

Glenview Elementary would like to share with you a new form of community building and conflict management practices, called Restorative Justice, that we have been “testing out.” Below is a description of the practices. For more refer to the resources below.

Restorative Justice

What Is Restorative Justice?

Restorative Justice is a set of principals and practices employed in the Oakland Unified School District to respond to student misconduct, with the goals of repairing harm and restoring relationships between those impacted. Both the theory and practice of restorative justice emphasize the importance of:

- (1) identifying the harm,**
- (2) involving all stakeholders to their desired comfort level, and**
- (3) true accountability**
- (4) taking steps to repair the harm and address its causes to the degree possible.**

Restorative justice in its basic form is incredibly intuitive and a common sense concept for most people. Restorative justice presents opportunities to those impacted by a event to collectively define the impact and determine steps to make things as right as possible for everyone involved: the person(s) harmed, the person(s) who harmed others, and the broader community that was affected both directly as well as indirectly. Because of the ways our current systems operate, often contrary to restorative principles, it is common for implementation of restorative practices to be misunderstood and face resistance.

In his seminal work, *Changing Lenses*, Howard Zehr examined the way in which we typically respond to crime and wrongdoing. Zehr contrasts questions the criminal justice system asks with restorative questions. The questions the current systems try to address are:

- (1) What rules or laws were broken?*
- (2) Who broke them?*
- (3) What do they deserve?*

Whereas, restorative justice asks:

- (1) Who has been hurt?**
- (2) What are their needs?**
- (3) Who has the obligation to address the needs and put right the harm?**

The restorative questions cannot be adequately answered without the involvement of those who have been most affected. Involving those affected is a cornerstone of restorative justice. The foundation of restorative justice rests on common values: respect, inclusion, responsibility, empathy, honesty, openness, and accountability.

What is School-based Restorative Justice?

School-based restorative justice includes prevention, intervention and re-integration. In the juvenile or criminal justice realm, restorative justice is primarily focused on responding to crime. A school is a community made up of educators, staff, students and families. As such, a school can more easily apply the principles of restorative justice broadly as the community is more clearly defined. In a school setting, many refer to restorative justice as restorative practices or restorative measures. Restorative practices are used in a variety of ways in schools: to build community, celebrate accomplishments, intervene in offending behavior, to transform conflict that may occur between adults or young people, and to rebuild relationships that have been damaged. They can also used to re-integrate students who have been excluded through suspension and expulsion. Restorative practices help schools create and maintain a positive school culture and climate.

Restorative justice is not another program to be imposed on schools. It does not push out current initiatives that schools are devoting resources and energy toward. Promising and evidence-based programs such as: Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), Responsive Classroom, Second Step, Too Good for Violence, Too Good for Drugs, Tribes, and others assist in building a foundation of caring. Many find that various approaches are complementary to restorative practices and can strengthen the school together. Restorative practices working independently or alongside promising programs can collectively provide tools to re-think and then build a caring culture in a school.

It is important to note that many teachers manage their classrooms in restorative ways without labeling their methods as restorative. Learning about restorative practices helps teachers to better understand their own methods, provides some language to describe their approach, further refines their practices, and makes it easier for them to share what is working for them with others.

School-wide Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice as a whole school approach supports and teaches social emotional intelligence, builds community and relationships (social capital), and increases the school communities ability and capacity to communicate and address challenges (human capital). This more universal application helps to create a positive and inclusive school culture and enhance teaching and learning. In this way it is a prevention method: the school community becomes better equipped to resolve issues before they escalate into real problems. These skills can be employed when differences or conflict first appear.

One of the goals of implementing restorative practices at this level is to allow for improved and increased communication. Creating the space to understand shared values in the classroom or whole school fosters an environment more conducive to establish and deepen relationships among school community members. This includes not just better relationships between adults and students but among adults and among students as well.

In terms of discipline, restorative justice takes incidents that might otherwise result in punishment and in them finds opportunities for students to recognize the impact of their behavior, understand their obligation to take responsibility for their actions, and take steps towards making things right. In this process students learn how to interact and manage their relationships with adults and peers; they become better equipped to understand how their behavior impacts others. In doing so restorative practices encourage accountability, improve school safety, and help to develop skills so students and the school community can succeed.

Examples of School-wide Restorative Practices

At one Oakland Middle School, a teacher and the RJ coordinator taught an elective class in restorative justice and conducted workshops in classrooms facilitating discussion on justice and oppression, social- emotional intelligence, and taking responsibility. The classes learned about restorative justice philosophy, principles, and practices. In 2007, the schools population decreased significantly because the school was slated to close due to low test scores. This allowed for a morning circle to be held with the whole school. Students were welcomed to school, heard announcements, and celebrated achievements, holidays, and special events. This morning circle was also used to develop a school pledge and participate in general activities that facilitated bonding between and among students and teachers. The circle also held moments of pain and sadness when traumatic events or losses had been experienced. This daily practice helped develop school connectedness and community.

Restorative Justice in Oakland and Alameda County

Alameda County Restorative Juvenile Justice Strategic Plan, January 2009 - December 2012
http://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/97/RJ_Strategic_Plan_4_8_09.pdf

Restorative Justice in Oakland Schools: Implementation and Impacts
http://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/134/OUSD-RJ_Report_revised_Final.pdf



Additional Resources for Information on Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth

<http://www.rjoyoakland.org/>

Fresno Pacific University Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies Restorative Justice Project

<http://peace.fresno.edu/rjp/>

Restorative Justice Online

<http://www.restorativejustice.org/>

Eastern Mennonite University Center for Justice & Peace building

<http://www.emu.edu/cjp/restorative-justice/>

Peace Making Circles, A Process for Solving Problems and Building Community

<http://www.ousd.org/cms/lib07/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/97/PeacemakingCircles.pdf>

For more information about Restorative Justice programs in Oakland Unified School District, please contact Barbara McClung at barbara.mcclung@ousd.k12.ca.us.

Information taken from the OUSD website:

<http://www.ousd.org/restorativejustice>