



Dear Parents,

In 2008, The German School Washington D.C. voted a new program called **act.now** (Active Competency Training) into its curriculum. The goal of this program is to strengthen key social skills for students in grades 5-10. The social skills trainings are conducted by trainers from Gunzburg & Associates, a private local organization that supports students and families not only in schools, but in private practice as well www.gunzburgandassociates.com . Joel Gunzburg was an essential part of the development of the **act.now** program from the very beginning and supported us as a trainer and coordinator for several years. We are thrilled to be working with him and his team, and have gotten very positive feedback from the students about their experiences with Lauren Fliegel and Ryan Long, who are conducting the training sessions at our school. The trainers have many years of experience working with students individually and in groups, and their friendly, compassionate and professional attitudes are a great addition to this program.

Students in grades 5-10 receive 3 training sessions per year (90 minutes each) spread out over the entire school year. Every effort is made to ensure that training times are fairly distributed among the subjects, and students should not miss more than one double period in any subject for training during the school year. For the training sessions, boys and girls will meet with their trainers in separate rooms to discuss such topics as friendships, gossip, bullying, peer pressure, drug/alcohol awareness, conflict resolution, internet safety and other fundamental social issues. Teachers are not present in the class during training to allow the students to speak about their feelings freely. Topics have been chosen based on several factors, including parent – and - teacher feed-back, student questionnaires and relevancy to our school's mission. The trainings address topics in an age-appropriate manner, using a variety of approaches, including discussions, role-play, group activities, work sheets, etc. Although the topics mentioned above are the focus of the training sessions, we try to be flexible. The trainers will address the needs of the students as quickly as possible in an effort to keep the subjects current and interesting and to make sure that the students have the maximum benefit from the program. The program is continually monitored by a group of staff, parents, and students who evaluate the trainings to ensure quality instruction for the students.

As the program is part of the school's curriculum, students are required to attend, and all students are encouraged to share in the group. However, no child is forced to volunteer information if they feel uncomfortable. The training sessions are conducted in English, but students who are more comfortable in German may also contribute to the discussion in German if they wish and ask a classmate to translate. The trainers keep the information that students choose to share confidential, but may pass on concerns to the counselor if the need arises. Before classes begin, trainers will remind the students about the importance of respect for each other during the discussion, as well as the need to keep personal information of others confidential. Also, they will be instructed to speak only about their own feelings and not to discuss other students.

As Mr. Gunzburg reminds us, social learning takes place in school and other social settings, but the morals of how we interpret and cope with specific social situations are debated and processed at home with our families. We therefore strongly encourage you to talk to your children about their experiences in Social Skills and use the questions your children may bring home to stimulate conversation. This will allow your child to combine what he or she is learning in the classroom with your family's own morals and principals. Students typically enjoy sharing during their training sessions. However, we understand that some topics may be more difficult than others, and may require a little extra support to process at home. This is not uncommon. However, you know your child best. If you are concerned for your child and feel that they are struggling emotionally, please do not hesitate to let us know. I can be reached either by phone at 301-767-3805 or via email at counselor@dswash.org. You may also contact Gunzburg and Associates, who are certainly available to talk. I will be happy to give you their contact details upon request. As always, if you have questions, concerns, or suggestions, please share them with us. We look forward to another successful year and thank you for your cooperation and support.

Kind regards,

Klara Fabina, M.Ed.

Director of Guidance