



REPORT

UB School of Social Work Extended School Day Program at the Harvey Austin Middle School (#97) in the Buffalo Public School District.

2005-2006

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The 2005-2006 school year was one of change at Harvey Austin, School #97 in Buffalo. In contrast to our services being the only ones available in the school during the 2004-2005 school year we began the year by being integrated into a new community school system with many different services available. The community school coordinator worked to ensure that students were matched up with services appropriate to their specific needs.

The program at Harvey Austin is a multi dimensional collaborative service delivery center similar to the VISA Choice Center, which was previously provided by UB SSW at the Kensington High School. The Harvey Austin program was offered by UB SSW in collaboration with the Buffalo Public School District and the Child & Family Services, a community based non-profit social service agency. As part of a continuing collaboration Child & Family Services also brought to the table the F.A.T.H.E.R.S. Organization (Fathers Armed Together to Help, Educate, Restore and Save.) F.A.T.H.E.R.S. is a community-based group of men, dedicated to providing mentoring and conducting anti-gang and anti-violence programs within the City of Buffalo.

This years' program offered services within the school including counseling, mediation, and Peacemaking Circles. Another major component of services offered this year included assisting school administration with disciplinary issues. Starting in September, we were able to place a full time staff person at the school to begin providing services at the start of the school year. Peacemaking Circles began in January with facilitators from Child and Family Services and the F.A.T.H.E.R.S. Organization.

During the school year our staff assisted with one hundred ninety eight (198) disciplinary issues, ranging from insubordination towards staff to inciting a fight. Project staff also provided mediation services to one hundred thirty (130) students throughout the year. Students were referred for mediation by the school services coordinator, by student self referral, or by the School administration. Most mediations were triggered by rumors of impending fights. These were usually resolved with mutually acceptable agreements between the parties. Our staff also assisted twenty seven (27) students during their re-entry process to the school after a suspension. Other services at Harvey Austin were based upon a Restorative Justice model, originally introduced at the V.I.S.A. Choice Center at Kensington High School, and later utilized at the Kensington Opportunity Center, with modifications thought to be appropriate for the middle school age level. Services offered were designed to be restorative in nature, allowing for students to work through differences, and prevent suspensions from school.

Peacemaking Circles were provided by a team of four facilitators, who spent several weeks training to facilitate Circles with middle school students. Throughout their training process, the facilitators worked to continue developing our training manual for use in future Peacemaking Circle projects. Training was provided by Child & Family Services Restorative Justice Department, the local leader in Peacemaking Circle initiatives. Prior to beginning services at Harvey Austin, the facilitators, along with Annie Monaco, LCSW-R, presented the concept of Restorative Justice and the process of Peacemaking Circles, to the faculty and staff at the school. This presentation allowed for teachers and administrators alike, to ask questions about the process, and to understand what the program was about prior to services commencing.

Peacemaking Circles were presented to approximately seventy-two (72) students in the fifth to seventh grades. By the end of the school year, eighty-eight (88) circles were conducted in four (4) classes, with each participating class receiving twenty two (22) Peacemaking Circle sessions. Teachers, and students alike, reported that they looked forward to Peacemaking Circles each week. On days when Peacemaking Circles were not scheduled to come to classes, teachers report that students would say that they wanted to have a Circle, and ask when the next session would be held. When students were surveyed regarding what they like about Peacemaking Circles they reported that they liked the activities and topics. Another major component that students looked forward to was the personal interaction with the facilitators. Student responses to our survey indicated that 94% liked Peacemaking Circles 'sometimes' to 'always.' Also, 80% of students reported that they would recommend Peacemaking Circles to their friends and family.

Our services in the school have become an important part of the school structure. Our staff was available and met with parents on fifty seven (57) occasions, either at parental request, or at the request of administration. Throughout the year staff made one hundred seventeen (117) outside contacts on behalf of students, by calling probation officers, contacting parents and guardians, and making referrals for continuing outside services. A major element of service included advocating for students. This occurred in mediation and counseling, but also included meeting with teachers on eighty (80) occasions, and contacting Child Protection Services (CPS) on their behalf, which occurred seven (7) times this school year. Staff also served the school and students by dealing with crisis situations. During this school year our staff helped deal with one hundred twenty five (125) crisis incidents ranging from students learning about upsetting family issues (for

example, death of a family member), to uncontrollable student behaviors in the classroom.

In the next school year, we will be using what we have learned this year to continue to provide comprehensive services within the school.

1. Peacemaking Circles will be provided starting in September. We will be working with four classes during fall semester and four different classes during the spring semester in order to provide services to a larger number of students. Thus, more students will be aware of the Circle process and will be able to use this process for conflict resolution.
2. This year's experience has taught us that working with one grade level was not always possible within a school. This past year we had planned on working with fifth grade students, however, the Principal requested continued work with seventh and sixth grade classes. We believed it was important to respond to the administration's perception of the greatest need. In this coming school, we will be working with fifth through seventh grade students which will allow us to continue to develop strategies specific to each grade level for implementing Peacemaking Circles.
3. This year we will describe our services to parents at an open house prior to the start of the school year. We will also present the Peacemaking Circles program to teachers prior to selecting the classrooms with which we will work. In this way we hope to obtain a commitment to active teacher participation which we found to be important to the success of the project.

Working within the constraints of Harvey Austin School #97, a new school still in transition, has proven to be challenging but definitely worth the effort. We look forward to building on our success this past year and to continue to develop even more effective programming at Harvey Austin.