

Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution at Flint Hill ES

One of the ways in which Flint Hill ES addresses student conflict, and therefore strives for a “respectful environment,” is through its Peer Mediation Program. Now in its seventeenth year, Peer Mediation is an integral part of the school's curriculum and fully supported by FCPS and the FHES administration. Mediation is a process in which students have the opportunity to talk through their disputes with a neutral third party (the peer mediators). It is based on the respect for and the dignity of each individual. Basic skills are transferred to disputants to empower students in solving conflicts in the future.

1) Who are the peer mediators?

Mediators are sixth grade students who have been trained since fifth grade in conflict resolution skills. Being a Peer Mediator is a school leadership position. Mediators, in teams of four, help facilitate a problem solving discussion between two or three students who are having a dispute. Ms. Lipton program coordinator, is always in the room during mediation. Mediators continue training throughout the year.

2) How does mediation work?

Mediators explain the five-step process. They let students know that they are not judges and that they do not take sides. They also assure that everything said in mediation is confidential, unless it involves weapons, drugs, or harm to self or others. Disputants are encouraged to tell their parents that they came to mediation.

Disputants agree to follow ground rules such as no name calling, interruptions, or put downs. They agree to try to solve the problem.

Each student has a chance to tell his/her side of the story. Participants use communication skills such as active listening, asking questions, and paraphrasing to help clarify the problem and issues.

Mediators help the disputants to reach resolutions that they both have agreed to after brainstorming. These are written into an agreement that they can follow. The agreements are kept in the counselor's office.

3) How can students come to mediation?

A student may request mediation by filling out a mediation request form and returning it to Ms. Lipton. Request forms are available in classrooms and the counselor's office. Once the request form is filled out, Ms. Lipton meets with each student privately to make sure that they understand and want to come to mediation. Teachers, teacher specialists, parents, and administrators can also refer students to mediation.

4) When does mediation take place?

Mediation sessions are scheduled during the lunch period on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Typically, a mediation takes about 20 minutes. There is a follow-up meeting within three weeks to see how the agreement is working.

Goals, Research, and Best Practices

The FCPS School Board Goal 2: Essential Life Skills, emphasizes the importance of students using conflict resolution skills on their own and as part of the Peer Mediation process. Throughout the school, students also receive instruction in conflict resolution skills. Counselors present skills and strategies during guidance classes and teachers reinforce them in their classrooms.

School-based mediation programs support School Board Goal 3: Responsibility to the Community, by helping to promote a positive learning environment, model good citizenship, and teach positive conflict resolution techniques.

Extensive research on Peer Mediation programs has verified that they are successful in (1) resolving conflicts between students; (2) teaching peer mediators conflict resolution knowledge, attitudes and skills; (3) reducing suspensions and discipline referrals; and (4) improving school climate. (Harris, 2005, Carstarphen, Harris, and Schooner, 1999, Jones, 2004, et al).

For more information on Peer Mediation, please contact Ms. Lipton, School Counselor, at Lauren.Lipton@fcps.edu or (703) 242-6162 or Joan Packer, Conflict Resolution Specialist, FCPS at joan.packer@fcps.edu