

Peer Mediation in Chautauqua County, N.Y. Schools

by [Jamestown Area Labor-Management Committee](#)

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Peer mediation is a concept that has been used with great success in schools across the country. It provides students and teachers an alternative to the traditional system of discipline for resolving conflict. Student mediators help their peers resolve their disputes by encouraging constructive communication, helping parties take responsibility for their actions, and clarifying their needs and feelings. Once reached, an agreement is put into writing and signed by the disputants, providing a permanent record of their settlement.

Teaching conflict resolution to elementary, middle and high school students is as important to preparing tomorrow's workforce as their reading, writing, and math classes. In fact, the value and importance of the benefits derived from peer mediation programs - from the skills the young mediators gain to the overall impact the program has in school - parallels the values and benefits employers derive from a well-trained and skilled workforce. At the very least, the training, skills, and experience these kids gain from participating in peer mediation will compliment the range of skills that will be essential to the workforce of the next millennium. That is why Jamestown Area Labor-Management Committee took the time and resources to introduce and implement peer mediation in school districts in Chautauqua County, N.Y.

In addition to providing youth with problem solving, critical thinking, and listening skills, peer mediation prepares students to be citizens in a complex and conflict-ridden world. School-based mediation programs provide a number of proven benefits to schools including:

- Reduced suspensions, detentions, and expulsions.
- Improved communications between and among students, teachers, administrators, and parents.
- Improved the school climate.
- A reduction of violence, vandalism, and chronic school absenteeism.
- Provided students with a direct forum for resolving conflicts that does not require the attention of administrators.
- Resolved conflicts permanently by addressing their underlying causes, much unlike traditional disciplinary actions.
- Allowed teachers to spend more time doing what they are supposed to be doing - teaching.

JALMC staff member and peer mediation program coordinator, Ralph Letersky said, "We have taken a very proactive approach to our mission of fostering a climate of positive labor and industrial relations. Learning they have avenues other than violence, bullying, and the old "I win - you lose" means of settling disputes at their disposal - gaining confidence in their abilities to assist peers in resolving differences - when they enter tomorrow's workplace, these kids will be fully equipped with the ability to resolve conflict on their own, thereby keeping the system free from static and more conducive to producing a quality product, whatever form that may take." Mr. Letersky stated support from a school's administration is critical to the success of these

programs. Qualified mentors are important too. That is why JALMC staff and executive board members have pledged to mentor these programs, thereby insuring their continued success and existence.

To date, over 500 elementary, middle, and high school children, teachers, administrators, and school staff have participated in one-and two-day training sessions. Several of the schools have programs well in place. Others are in the process of introducing the concept. Peer mediators are recognized with certificates of completion from Jamestown Community Colleg. Some schools provide student mediators "Peer Mediator" T-shirts to wear when facilitating a session. Many schools have reported Peer Mediation complements their "Second Step Programs." Some of our schools have programs in the seventh year of operation. The schools love their programs and we are proud of our accomplishments.

Biography

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