

## TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

### Mary Cotoia, 1st Grade Teacher

Every Friday after recess, Mary's first graders are eagerly anticipating their 30-minute visit with Miss Shannon from the **ResilientKids** program, which follows the best practices in mindfulness and social emotional learning. "It looks like games to the kids, but really, they are learning new strategies for recognizing their emotions and regulating their bodies," Mary said.

Through Resilient Kids, the first graders learn breathing techniques to calm their anxiety and focusing skills to improve their school performance and tools. "They find their anchor," Mary explained. "These six-year-olds put their hand over their chest or belly and they become mindful of their breathing." Mary added, "Starting early is the way to go because they gain tools for life."

Resilient Kids also provides Mary's students with a primary for identifying emotions. "Sad is different from angry, happy looks different than excited, excited might look different from anxious," she explained. "If they can verbalize how they feel, then they can recognize those feelings in others and show empathy."

This has a real impact on group dynamics, according to Mary. "We do a lot of group work and partner work. Some of the conversation that I hear in the groups is a direct result of what they are learning in Resilient Kids." She added, "In some aspects, they can start to learn conflict resolution with each other."

Mary acknowledged that the strategies children acquire through the Resilient Kids program can have effects far beyond the classroom. "Some of the things happening at home with these little ones shouldn't be happening to anyone. They need the tools to deal with that."

"If they grow up to be kind, empathetic responsible people, there's the big win."