

Integrating Restorative Strategies with Positive Behavior Support: The Sarasota County School District Initiative

Student academic engagement in a safe, secure environment is the highest priority of the Sarasota County School District administration, faculty and staff. When students do not feel safe at school, their learning often is compromised. They may skip school or demonstrate behavior problems that cause them to spend significant time out of their classrooms. When they do attend, anxiety can prevent them from being fully engaged in their academic work.

The Sarasota County Schools district-wide Restorative Strategies Initiative is a model for productive personal interaction. It was developed to help teachers, administrators, and support staff employ practices in their daily work that help establish a safe school culture, promote academic engagement and reduce inappropriate behavior, all of which foster increased student attendance and reduced suspensions.

Through the district's well established Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program, students learn appropriate behaviors and are rewarded for practicing them. By combining Restorative Strategies with PBS, students learn *why* positive behavior is important. They personally experience the effects of positive behavior as their sense of connectedness and empathy with their classmates improves. Restorative Strategies help students learn to choose appropriate behaviors and how to resolve interpersonal issues before they develop into behavior problems.

Follow-up studies have shown that students in schools where restorative strategies are fully implemented feel safer and better connected to their school and their peers than they did before the program was initiated. Attendance, academic engagement, and behavior all improve in schools where Restorative Strategies are fully and properly practiced.

Through the Sarasota County Schools Restorative Strategies Initiative, school-based staff are taught to implement the following strategies:

- Community-building/Proactive Restorative Circles
- Academic Restorative Circles
- Large- and Small-group Responsive Circles
- Restorative Meetings and Re-entry Meetings

The initiative also will include training in relevant aspects of these Restorative Strategies for School Resource Officers (SROs), parents and family members, juvenile justice personnel, and other community members.

For more information on this initiative, please contact the Volunteer & Partnership Office of the Sarasota County School District by emailing rex.ingerick@sarasotacountyschools.net or calling 941.927.9000 ext.34756.