



# Northeast School Principal's Newsletter

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## Restorative Justice @ Northeast

Strong relationships are the cornerstone of success in any community. Without forming a trustful and respectful climate, our community will not be able to function equitably and effectively. I'm sure we have all had the unfortunate experience of either being a part of or witnessing an interaction where communication fails, and conflict arises. These interactions, if left unaddressed, can permeate our community, and have a negative impact on school climate.

The Montclair Public School District has committed itself to reestablishing how we form relationships with each other. Forming and fostering meaningful and lasting bonds between people is delicate and on-going work. The practice of Restorative Justice is a perfect addition to dovetail the already effective social emotional supports at Northeast to guide our community development.



### What is Restorative Justice?

**Restorative Justice (RJ)** is a philosophy that emphasizes building relationships. The crux of the practice is that when we know each other better, we are more likely to treat each other with more compassion and understanding.



Restorative practices can have an array of positive impacts in a school:

- build healthy relationships between students and school staff, as well as among adults in the school community.
- support students' healthy social and emotional development.
- create safe spaces for difficult conversations, and emotional healing.
- shift the focus from intervention to prevention of disciplinary infractions.
- shift the paradigm from punitive to restorative disciplinary practices that repair harm and reduce suspensions and expulsions.

### How Does Restorative Justice Look?

Restorative Justice is seen in action across a school in a variety of ways. There are proactive and preemptive strategies that are designed to set the framework of a positive school climate grounded in trust. Additionally, there are strategies that are implemented in response to situations that are designed to repair any harm that could have been caused if a conflict arises. These responses to situations take the shape in the form of peace circles, peer juries, restorative chats, restorative conferencing, and family group conferencing.

## Proactive and Preemptive

Daily opportunities for students to build relationship should be scheduled into each day. One example of this would be asking students schoolwide to reflect on a common question or experience, while in homeroom, where they can share out to their peers. A second example could be hosting classroom lessons that allow for students to get to know each other better. These types of schoolwide or classroom level moments are guided by our counselor, Ms. Kupperman, the Principal, classroom teachers or any member of the community that is trained in restorative practices. In these moments students will discover similarities between each other that they may not have known existed. When students learn they share something in common with a peer the bond between them strengthens.

Each time a bond is reinforced between students, there is less of a chance that they would get into a conflict or less of a chance they would not be able to resolve one.

## Response

Strong relationships aren't a cure-all for conflict. Anyone can have a bad day or make a poor choice. When those situations arise, we, as a community, hope that our proactive and preemptive groundwork was effective enough to support the next steps.

A typical response to a conflict is a restorative circle. These moments are just what they sound like. Participants sit in a circle, but the circle concept goes deeper than the shape alone. The circle is a structured dialog process that nurtures connections and empathy, while honoring the uniqueness of each participant. In the circle, each person can speak his/her truth but cannot assume the truth for anyone else. A restorative circle welcomes difficult emotions and difficult realities, while maintaining a sense of positive possibilities. Circles are much longer than a basic "check-in". Rather they can last for 40 min if necessary and even be revisited.



The goal of a circle is not always to reach a solution, but instead a consensus. A consensus is a resolution that all participants can agree is the best path forward despite any assignment of right or wrong.

A circle can be recommended by a staff member or requested by a student or parent. Participants in the circle need to consent to participate. Without members willingness to be a part of the process, it does not work.

## Who can host a circle?

Not anyone can host a circle. A very specific training is required to be designated a "circle keeper". Many staff and community members, including myself, have received this training since 2019. Trainees learn to use the environment and structure of the group to create a safe space for all participants to speak their truth. Furthermore, circle keepers are taught how to seek resolution of the conflict respective of one another's perspective.

## How will this look at Northeast Elementary School?

A major shift for our community will be to see and understand how schools will use circles to address accountability for student choices. Most people are familiar with the use of consequences such as detention or suspension as a method to hold students accountable for poor choices. Being a restorative school means that we will seek to reduce "empty" consequences. While detentions and other punitive consequences will still be utilized when appropriate, the weight of working through your issue with your peers far out-weighs staying out of school for a set number of days without any direction. Ultimately, we want to make every situation a moment of learning.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

Thank you as always for your continued support.

**Early Dismissal**

**Parent  
Conferences  
(Evening)**

**December 6<sup>th</sup>**

**Early Dismissal**

**Parent  
Conferences  
(Afternoon)**

**December 7<sup>th</sup>**