

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SCHOOLS

Creating Peaceful Schools. Building Capacity. Developing Skillful Educators and Students.

Since its inception in 2003, the Center for Dispute Resolution at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law (C-DRUM) has worked with Maryland K-12 public schools to create safer more peaceful learning environments. Through training, resources, consulting, coaching, and hands-on assistance, C-DRUM supports a wide variety of conflict management programs and processes.

THE CHALLENGE

Schools sometimes struggle to provide safe and engaging learning environments. Conflicts among students, educators, and family members, and bullying can derail learning and result in school violence or student disengagement. Disproportionate data associated with behavioral interventions and the links between behavior management problems, low academic performance, truancy, and dropout rates highlight the need for change. Schools continue to seek effective methods to prevent conflict and to appropriately address conflict when it occurs.



UM Carey Law Mediation Clinic students lead a mediation with two students from Holabird Academy in Baltimore City.

THE SOLUTION

Conflict resolution education provides practices and skills to help students and schools address conflicts effectively. A variety of programs and curricula focus on positive discipline and classroom management based on relationship-building rather than punishment. Mediation and restorative processes such as circles, restorative questions, and formal conferencing work toward improving communication and conflict resolution skills to foster safer, more welcoming school communities and improved learning. According to The School Discipline Consensus Report published by The Council of State Governments Justice Center, “schools that prioritize positive school climate strategies can redirect the focus of responses to student misconduct from primarily reactive approaches to prevention strategies.”

“We’re training people—whether it’s elementary, middle, or high school—to talk through their problems. If we can teach kids to problem solve and communicate and be assertive in a respectful way, there is going to be much less violence and better learning.”



*Barbara Grochal
Director, Schools Conflict Resolution
Education Programs*

Photo Courtesy of Clipper City Media



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The Center for Dispute Resolution at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law (C-DRUM) promotes the effective resolution of conflict to empower and transform. For twelve years, in partnership with the Maryland Judiciary's Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO) and the Maryland State Department of Education, C-DRUM managed the Maryland Schools Conflict Resolution Grants Program. The program provided funds, training, resources and hands-on assistance in support of a wide variety of conflict management programs.

C-DRUM continues its work in schools by providing direct services, consulting, and training for schools and educators in a variety of areas. C-DRUM staff are trained and active neutrals experienced in a variety of processes relevant to conflict resolution in schools including, mediation, facilitation, coaching, dialogue circles, and formal conferencing.

TRAINING

Conflicts in schools distract from the learning environment. Effective methods to resolve conflict are essential for both students and teachers to maximize learning and build problem-solving skills. Staff, student and parent trainings can build school capacity to better manage conflict in the school community. School-related trainings include:

- Peer Mediation
- Introduction to Restorative Practices*
- Using Circles Effectively*
- Dealing with Difficult People
- Team-Building for Staff
- Parenting Workshops
- Basic Communication Skills

**C-DRUM staff are licensed to provide the International Institute for Restorative Practices trainings.*

CONSULTING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

Once the first step is taken to changing the conflict climate of a school, additional support is necessary to create lasting, sustainable change. C-DRUM offers a variety of options including:

- Coaching of staff
- Facilitation of staff, student and parent meetings
- Consultation on program design and implementation
- On-site support of teachers in conducting circles
- Ideas for integrating conflict management and restorative practices tools into existing PBIS structures and practices

THE IMPACT

In 2012-2013, Sligo Middle School implemented weekly circles school wide and the school experienced a 24% reduction in office referrals and a 44% reduction in suspensions compared to the prior year. In the same year, a total of 81% of teachers indicated that they felt more connected with their students. The school continued circles in 2013-2014 and received support from UM Carey Law Mediation Clinic students.

For information about C-DRUM's support in creating School Conflict Resolution Education Programs, to join the C-DRUM schools listserv, or to inquire about training or services for your school or organization, contact www.cdrum.org.