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## COURAGEOUS SCHOOLS

### Putting Social & Emotional Learning at the Heart of Education

By Tom Roderick

“Our schools should be preparing kids for the test of life,” quipped a speaker at a conference I attended recently. “Instead they’re simply subjecting kids to a life of tests!”

Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs address important needs virtually ignored during the current age of test prep. They help young people develop skills to deal effectively with the real-life challenges they’ll face in school, at home, at work, and as citizens, now and in the future.

That’s why Morningside Center is committed

to building a movement to make SEL an integral part of every child’s education.

We define SEL as the process by which we develop our capacity to understand and manage feelings, relate well to others, make good decisions, effectively handle conflict and other life challenges, and take responsibility for improving our communities—from the classroom to the world.

In the past, school-based “conflict resolution” or “anti-bullying” programs were often seen as discreet interventions, often focusing on “at risk”

## P.S. 24 Principal Christina Fuentes:

# ‘YOU CAN’T BE DRIVEN BY FEAR’

ACTIONNEWS is the member newsletter of Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility.

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P.S. 24’s intimate auditorium is bursting with children, parents, and staff eager to witness the culmination of the fifth graders’ work with a resident artist who has been teaching them Mexican dance. Carlos, a fifth grader with no mobility in his legs who has always been painfully shy, appears on stage in his wheelchair. Dressed in costume and holding a microphone, he quiets the audience and explains what they are about to see. As the dancing unfolds before the delighted audience, Carlos, deftly steering his wheelchair, joins in the dance as well. “For the kids I’m sure it didn’t seem like anything unusual,” reflects Christina Fuentes, P.S. 24’s principal. “But for the adults, it was a very special moment.”

Fuentes recalls this story in explaining why the arts are an essential part of the curriculum at P.S. 24. “We’re trying to provide an excellent education, and understanding the arts is the mark of a well-educated person. The arts provide entry points for kids who may not be academically oriented.

They are also a way to express culture.”

In 2002, P.S. 24 was labeled a School-In-Need-of-Improvement (SINI) under the No Child Left Behind Act. Many school leaders have responded to the SINI stigma by making test-prep their top priority.

Not Fuentes. “We do our best to prepare the students for the tests,” she explains. “It would be irresponsible not to. But we don’t deprive them of a well-rounded education. We ask ourselves, what would we want for our own children? We’d want teachers who are professionals, who are the chief scholars in the room, learning as well as teaching. We’d want a rich curriculum that integrates learning across the disciplines. We’d want social studies, science, the arts, and social and emotional learning.”

### PS 24’S STORY IS ABOUT PUBLIC EDUCATION AT ITS BEST

The story of P.S. 24 is about public education at its best. It is also about the extraordinary efforts required to overcome the barriers current federal, state, and city policies throw in the way of educators committed to giving low-income children of color the education they deserve.

P.S. 24, the Dual-Language School for International Studies, is located in the largely Latino, working class neighborhood of Sunset Park in Brooklyn. Nearly half of the school’s 780 students in grades pre-k – 5 are “English language learners.” Many of the children’s families have emigrated from Mexico,

the Dominican Republic, or Ecuador. Almost all of the students are low-income

P.S. 24’s dual language program is at the heart of their vision. Half of the school’s 42 classes are dual language with half of the children in those classes Spanish-proficient and half English-proficient.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is another priority at P.S. 24. “Attending to social and emotional needs is critical,” insists Fuentes. “If we want kids to be risk-takers intellectually, we need to help them feel safe in school and at home. The more we address emotional needs, the fewer discipline problems we have. It’s not only the right thing to do morally, it helps kids academically.” Morningside Center has been helping P.S. 24 foster social and emotional learning since the school opened its doors in 1997.

P.S. 24 views social and emotional learning as an essential ingredient for success in life and participation in a democratic society. As such, it is for everybody, not only for so-called “high-risk” students as it is in some schools.

P.S. 24’s approach gives equal weight to classroom instruction and student leadership. Teachers help students develop skills in listening, assertiveness, anger management, and problem-

solving through lessons based on Morningside Center's 4Rs curriculum (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution), which integrates conflict resolution and language arts.

Ninety-five students, grades 3-5, trained as peer mediators, help their peers talk out conflicts in P.S. 24's cafeteria, playground, and classrooms. P.S. 24's "Peace Helpers" Program got started several years ago when an ambitious second-grader insisted that although he was too young to be a mediator, he knew he could help make peace. Morningside Center's staff developer Emma Gonzalez trained him to be a peace helper, and he worked with his teacher to create a peace corner in his classroom. A peace corner is a place where students who are upset or in conflict can go to calm down, read, think, and perhaps discuss their situation with a peace helper. The school now has dozens of peace helpers who have helped their teachers set up peace corners in all K-2 classrooms.

The 4Rs curriculum has a unit on diversity. Students share information about their cultural backgrounds and practice skills in standing up to teasing and bullying. Teachers at P.S. 24 give special attention to the topic during an annual "diversity month" in the spring. A recent innovation, the "student diversity panel," has taken the work to a new level. A panel typically includes five students representing various forms of diversity (for example, an African-American, a boy

who is short, a girl with only one hand, an Asian American, a Dominican-American). With support from Morningside Center's staff developer, the panel makes presentations in classrooms.

The clear vision and hard work of Fuentes, her staff, and her nonprofit partners are paying off. P.S. 24 is a model for dual language instruction and for social and emotional learning. Visitors come from near and far to learn from the school's practices. The NYC Department of Education acknowledges the school's achievements. P.S. 24 consistently receives an "A" on its report card. The DOE gave the school an excellence award for outstanding school-wide progress in math and English language arts, and called the school exemplary in closing the achievement gap. P.S. 24 was one of a handful of New York City's 1400 public schools rated as "outstanding" in all five areas evaluated in the school's 2008-2009 Quality Review.

Christina Fuentes offers the following advice to the thousands of educators throughout the country who labor day in and day out to put children first: "You can't be driven by fear. You have to be

confident of where you're going. You have to have a clear vision and keep your eyes on that prize. You can't sneak around, you can't do this job scared. I must follow my convictions. If this is not acceptable to those in power, they will have to move me on. Some principals are fearful of losing their jobs. But if your decisions are truly based on what is best for students, you can sleep well at night. I'm not going to compromise my deepest convictions. Those convictions are why I do what I do. They're what keep me going."

—Tom Roderick



*The NYC Department of Education kicked off Respect for All Week this March at PS 24. Clockwise from upper right: Christina Fuentes, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, PS 24 students, Chancellor Joel Klein, and Morningside Center's Tom Roderick.*

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children.

By contrast, social and emotional learning is for everyone. That's the point Daniel Goleman made in his 1995 bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.

In addition to being a learning process, SEL can be a powerful organizing framework for analysis and action. We can look at everything that goes on in a school and ask: to what extent does it contribute to (or undermine) students' positive social and emotional development?

This SEL conceptual framework can become a powerful tool for school improvement—dare we say transformation! As a school integrates SEL into its daily life—from the playground to the classroom to the principal's office—students feel safer and more motivated to learn, adults get more satisfaction from their work, and student achievement goes up. Equally important, students develop skills they'll use for the rest of their lives.

Since 1985, Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility has been implementing SEL programs in the New York City public schools. Over the years, and in collaboration with school leaders and leaders in the field, we have developed a clear sense of what

it means for a school to embrace SEL—to put SEL at the heart of its curriculum and culture. Our vision of a great SEL school has six components.

### **1. The school is a learning organization based on inquiry, collaborative problem-solving, and collegiality.**

Intelligence is the ability to construct fresh, accurate responses to each new moment. To flourish in our rapidly changing environment, school leaders need to be intelligent in this sense: alert to new information, able to adapt and change when necessary, striving for constant improvement.

An intelligent organization is a healthy organization. People feel their voices are heard; channels of communication are open; there's no back-biting or gossip; people are working together for the good of all; members of the organization are getting better and better at doing their jobs; morale is high.

To create a healthy school culture, school leaders need to model good social and emotional skills and provide ample opportunities for school staff and students to develop their social and emotional skills as well. Here are some steps the school's leadership can take to move a school in this direction:

- Self-Assessment. The

school leader conducts a self-assessment of his or her social and emotional skills, and identifies strengths and areas for improvement.

- Inquiry-based collaborative planning. An SEL committee that is representative of key constituencies in the school lays the foundation for integrating SEL into the culture and curriculum of the school.

- Professional development. Training and coaching are essential in supporting the development of SEL in a school. Equally important is ongoing planning, sharing of experiences, and problem-solving. Time needs to be set aside for these activities.

- Team building. To build a collaborative culture, school staff members need opportunities to focus on strengthening their relationships with each other without the pressure of a high-stakes task to perform.

### **2. Students are developing their social and emotional skills through regular classroom instruction.**

Like math, reading, or science, SEL is a discipline that includes knowledge, attitudes, and skills. And as with other disciplines, students come to school with varying degrees of

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## From the Executive Director



Tom Roderick

# THE RESULTS ARE IN:

*SEL programs help kids socially, emotionally & academically*

Is there hard scientific evidence that programs for fostering children's social and emotional learning really work?

Yes indeed—and new findings from a scientific evaluation of Morningside Center's 4Rs Program (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution) are a prime example.

This fall, top peer-reviewed journals will publish the first results from a rigorous federally funded 3-year study of The 4Rs. This is one of the first gold-standard studies to examine at the classroom level the effects of a program that integrates SEL with an academic subject (in this case language arts).

A university-based research team, led by Drs. J. Lawrence Aber, Joshua Brown and Stephanie Jones, conducted the study. For three years (2004-2007), Morningside Center trained and coached all of the teachers in nine NYC public elementary schools to support them in teaching the 4Rs curriculum to their students on a weekly basis. Gathering data in the fall and spring of each year, the researchers tracked the social, emotional and academic development of children in the nine schools compared with children in nine "control" schools.

After much data-crunching, the researchers are now reporting results from the first two years of the study, which will soon appear in two

prestigious journals: *Child Development* and the *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

- Children in 4Rs schools showed lower rates of depression and were less likely to ascribe hostile motives to others in ambiguous situations.

- Teachers in the 4Rs schools reported declines in children's attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms compared to increases in control schools.

- Teachers in the 4Rs schools reported increases in social competence, compared to declines in the control schools.

- Teachers in the 4Rs schools reported significantly slower growth in children's aggression—compared to steep increases in the control schools.

- Students identified by their teachers as at highest behavioral and academic risk had better attendance than their counterparts in the control schools, and their teachers gave them higher ratings for academic progress.

- The 4Rs dramatically improved the standardized math and reading achievement scores for the 8% of students who were most behaviorally disruptive at the start of the intervention.

Researchers also analyzed classroom quality in 4Rs versus non-4Rs schools. Classrooms in 4Rs schools had significantly



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higher levels of emotional and instructional support compared to classrooms in control schools.

The 4Rs study is Morningside Center's contribution to a growing body of evidence about the efficacy of SEL programs. *Child Development* will also soon publish findings from a "meta-analysis" of over 200 studies of SEL interventions for over 270,000 students.

The results: Students in SEL programs had better grades, better attendance, better behavior, and higher test scores. Visit [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org) for a full report on this research.

The conclusion: High-quality programs to foster social and emotional learning should be part of every child's education.

**A gold-standard study of The 4Rs adds strong new evidence that SEL programs can work.**

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competence. Best practice in fostering SEL absolutely requires consistent instruction using a research-based SEL curriculum. The curriculum introduces students to the key ideas of SEL and gives them a safe place

in an SEL curriculum as the foundation, teachers can integrate SEL into other areas of the curriculum—to great advantage. By doing so, they not only foster SEL, they enrich the other areas of the curriculum.

Morningside Center's 4Rs Program (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution) is an example of a fully developed curriculum that integrates conflict resolution and language arts.

But there are many informal ways teachers can infuse SEL activities into whatever subject area they're teaching. It's especially easy with language arts and social studies. The students are reading a story or studying a historical event that involves a conflict, as many great stories and events do, and the teacher engages the students in discussion about such questions as, How do you think the various characters are feeling? What choices do they have in this situation? How would you suggest they solve the conflict? Does their conflict remind you of a situation you've experienced?

### 3. *The approach to discipline fosters SEL.*

An approach to discipline aligned with SEL helps students internalize values of caring and responsibility. It helps young people learn to meet their own needs while fulfilling their responsibilities to others. Self-reflection is the essential ingredient.

Teachers sometimes complain that "I've taught the lessons, but the kids don't apply what they're learning in real-life situations." The school day represents a huge chunk of "real life" for students. They have many opportunities to apply the social and emotional skills they are learning in their SEL lessons.

But they need adults to help them reflect on the connections between yesterday's SEL lesson and the behavior that got them into trouble or hurt someone's feelings today. Did the student lash out without thinking? Did he remember to apply those techniques we practiced for cooling down when we're angry? Did he fail to listen and jump to conclusions? Did he remember how to be strong and not mean in standing up for himself?

If the adults compartmentalize, putting SEL lessons in one box and "discipline" in another box, it's not surprising that the kids don't make the connections between the lessons and their behavior. We need to support young people in seeing the connections between classroom exercises and real life. When we do this, the whole school day becomes a laboratory for students to develop their social and emotional skills.

Here are the building blocks of an approach to discipline aligned with SEL:

- A tailored school discipline plan.
- Support for teachers in promoting positive classroom behavior.



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The school day represents a huge chunk of 'real life' for students, with many opportunities to apply the social & emotional skills they are learning.

to discuss ideas and practice skills in such areas as listening, handling feelings, assertiveness, and problem solving.

A growing body of scientific research shows that SEL programs can improve students' behavior. The data also show that we don't have to choose between fostering social and emotional learning and boosting students' academic achievement. They go hand in hand. The research has also identified the ingredients of effective instruction. It is Sequenced, Active, Focused, and Explicit—that is, SAFE. (For more information visit the website of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org).)

With regular instruction

- Procedures and supervision to provide a positive environment for students during their out-of-classroom time.
- Effective interventions for students who need extra help in developing their SEL skills.

**4. The school celebrates diversity, counters discrimination and strives for a culture based on respect.**

Prejudice and discrimination are realities in our world. We all receive misinformation about the groups we're part of and about other groups. We all develop prejudices. It's not our fault, but it is our responsibility to examine our prejudices and make sure that we're not using them as an excuse to treat other people unfairly.

Charged with fostering the positive development of young people, educators have a special responsibility to encourage respect for people regardless of their race, color, religion, gender, gender expression, gender identity, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, citizenship/immigration status, and disability. We must do our part to prevent the horrendous human suffering that results when one group oppresses another. In our schools we have the responsibility to ensure that all members of the school community are safe and feel comfortable so that they can do their best learning—and go on to become positive members of their community.

Here are key strategies for ensuring respect for all:

- The school's leadership and teachers take a strong and



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highly visible stand against discrimination in all of its forms.

- School staff and students are alert to any signs of bullying and immediately use evidence-based approaches to eliminate it.
- School staff members develop their awareness of prejudice and their skills in stopping bias-related behavior and use it as a teaching opportunity.
- Students receive classroom instruction through an evidence-based program that includes components on celebrating differences and standing up to discrimination.
- Students have a chance to be leaders in promoting respect among their peers.

**5. Students are developing their leadership skills by making positive contributions to their school community.**

SEL goes beyond developing individuals' social and emotional skills. It involves developing a sense of responsibility to others—both nearby and far away. To foster SEL, schools must give young people substantial opportunities

to contribute to the school community. We need to give students the message that they have a responsibility to make a positive difference in the world and that they have important contributions to make.

By engaging students in taking leadership, adults gain powerful allies in creating a positive school community. Through leadership activities such as peer mediation, students get a chance to reinforce the skills they're learning in classroom lessons by using them in real-life situations. Leadership programs also increase students' connection to school by helping to meet their basic human need to belong and to make a difference.

**6. The school keeps parents informed of the school's efforts to foster SEL and engages parents in activities to develop their social and emotional skills.**

Parents and guardians are the major influence in children's lives, even during children's adolescent years, when many children seem to be  
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4Rs classroom in Brooklyn.

Students need the chance to become leaders in promoting respect among all their peers.

# Building an SEL movement

CAROLINA KROON



A young leader at Brooklyn's PS 24.

As part of our effort to help build a national movement to put social and emotional learning at the heart of education, Morningside Center has entered into a strategic partnership with CASEL (the Collaborative for Social & Emotional Learning), a national organization based in Chicago.

CASEL, co-founded in 1994 by Daniel Goleman, the author of *Emotional Intelligence*, has taken

a leading role in developing the field of social and emotional learning.

The organization has been especially effective in gathering together the growing scientific

research demonstrating the impact of SEL programs.

Through CASEL, Morningside Center has been working with other leading SEL organizations from around the country (such as the Developmental Studies Center and the Committee for Children), to help shape a strategy to make SEL a cornerstone of school improvement nationwide.

Here are some aspects of the emerging strategy:

- We need to build public and political will to support SEL nationwide. This includes helping kindred movements see how SEL can be a framework for school transformation.
- State and federal policies can help set the stage for expanding SEL. For instance, the state of Illinois recently

adopted SEL standards, opening the door for increased public demand and funding. Advocates have also introduced federal legislation: the Academic, Social & Emotional Learning Act.

- SEL will scale up primarily through superintendents and school boards that adopt and implement SEL. Through districts, SEL can be integrated systemically—across grades, into curricula, and into professional development programs.

- We need to create tools to support districts in implementing high-quality SEL programs.

- Much hinges on our efforts to engage and provide effective support for teachers and principals in adopting and delivering excellent SEL programs.

## COURAGEOUS SCHOOLS

giving their parents the message, “Get lost!” The stronger the parents’ social and emotional skills, the more effectively they can support their children’s positive development. A school that embraces SEL sees parents as an integral part of the school community and keeps them informed about SEL activities (for instance, classroom instruction or peer mediation). Here are some ways to do this:

- Teachers or guidance counselors experienced in SEL provide parenting workshops.
- Children do skits and

facilitate activities at parent association meetings to demonstrate what they’re learning in SEL classes.

- Parents are invited to a celebration to inaugurate newly trained peer mediators.
- The school offers ESL classes for parents who are recent immigrants.
- Parents do activities with children at home in conjunction with a classroom curriculum like The 4Rs.

How does a school move from where it is now toward full implementation of SEL? It must undertake a long-term process of organizational change. And

though the ultimate aim is to educate the students, that change process begins with the adults.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility provide books and pamphlets, consultation, and training to support schools in this journey. Visit our websites at [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org) and [www.morningsidecenter.org](http://www.morningsidecenter.org).

*Tom Roderick is executive director of Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility.*

# MORNINGSIDE CENTER: WHO WE ARE, WHAT WE DO

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility has been educating young people for hopeful and intelligent engagement with their world since 1982. In 1985 we founded the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program in collaboration with the NYC Board of Education. Since then, we've developed an array of programs that have helped thousands of educators and hundreds of thousands of young people (pre-K to 12) develop their social and emotional skills. While our focus has been on the NYC public schools, we also work with schools in other parts of the country.

Our programs include:

## INTENSIVE CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

We provide professional development to support teachers in consistently teaching our social & emotional learning (SEL) curricula. Our classroom instruction programs include:

- *The 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution)* develops the academic, social & emotional skills of students from pre-K through middle school by integrating SEL into a core academic area (language arts).

- *Resolving Conflict Creatively (RCCP)* develops the social & emotional skills of students grades K-12.

- *Pathways to Respect* is our research-based program for eliminating bullying in middle schools. It addresses the problem

on three levels: school-wide, classroom, and individual. The curriculum component is 4Rs for Middle School.

- *Nothing Like My Home* combines SEL with social studies and the arts through an engaging classroom curriculum on the Iraqi refugee crisis. Last year hundreds of high school students from schools in New York and three other cities around the country participated in the project.

## STUDENT LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

We provide school-based training and support for students (K -12) in becoming leaders in their schools and communities. We also provide technical assistance to help schools set up effective student leadership programs. Our programs include:

- *Peer Mediation.* Selected young people, grades 3-12, (usually 25-30 students per school) learn basic SEL skills and master a step-by-step mediation process. They then serve their schools by mediating disputes among their peers.

- *Peace Helpers.* Students from grades K-2 work with their teachers to establish classroom Peace Corners and help their classmates address problems.

- *Diversity Panels.* Panels made up of students representing various forms of diversity make classroom presentations to trigger discussion of how the school can ensure respect for all.



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RAEFORD DWYER PHOTOGRAPHY

From top, PAZ @ PS 24 (Brooklyn); The 4Rs at Brooklyn's PS 81; PAZ @ PS 214 (Bronx) visits the Bronx Botanical Garden.

## AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

• *PAZ (Peace from A to Z) After-School Program @ P.S. 24* serves 255 children in Sunset Park, Brooklyn with a program of conflict resolution instruction, cooperative sports, arts, community service, and homework help. PAZ @ P.S. 24 operates from 3-6 every school day afternoon and all day during 20 school holidays and the summer.

• *Supplemental Educational Services Program @ P.S. 24* provides after-school tutoring services for about 400 students at P.S. 24. The program integrates SEL and is aligned with PAZ and with P.S. 24's progressive approach to education.

• *PAZ @ P.S. 214* serves 132 middle school students in the Bronx with a rich program of conflict resolution, health and nutrition workshops, and an outdoors program (PAZ into the Woods). PAZ @ P.S. 214 operates from 3-5 Monday through Thursday, and all day on holidays.

## MODEL SCHOOLS

We are now partnering with eight schools to support them, over time, in

implementing a comprehensive school-wide SEL model that we first developed in collaboration with P.S. 24. The model includes regular instruction for students in The 4Rs; an approach to discipline that is aligned with SEL; student leadership programs; and, in two schools, our PAZ after-school program. We are now piloting a new guide for these model schools called Educating the Heart as Well as the Mind.

## STAND-ALONE WORKSHOPS

Our staff developers provide engaging, interactive stand-alone SEL workshops for school staff, including teachers, guidance counselors, and school aides. In the past two years, we have conducted workshops for thousands of school staff from around the city through Respect for All, an initiative of the NYC Department of Education. We helped develop the two-day Respect for All workshops, which give school staff tools they need to foster respect and counter bullying, especially of lesbian and gay

students.

## RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Morningside Center collaborates with researchers to evaluate the impact of our programs and contribute knowledge to the field. Current research collaborations include The 4Rs Research Project and the CLASS/My Teaching Partner Project.

## WEBSITES

In 2010, with help from the Taproot Foundation, we are developing our website [MorningsideCenter.Org](http://MorningsideCenter.Org) into an engaging center for teachers and other SEL practitioners. Our website [TeachableMoment.Org](http://TeachableMoment.Org) offers educators timely, inquiry-oriented classroom lessons on current issues, drawing over 50,000 visitors a month.

## CONTACT US!

We're available to bring our programs to your school! Contact Lillian Castro: [lcastro@morningsidecenter.org](mailto:lcastro@morningsidecenter.org); 212-870-3318 x33. Or visit [www.morningsidecenter.org](http://www.morningsidecenter.org).



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