



# The Peace Alliance

Campaigning for a U.S. Department of Peace

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## The Work of Peace-Building

Below are examples of proven, effective programs now existing in the United States, that substantially diminish levels of violence in their communities. Central to the work of the Department of Peace will be a U.S. Peace Academy, in which such techniques will be taught and extended to their maximal usefulness.

### COMMUNITY CONFERENCING (Baltimore, MD)

A **Community Conference** is a meeting of the entire *community of people* affected by a crime or conflict, that allows them to decide for themselves how to best repair the harm and prevent it from happening again. Everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard, and in doing so a greater sense of understanding and connection is created. A conference gives those who have caused harm a chance to understand the impact of their behavior on others, on themselves, and on the community. Those who have been harmed get a chance to tell how they have been affected and how the damage can be repaired.

#### Philosophy & Principles

- Holds people **accountable** for their actions
- Provides **immediate** response to harmful behavior
- Highly participatory – in criminal cases, victims, offenders, and their supporters are included
- Allows those affected to decide how to best repair harm
- Builds community cohesion
- Provides a proven, effective structure to build individual and collective efficacy

#### Impact

- Recidivism (return rate) reduced by 60% in young offenders compared with comparable juvenile justice cases
- Cost effective (1/10 the cost of current criminal justice/disciplinary practices)
- Victims are included in deciding outcomes, and are satisfied that “justice was served”
- Reduces minority over-representation in criminal justice system
- Keeps students *in school and* accountable for their actions
- Mobilizes community to collectively take responsibility for public safety issues.
- Families have opportunity to identify their own needs and gain access to community-based resources for challenges that may have helped precipitate the harmful behavior to begin with.

#### Uses of Community Conferencing

- **Juvenile justice** Community-based diversion in cases of undisputed harm
- **Schools** Alternative to suspension, truancy, authoritative response to harm
- **Neighborhoods** Ongoing and intractable conflicts
- **Criminal justice** Court diversion; Multiple charges/counter charges
- **Human services** Case management (initial coordination of family and providers)  
Family violence  
Re-entry into families/communities after incarceration

# Ohio's State-wide School Conflict Management Initiative

The State of Ohio leads the United States in school-based conflict management through the work conducted and coordinated by the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management. In 2004 there were more than 1,700 schools with programs.

To achieve this goal of institutionalization, the Commission has developed a grant-training program that enabled elementary, middle, and high schools to integrate nonviolent dispute resolution techniques into their overall curriculum, teaching conflict management as a life skill. Teachers, staff and administrators are trained to integrate conflict resolution as a life skill into existing curricula and to facilitate positive change within the school community by aligning school mission statements, disciplinary procedures, and team-building efforts with conflict resolution concepts and theories.

## Results

- Evaluations of the Commission programming demonstrate an improvement in academic achievement, a reduction in truancy, fewer suspensions and expulsions, a decrease in time spent on dealing with discipline, financial cost savings to schools, and an improvement in overall school climate (OCDRCM, 1994; OCDRCM, 1997; Tschannen-Moran, 1999).
- Independent program evaluations demonstrate a significant decrease in the reported number of conflict-related behaviors in schools, often leading to suspensions and expulsions.
- Middle school teachers report that conflict management training enables students to better resolve conflicts on their own.
- High schools with conflict management programs report that physical violence has decreased as much as 43% (Hart, et.al., February 2003).
- The annual cost per student to administer the school conflict management grant training program is approximately \$12.00. When compared to the per student cost of suspending a child (\$231.00) or expelling a student (\$431.00), the program is clearly cost effective (Hart, et.al., February 2003).
- Independent evaluations of the truancy prevention mediation program demonstrate a significant increase in pupil attendance and decrease in tardiness resulting in an average cost savings of \$1,889 per participating school (Kimberly, July 2002).
- With 171 participating schools (currently funded by the Commission) total program cost savings for the 2002-2003 school year was estimated at \$323,019.

## Lessons Learned

While Ohio's comprehensive model is paving the way for more effective program institutionalization, more work is needed to establish conflict resolution education as a permanent fixture in our education system. *Despite state-wide education statistics (EMIS) showing that disciplinary incidents in schools in Ohio for fighting far outnumber the disciplinary incidents related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (where large amounts of prevention funding have been targeted), funding continues to decrease for conflict resolution education efforts. Yet the evaluations related to conflict resolution education show significant decreases in discipline related challenges such as fighting, and at a significant cost savings to the school district and state.*

A recent World Health Organization report on inter-personal violence (excluding the costs related to war) showed costs to the U.S. of addressing this violence at an estimated \$300 billion a year, with violent crime committed by a single minor generally costing the victim approximately \$61,000 dollars in expenses (Kole, June 9th, 2004). The point needs to be conveyed to funders that investing in prevention efforts such as conflict resolution education is critical to seeing a reduction in societal violence.

**Website: [www.disputeresolution.ohio.gov](http://www.disputeresolution.ohio.gov)**