



Restorative Justice in Schools: The Full School Program

By Jorge Gibbons

The extraordinary 20-year peacemaking journey The Conflict Center started in 1987 is flourishing. Restorative principles and practices are being integrated into adult and youth classes, organizational trainings and school programs.

The full school program is a three-stage, or three-year process of community building that actively involves administrators, teachers, support staff, students and parents in creating a new framework for the school. The restorative framework invites us to create an environment in which offenses are seen as harm against the community, providing opportunities to both offenders and victims to repair the harm.

The Conflict Center is currently partnering with 4 schools in what we call the “full school program.” Each school comes with unique challenges and opportunities, each with its own flavor and particular rhythm but all of them committed to answer fundamental questions:

1. How do we teach our children about accountability and responsibility?
2. How do we create vibrant learning environments where conflict is a door for

growth and change instead of a door that might exit students from the school system?

We are getting some answers: teachers jubilantly sharing stories of peacemaking and reconciliation, students organizing and facilitating restorative circles, students using recently learned social and emotional skills to deal with conflict, and adults in schools being able to air their differences in a restorative fashion.

“We are learning to model positive conflict resolution and relationship building. Students make comments about how they are using their words to resolve conflicts instead of fighting” said a teacher in one of the schools The Conflict Center is working with.

“We want to have a school that is considered a caring community where all community members develop self discipline and understand how their choices affect others.” These words exemplify our ultimate goal: Provide schools with the necessary tools to sustain the restorative efforts in years to come.