

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Report for Academic Year: 2008-2009

Peer Mediation Program Navajo Middle School

Navajo, NM Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Project Coach: Virgil Brown

Regional Coordinator: Apryl Joe

Navajo Middle School strives to provide a diverse and quality education to students while preserving their culture and traditions. The Youth Leadership Program is utilized through the Peer Mediation Program, giving students the opportunity to practice their leadership and communication skills with their peers.

LEADERSHIP PROJECT:

◆ PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM

At Navajo Middle School, the Youth Leadership group's project was participating in and running the Peer Mediation Program. The idea developed when many schools within the district experienced high rates of bullying. The district established an anti-bullying program that included a peer mediation component. When Virgil recruited peer mediators many of the students that were his previous students became involved in the Peer Mediation Program. The students who signed up to be peer mediators attended mediation training at the start of the school year in Gallup, NM. The students participated in high ropes courses and other challenging activities to work at overcoming their fears and to team build.

The students learned about the different aspects of mediation and conflict resolution by participating in mock scenarios where they helped peers resolve a conflict. As part of being a peer mediator, students had the responsibility keeping peer issues confidential. Virgil tried to meet with the peer mediators once a month to checkup on the program; however, it was difficult to find a consistent time to meet as a group. Overall the Peer Mediation Program was successful and helped students learn more about conflict resolution. The goal was that the students pass on their knowledge about their experience to others and as a result the number of bullying incidents in the school and/or community will decline.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

◆ The peer mediators at Navajo Middle School accomplished various leadership tasks and assisted in resolving conflicts between peers. Virgil commented, "About 85% of my mediators were able to learn about the primary concepts of group cooperation, sharing, and learning about the value of respect and fairness." In addition, the peer mediators excelled in resolving conflicts between students.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Youth Leadership Program assists children in developing leadership skills while generating projects that contribute to their communities. Each Youth Leadership group executes a project that benefits their community. The curriculum provides a framework in which students, guided by Project Coach volunteers, engage in activities focusing on improving leadership and confidence, both individually and as a group. Students learn to challenge their personal limits and achieve personal and group goals.

◆ The students participated in the Youth Leadership activity-*The Human Knot*. Each participant was holding onto a bandanna with each hand. They were tangled up and had to untangle and form a figure eight without letting go of the bandannas. After they had successfully completed the task, the group commented on their success and that it was only possible by acting as a team and using their communication skills.

CHALLENGES:

◆ One of the main challenges the Youth Leadership group faced was finding a time to meet. The Project Coach, Virgil Brown, was also a school counselor, so he had other duties and commitments, making it difficult to establish regular meetings with the Youth Leadership students. Virgil was not able to meet with them on a regular basis, but tried to meet with each of them at least once a month, either during their elective hour or afterschool.

◆ Virgil explained, “Many of the mediation cases that came our way were too intense for my student peer mediators to work with.” Virgil, as the school counselor, handled most of the conflicts between students. Therefore, the peer mediators did not get the opportunity to be fully engaged with the conflicts that came up. As a result of this issue, the peer mediators, at times, lost interest in the program because they did not meet on a regular basis, but also because they were not able to practice the skills they learned in training on a regular basis.



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