

Restorative Practices at North High School

May 09, 2017

Three years ago North High School embarked on a mission to significantly improve the culture and climate of our school. Through our graduation improvement efforts, we came across a DESE endorsed training through Suffolk University titled “Restorative Justice”. We began a voluntary training during the summer months for any interested staff and students.

Approximately 30 people participated and at the conclusion, decided to pilot the program the following school year.

During the 2014-2015 school year , we adopted the text “ Circle Forward; Building a Restorative School Community “ by Carolyn-Boyes-Watson and Kay Pranis out of Suffolk University. The text asks the important question; “How can ALL students in a school feel belonging and significance? That is the challenge of creating a safe, healthy school.” Our first year we focused on the grade 9 team for implementation. Restorative Circles were used primarily for disciplinary measures allowing students, families and their teachers to be a part of the discipline process.

While staff continued to reflect and assess these practices, it became clearer to all that the outcomes were very positive in grade 9. Reduced conflicts, reduced suspensions, positive student-teacher and student-student relationships were evident.

During the 2015-2016 school year and continuing to the present 2016-2017 year, restorative circles and restorative practices have become a key component of our social/ emotional and academic support for our students. We have a schedule for the year of topics we “circle up” to discuss in classrooms schoolwide. Topics include: Circle for Designing our Classroom Community to Meet Our Needs, Understanding and Living With School Rules, Let’s Talk About Bullying and The Impact of Gossip to name just a few. (see attached schedule)

Circles are facilitated by the classroom teacher but it is primarily led by students’ voices. Students use a talking stick to speak and take notes on individual topics to hang in their

classroom when appropriate. Every student has a voice and is heard by both teacher and peers. The results of these conversations has led to a significant decline in conflicts schoolwide and has helped our community of learners develop a clearer focus on their individual responsibility to their communities at large and to themselves. Students exhibit a much greater sense of compassion and empathy for those around them.

Although restorative circles are not strictly a means of reducing conflicts, the impact on our suspensions is significant.

2012-2013 – 750 suspensions

2013-2014 – 726

2014-2015 – 268

2015-2016 – 170

2016-2017 – 121 to date

Contained within the text are topics and outlines for Circles to help build positive relationships and community and to teach social/emotional skills. In addition, restorative circles have developed to a point that teachers will use them outside of the school wide schedule in their classroom to discuss content as it relates to real life and as a tool to increase personalization.

We currently have a cohort of peer leaders that have been training all year to assist in facilitating circles for underclassmen next year.

**RESTORATIVE CIRCLES SCHEDULE
2016-2017**

Date	Letter/ Period (<i>all long periods</i>)	Topic/Page Number	Notes
September 13, 2016	E-6	Circle for Designing Our Classroom Community to Meet Our Needs, Pg. 60	
September 28, 2016	D-4	Understanding & Living with School Rules, Pg. 68	
October 17, 2016	C-3	Let's Talk About Bullying, Pg. 148 The Impact of Gossip, Pg. 149	
November 1, 2016	B-2	TEACHERS CHOICE OWN TOPIC (based off of Modules 3.1-3.9) Pg. 71-87	
November 17, 2016	A-1	What Do Adults Need to Understand about Our Lives, Pg. 257	
December 7, 2016	F-7	Who am I Really, Pg. 135	
December 22, 2016	E-6	Elements of a Healthy Relationship, Pg. 109 Choosing Trustworthy Friends, Pg. 111	
January 18, 2017	E-6	What Motives You, Pg. 145	
February 2, 2017	D-4	Picture My Future, Pg. 99	
April 6, 2017	B-2	What Does Success Mean, Pg. 100	
May 3, 2017	C-3	Managing Mountains, Pg. 140	
May 31, 2017	D-4	Visioning A Good Life, Pg. 259	