

# Reducing School Violence in Elementary School Settings in America



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### INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The propensity our nation's people toward violence and aggression has been cited as a legal, psychological, social, and public issue (Guetzloe, 1999). Acts of violence are not only occurring in our streets but in our backyards and schools.
- ❖ Between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2012, there were a total of 45 school-associated violent deaths in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Of the 45 student, staff, and nonstudent school-associated violent deaths occurring during this time span, there were 26 homicides, 14 suicides, and 5 legal interventions (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2015).
- ❖ In response to the rising number of violent incidents in the school settings, different intervention programs were developed and offered to the school system.
- ❖ Programs aimed at combating violence in our schools are being supported by school administrators across the nation. This support is reflected in a 40% increase in violence prevention programs from 1991 to 1994 (Shepherd, 1994) and an increase of 6,000 programs from 1992 to 1994 (Bell, Coleman, Anderson, Vihelan, & Wilder, 2000).
- ❖ A conflict management program can assist schools in improving academic achievement not only by providing more time spent on teaching verses on dealing with discipline challenges; but also through the teaching of important life skills such as critical thinking skills and problem solving necessary for improved academic performance
- ❖ Mediation and conflict resolution programs provide opportunities for modeling and rehearsing critical negotiation and resolution tactics, however, because high school mediators are not well screened, it is imperative to implement a mandatory course in elementary school students to learn about conflict resolution and to be trained in peer mediation (Gottfredson, 1987).

### GOAL

- ❖ To reduce elementary levels of school violence by implementing a mediation program in which the entire third grade will be around that age when they can successfully mediate peer conflicts as well as mediate most conflicts without the help of adult supervision. This promises a timely attempt to minimize violence in the short term, as well as plant the seeds that will help decrease it through childhood and adolescence. "The Boys and Girls Club of America surveyed over 46,000 teens coast to coast and found that one of their biggest concerns was day to day conflicts without knowing how to solve them (without a fight)." (Borba, 2013).

### PARTICIPANTS

- ❖ The entire 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in a large suburban public school will participate, comprised of 25 children from all different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.



### PROCEDURE

#### 1. Recruitment

As a trained mediator and part of the Peer Assistant Leadership Program in both middle and high school, I will be recruiting faculty to learn the fundamentals of conflict resolution and mediation in order to teach the program to students. This is a 24 hour training course before the start of school.

#### 2. Training

Students will take a 1 hour class each week for 18 weeks that focuses and defines concepts on anger and conflict, conflict resolution and mediation, and other problem solving techniques.

#### 3. Role Play

They will engage in role play to practice the steps of mediation and resolving conflicts learned in their training.

#### 4. Lessons and knowledge obtained

Each role play has a specific theme or lesson that integrates conflict resolution and character education.

5. PRQ (Peer Resolution Questionnaire)  
This is to be administered before, after, and three months training to assess what both the students and mediators gained and retained from the training in terms of conflict, conflict resolution, and mediation.

### MEASURES

PRQ – (Peer Resolution Questionnaire) will be developed for the purposes of this study to assess the level of knowledge the peers and trainers learned from their training. This pre and post study questionnaire will be designed to measure the effectiveness of knowledge pertaining to conflict, conflict resolution, and mediation. Items are developed directly from program curricula and evaluation criteria. The data will be measured qualitatively using a systematic comparison of responses.

### Strengths

- ❖ By including all students and embracing diversity, children will discover that peers whom they may have had negative judgements toward are actually wonderful, caring, and fun people. They will carry this discovery into the mediation room.
- ❖ This program engages all students, even those considered "at risk." This program helps utilize their skills and begin to excel when they are trained as mediators. It also gives them a badly needed way to contribute to their schools..

### Weaknesses

- ❖ The thoroughness and lengthiness of the intervention program makes its implementation relatively demanding in terms of time and resources compared to other intervention programs aimed at reducing school violence
- ❖ Further research must be done to know if this particular program can transcend school settings. This program may be effective in this school environment but can it succeed in rural, urban, privatized, and even parochial school settings. Also, further research should be carried out to see if the reduction in school violence follows them as they head into their middle and high school years.