

Secondary Level Restorative Practices

As a follow up to the elementary level bully prevention and character development practices reported in our spring 2012 newsletter, Citizens For Education is now looking at the secondary level (grades 7-12). In Council Rock, the secondary level relies on Restorative Practices to assist in preventing and addressing bullying and other undesirable behaviors.

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) states that the premise of Restorative Practices is “that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.” Restorative Practices is used to manage student behavior and teach students to take responsibility for their actions. It is considered preventive because it is applied before a significant problem has developed, compared to Restorative Justice, which is reactive, i.e., applied after the problem has occurred.

Newtown Middle School (NMS) initiated this program in Council Rock, led by then Assistant Principal Richard Hollahan. The NMS program began with IIRP provided trainers and data was collected for three years. The results of that study, shown below, indicated a significant decrease in behavior problems and lower numbers of detentions and suspensions. After analyzing the data, all of the secondary level schools began to employ Restorative Practices.

Infractions	05-06	04-05	03-04		Response	05-06	04-05	03-04
Misbehavior (hall, class, bus)	69	161	147		Restorative Conference	29	2	0
					Detention	71	182	396
Physical Altercation	9	20	41		Saturday Detention	24	103	67
Fighting	2	5	8		Suspension (1day)	17	69	41
Threats	2	7	8		Suspension (2 day)	8	35	22
Theft	5	5	10		Suspension (3 day)	8	16	13

In Council Rock middle schools, Restorative Practices has two main components: circles and restorative conferences. Circles occur during RA period or other times as the need arises. They are used to build relationships and are often topic driven. Circles allow each person to share their feelings and listen to others' in a safe and controlled environment.

Restorative conferences are run by an administrator (sometimes not the building administrator where the action occurred to promote neutrality) and sometimes include teachers, affected students and parents. This concept holds that the relationship has to improve before it can be repaired. This is accomplished by students sharing the personal impact of the undesirable act, and what each party was thinking as this occurred. This is viewed as a fair process as students feel they have a voice. The following are examples of questions asked during Restorative Conferences:

Restorative Questions #1 (to respond to challenging behavior):

1. What happened?
2. What were you thinking at the time?
3. What have you thought about since?
4. Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
5. What do you think you need to do to make things right?

Restorative Questions #2 (to help those harmed by others' actions)

1. What did you think when you realized what had happened?
2. What impact has this incident had on you and others?
3. What has been the hardest thing for you?
4. What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

All three middle schools have activities to bring students together to create a school family. There are opportunities for students and staff to interact over the summer. All three middle schools have boys and girls "Nights Out". The sixth to seventh grade transition has developed to include collaboration between sixth and seventh grade teachers. Recently all sixth grade teachers were required to visit a seventh grade classroom and seventh grade teachers did the same in sixth grade classrooms. Newtown Middle has transition coaches to help new students become acclimated to the middle school.

At the high school level, peer mentoring programs have been developed. CR North has been using the KOMs (Kick-Off Mentors) peer mentoring program for a number of years and recently CR South has developed its own program. Both programs were funded initially by the Council Rock Education Foundation. These programs enlist upper level students as peer mentors who interact with ninth grade students to help students adjust to their high school. This is all in an effort to develop positive relationships to prevent bullying. Restorative conferences are used when needed. Both high schools also use circles, like the middle school, but not during a certain period of the day. CR South is looking into doing boys and girls "Nights Out," like the middle schools. CR North has pursued different initiatives such as a Diversity Committee.

Due to the cost of training on Restorative Practices, a trainer model was developed. Council Rock now has seven trainers who in turn train staff. They are Richard Hollahan, Tim Long, Tim Keddie, Matt Schram, Mike Reid, Shighlah Jackson and Tammy Cook. Trainers must renew annually with IIRP at a nominal cost of \$100 per trainer. Restorative Practices training is included in the new teacher induction program so that every teacher knows this process.

As social networking has evolved, the district has seen problems spill over into school from actions that occur outside of the school day. The issues inherent in social media have been incorporated into computer classes at the middle school. An Assistant District Attorney spoke to all middle school students about the problems with social media. Motivational speakers are often engaged for student assemblies.

Restorative Practices seem to be working. While the district does not keep specific data per school, detentions and suspensions continue to decrease at the secondary level. The middle schools have eliminated Saturday detentions completely as the need disappeared. At the high school, weekly Saturday detentions have now turned to bi-weekly.

Citizens For Education would like to see the district collect relevant data and track behavior issues to analyze the effectiveness of the diverse elementary and secondary programs as students move through all three levels of education. This would allow for tweaking of programs to develop the best practices to prevent bullying at an important, impressionable time in a students' life. As Mr. Desko said with regard to bullying, "when you let it go, you send a message that you are comfortable with it."

Update on Pennsylvania Anti-Bullying Initiatives

As of this writing, PA House Bill 2636, otherwise known as the Pennsylvania Safe Schools Act, has been introduced with bipartisan support from thirteen cosponsors. Six mayors representing cities throughout Pennsylvania have signed their approval. According to the bill's sponsor, the bill addresses concerns through "promoting the prevention and appropriate remediation of bullying incidents with educators and school staff, along with raising awareness of cyber-bullying that takes place within schools' jurisdiction."

A 2011 report by the US Department of Education analyzed Pennsylvania bullying laws, and reported that Pennsylvania's policies "were less explicit in communicating legal expectations and avoided concrete prohibiting statements" than other states. "I don't think anyone is taking them seriously, they just don't have any teeth," said the bill's sponsor.

The House Education Committee recently conducted a public hearing on House Bill 2464. According to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) legislative report dated September 28, 2012, "Legislation requiring school entities to develop by January 1, 2013, a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation, bullying, and cyber bullying (has been introduced). The policy shall delineate disciplinary consequences for bullying and shall identify by job title, the appropriate school staff person to receive reports of incidents of alleged bullying and the school officials responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented. The bill outlines minimum standards the policy must meet and outlines duties of the Department of Education to enforce compliance."