is proven to cultivate healthy relationships and improve the mental well-being of school communities. Using a coach-practice framework and metacognitive educational philosophy, the program teaches skills and strategies to improve connection.



Spark Connection. Strengthen Community.

Our integrated coaching and curriculum is proven to cultivate healthy relationships and improve the mental well-being of the entire community.

THE CHALLENGE

When schools look for support to attend to the individual needs of students, the sheer number of options can be daunting. In addition, there's little consensus on how mental well-being at school should be defined and measured. That means finding an approach proven to deliver a long-lasting impact is not an easy feat.

During the summer, a premier high school for the development of talent in science, mathematics, and technology partnered with Robin for a month-long program that utilized a coaching and practice model to help students build the skills they need to face life's challenges.

Administrators placed a high value on offering a social-emotional learning solution that would truly engage students. As a specialized public high school where admission is determined by placement on an entrance exam, it is dedicated to academic success, but its mission also includes facilitating each student's social and emotional growth and providing a supportive environment to a diverse student body.

"A lot of edtech companies in the social emotional learning space are very techcentric," said Sonny Thadani, Robin Co-Founder and CEO. "But only human beings can help model and teach how to connect and build community."

"Human connection is at the core of everything we do at Robin," Thadani continued. "With evidence-based integrated coaching and curriculum. Students learn skills such as how to strengthen self-confidence, build healthy relationships and manage their social media use."

While some may have balked in the past at the idea of live coaching, Thadani says as more adults within school ecosystems utilize coaches themselves, the higher their comfort level becomes and the more open they are to the idea of facilitating coaching for their students. Live coaching makes it easier for members of the school community to get past the stigma of talking about mental illness.

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Sometimes I get so tired of hearing the word 'strong.' That's all I heard from my mother, my grandmother, my great-grandmother. But their idea of 'strong' was suppression. They didn't voice their emotions or what they were feeling. Being vulnerable is strength, and I want to show children that.



**Robin Coach
Nyeesha Williams**

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What made the event great for me was that everyone shared the negative things they said about themselves; it made me realize that I'm not the only one who tells myself negative things. I liked that we changed the negative thoughts into positive ones.



**High School
Student**

THE SOLUTION

Social and emotional learning is typically taught in the classroom, both explicitly and embedded into other curriculum. Robin is the first to use a coaching model to teach students how to apply and practice skills that help them:

- **Build self-confidence**
- **Manage their emotions**
- **Develop healthy relationships**
- **Practice effective and respectful communication**
- **Manage feelings of stress and anxiety**



Live Group Coaching

Through sharing their own personal life-challenge stories, the coaches create a safe, supportive space where students can think and talk about their mental well-being. These coaches are accomplished leaders in their fields – including business, nursing, sports psychology, psychiatry, arts, and education – but also people who can build trust and connect with students to lead lively discussions

After consulting with the high school, Robin designed two parallel experiences for students in three grade levels:



Interactive coaching series for educators

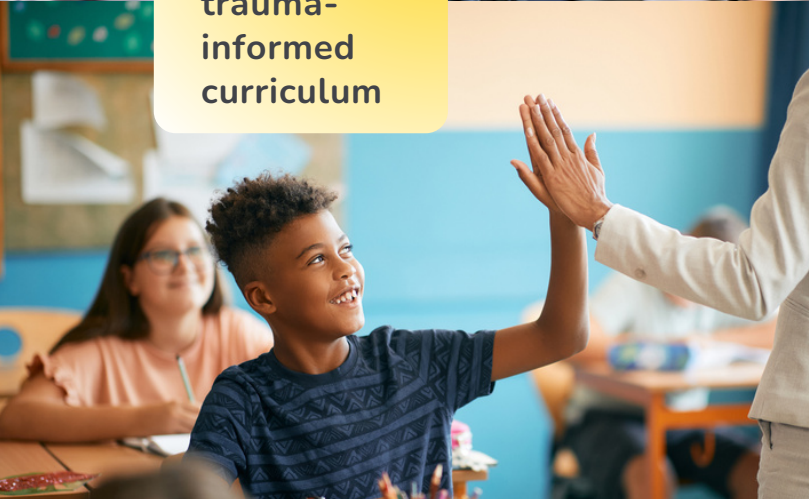
1. A Discovery Program for 9th graders: For four weeks, incoming freshmen received a live coaching experience early in the week, paired with an interactive lesson delving more deeply into the same life challenge later in the week, and daily 5-minute online practice in a gamified format.
2. A coaching and reflection experience for 10th and 11th graders: Sophomores and juniors participated daily in viewing short coaching videos and writing a 5-minute response to prompt reflection on their learning.

For the Discovery Program with 9th graders, Robin incorporated these evidence-based techniques:



Culturally-responsive, trauma-informed curriculum

- Four live group coaching events, one each week from July 6-Aug. 2. Three were live virtual and one was live in person.
- Interactive lesson plans and activities that featured asynchronous videos of the Robin coaches to deepen understanding of skills students had already learned. These 3-minute videos from each coach are used as the basis for longer lesson plans, which include reading and writing prompts, and as separate short exercises emphasizing practice of the skills, mindsets and tools students were taught.



- A Mindfulness Challenge in which more than 100 students participated. After the initial live coaching sessions, students were asked to log in for 30 days in a row. The challenge was a fun, gamified experience that encouraged students to build mentally healthy habits

The program aligned with the Collaborative on Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The multidisciplinary network recommends that school-wide implementation of social-emotional learning incorporate a systemic model that includes explicit and embedded lessons along with youth voice and engagement, adult social-emotional learning, and aligned community partnerships.

“Robin’s model isn’t just focusing on children,” explained Nyeeshia Williams, a Robin coach, clinical researcher, author, and women’s health expert. “They’re focusing on the parents and faculty as well.”

Importantly, this focus differs from the use of instructional coaching solely for educators. Robin’s replicable model uses local experts such as former educators, counselors, mental health coaches, award-winning authors and social workers. In addition, Robin has developed a nationwide network of coaches with expertise in various social-emotional topics.

“Our coaches come from diverse backgrounds and life experiences; teaching skills students actually need to learn, from developing healthier social media habits to identifying and building supportive relationships,” Thadani said.

Robin carefully vets coaches based on their openness and authenticity with young audiences during a detailed hiring process. “The worst thing you can do, even at the junior high level, is to underestimate them and ‘dumb it down,’” Avritt said. “If you do that, they have you where they want you. They will go down to that level. But kids will rise to meet you too. They want to be coached.”

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This event was one of the first things that actually helped me relax and calmed me down.



High School Student

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Robin works with our school to address our specific social-emotional learning needs and provides the best and most personable programs that really benefit our community.



**Michael Parent,
Glen Rock MS +
HS Principal**

THE OUTCOME

25% avg. increase in Robin Connection Diagnostic Assessment[®] scores

83% of students “likely” or “very likely” to use the skills taught

16% increase in students feeling a sense of community at school

The high school's Discovery program was the first to implement and measure the effects of the integrated coaching and curriculum on skill building and student well-being. The impact was measured by the Robin Connection Diagnostic Assessment[®], which assesses the degree to which students feel connected to others within their social and home environments and provides valuable insights into the growth of the community's collective feeling of connection and belonging.

Increased levels of connectedness lead to lower psychological stress, including anxiety and lonelinessⁱ and are the foundation of the Robin effort to include human interaction with coachesⁱⁱ at the intersection of social-emotional learning and mental well-being.

Results showed 25% increases in connectedness scores, with the largest gains among students who had initially scored the lowest. Results from the 9th-grade students showed a significant increase in overall connection and well-being in relation to themselves, their families, their school, and their peers.

Overall quantitative results rose from 4.94 (areas for targeted improvement) to 5.45 (areas of strength) overall on a scale of 7.ⁱⁱⁱ



Discovery Program for 9th Graders	Pre-Program	Post-Program
Number of student responses	156	100
Average Connection Score	4.94	5.45
Students scoring above a 5	44.23%	64.96%
Students who were likely or very likely to use the skills taught	N/A	83%
Response to the statement “At my school, people care for one another.”	5.06	5.91
Response to the statement “I feel a sense of community at my school.”	5.28	6.10

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I learned how to stay motivated and resilient when facing difficult situations.



High School Student

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I really enjoyed the interactive aspect of the seminar. I think that it was a great way to help and introduce students and get rid of the awkwardness and apprehension.



High School Student

Researchers also found that:

- More than 90% of students stated that they were “likely” or “very likely” to practice the skills in the Power of the Voice lesson from coach Marshall Davis Jones.
- Faculty liked the asynchronous social-emotional learning option for the sophomores and juniors, who used the video coaching library as part of an advisory activity and exit ticket for the day.

The qualitative results from the program were also resoundingly positive. “We heard from students that no one was what we at Robin call ‘sparking a conversation,’” Thadani said. “Our coaches were allowing them to be free to talk about something more emotional – which they might not have done in an assembly at school.”

i Lee, R.M., Draper, M., and Lee, S. (2001). Social connectedness, dysfunctional interpersonal behaviors, and psychological distress: Testing a mediator model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 48(3), 310-318. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.48.3.310>

ii Sezer, S. (2016). The Effects of Educational Coaching on Students' Academic Motivation, Error-Orientation Motivation and Educational Stress. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 2016(Special): 850-855.

iii In scoring the Connectedness Scale, items are summed and the mean average is taken; a higher score indicates a greater connection. A score of 1-3 indicates areas for close attention and possible intervention. A score of 3.01-5 indicates areas for observation and targeted improvement. A score of 5.01-7 indicates areas of strength.