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Counselor's Corner

A place to educate, inspire, and nurture our growth as parents and educators.

Restorative Practices are based on principles and processes that emphasize the importance of positive relationships as central to building community and restoring relationships when harm has occurred (SF Unified School District)

Recently, Edison staff had their annual Winter Retreat. Historically, it is a way for us to reconnect professionally as a staff and community. We spend time discussing curriculum, technology, best practices, and general student concerns. However, this year was a little different. At Tuesday's retreat, we were very lucky to receive a 3-hour training from Resolutions Northwest on Restorative Justice. It's an exciting process we hope to explore more at Edison and may be useful to you at home!



What is Restorative Justice?

Defined by John Braithwaite, restorative justice is:

...a process where all stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and to decide what should be done to repair the harm. With crime, restorative justice is about the idea that because crime hurts, justice should heal.

Restorative justice is not a "new" thing. It is based on building and rebuilding relationships and is traced back to ancient civilizations.

"Restorative Justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific incident and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and to make things as right as possible." -Howard Zehr

Restorative Justice and Schools

Restorative justice is the new buzzword in education. In the context of a school environment, restorative justice seeks to create a culture of relationships, ensure a safe school climate, help students develop social and emotional skills, and create a time and space in the community to repair and maintain positive relationships.

For example, a student constantly blurts out in class and the teacher redirects the student repeatedly. The student continues the behavior and is sent to administration for discipline. Now this student is feeling labeled and angry, the teacher feels disrespected and frustrated, and administration is faced with handing out punitive actions. Restorative justice teaches educators how to avoid the student's loss of "seat time" in the classroom, how to quickly restore the relationship between teacher and student, and understand our different communication styles.

Imagine this same situation, but this time when the student first blurts out, the teacher takes him into the hall and asks two or more of the following questions:

- What happened?
- Who was harmed and how?
- What can be done to make things right?
- How can we keep things right?
- What support do you need to make and keep things right?

Research of adolescent brains indicate that punitive responses trigger a fight/freeze/flight brain reaction, shutting down the adolescent's ability to learn. Restorative responses construct a brain state of calm awareness that boosts the ability to think productively and learn. By using restorative inquiry, the teacher talks about the behavior or incident without blaming the student. They use relational questions to bring out who was affected and how. Then the student and teacher can determine what needs to happen to make things right for them and the other students in the classroom.

Administrators, teachers, counselors, and students involved in restorative justice learn and practice self-discipline, empathy, and accountability. It is not just a conflict resolution process that happens after the harm has occurred. Restorative justice brings together the person harmed with the person responsible for the harm in a safe and respectful space, promoting two-way conversation, responsibility, and a better sense of community. It is a practical way of fostering a positive, beneficial, and systematic school environment.

