

Solving the Four-Square Conflict



How two Fly Five ambassadors turned four-square into a teachable moment

The Challenge

At the beginning of the school year, fifth grade co-teachers Ina Pannell-Saint Surin and Laura Burns heard about a conflict on the playground. Students were having a hard time transitioning from recess back into class, and the tension—from a popular game of four square—was creeping in.

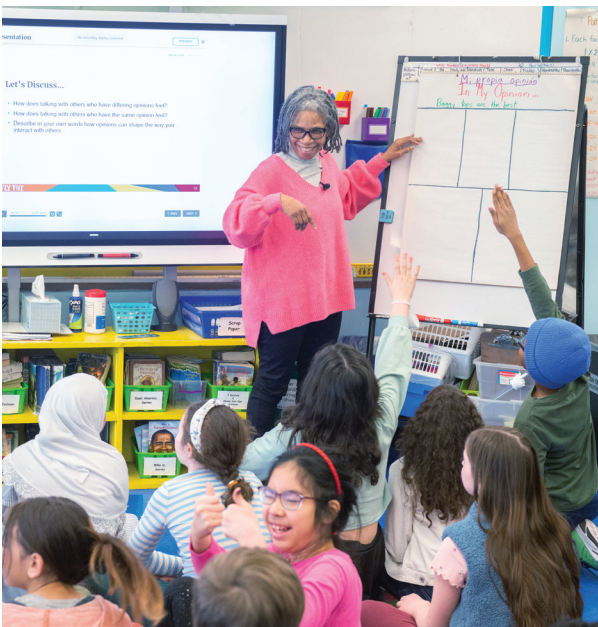
Together, both co-teaches shifted gears to cover Fly Five lessons on assertiveness, where students practiced developmentally appropriate strategies for how to seek help, problem-solve, and peer mediation skills.

From Four-Square to Four Strategies

Ina knew something had to change, and that implementing social-emotional learning strategies was the answer. Over the course of two months, students began to tackle the issue of four-square together. They were given opportunities

“Week after week, we gave them exercises to try that incorporated the four-square conflict —with the help of Fly Five.” —Ina Pannell-Saint Surin

to express themselves through new vocabulary, role-play how a fair four square game is played, and rewrite the rules in a way that not only benefits their classroom community—but all fifth graders in the school.



ANGER: *(WHAT HELPED?)*

HOW WE RESPOND MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE

CONSTRUCTIVE	DEESTRUCTIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I NEED A BREAK • I'M ANGRY • NEVER LISTENING & SHARING BOTH SIDES • ENDING THE ARGUMENT • CONSIDER ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE • "I NEED A MINUTE" • TALK & LISTEN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YELLING WITHOUT KNOWING • USING THE IPAD WITHOUT ASKING • TRYING TO MAKE SOMEONE FEEL BAD • HITTING/PUNCHING PEOPLE

Each of these Fly Five strategies played a role in ushering Ina and Laura’s class through the four steps of conflict resolution:

The Four Conflict Resolution Steps

1. Summarize your thoughts and feelings as well as others’ thoughts and feelings.
2. Consider what works best for everyone.
3. Create three options for a compromise.
4. Choose the best compromise together.

A Brand New Court

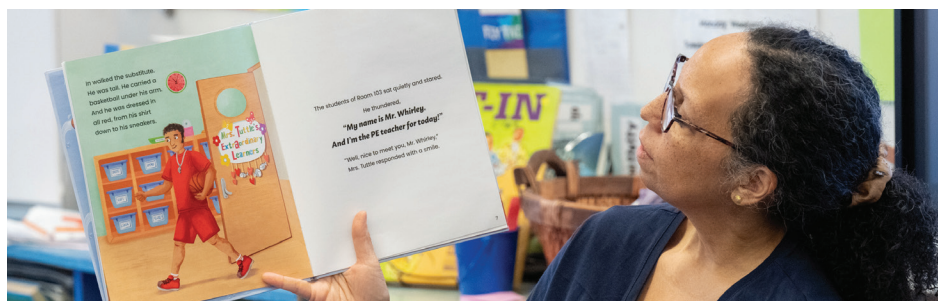
Putting their Fly Five assertiveness skills into action and deepening their competence, students in Ina and Laura’s classroom wrote a pledge dedicated to making four-square more fair for all players. After getting signatures from students in each fifth-grade classroom, they began applying their conflict resolution techniques on the court and asking adults for help in the moment.



“It’s a real-time, real-life situation, where after we talked about it and students got involved—in some ways—they lead the charge.” — Laura Burns



“Fly Five has really increased how we all look out for each other and can problem-solve by ourselves.”
— Serena
Fly Five fifth Grader



Ina and Laura saw that students were taking their skills beyond Fly Five lessons. Students began to feel like they had a voice and agency to navigate sticky situations, which resulted in their school adding a second—brand new—four-square court on the playground. 🏀