

**The PSI membership criteria are:**

**1. A collaborative approach to school-based decision making**

A school with a safe, inviting climate is a school in which parent input is valued, students and staff members work together as a team and there is a high level of participation in school decision making and goal-setting. There is an expectation that each student and staff member can and must make a difference in the overall life of the school.

In every school there is a wide range of expertise among teachers and resource staff. In schools that foster cooperation, collegiality and professional risk-taking, staff members share their expertise willingly and problems are shared as readily as successes.

A school discipline policy, for example, should be a shared responsibility. By including students and parents/guardians in the process, a sense of ownership and responsibility is created among all those affected by the policy. When asked why her school was peaceful, one grade two student in a PSI member school responded, "Well...you know, in some schools teachers make the rules and tell the kids to follow them. In our school, we help make the rules."

As is the case in all organizations, when people are invited to be actively involved in decision making, a climate of cooperation, support and understanding emerges. Fostering a spirit of mutual respect and inclusion in decision making plays an important role in the ever-increasing challenges that face schools in all parts of the world.

**2. Curricular and/or extracurricular peace education initiatives**

The responsibility for creating a global culture of peace is far too lofty a goal for educators alone. We can, however, strive to create and sustain a culture of peace within our schools. To do so, we must **teach** peace. It cannot be achieved by means of a simple recipe or by wishing for it anymore than we can achieve it by writing tough policies or merely mandating it.

There are basic principles inherent in the belief that it is necessary to equip children and youth with the attitudes, knowledge and skills essential to the prevention and resolution of conflict. Every student has the right to feel safe in school. The prevention of conflict and the peaceful resolution of conflict can be taught and should be taught.

There are currently many books and other resource materials available that contain innovative, practical lessons in cooperation, respecting differences, communicating effectively, expressing emotions in a positive manner and resolving conflict creatively and non-violently. No single book or program will meet everyone's needs. When there is a variety of resources made available in the school, teachers will be free to use those that are relevant to the needs of their students, being aware that their needs will vary from year to year.

In some schools and school districts, peace education has been incorporated into curricular activities. Social studies, health and language arts are some of the subject areas that are conducive to such integration. In other schools and school districts, peace education activities are introduced in an extracurricular manner. For example, many schools host Peace Festivals, invite guest speakers and hold assemblies with a focus on peace. How peace education occurs is not as important as that it occurs.

### **3. Teaching methods that stress participation, cooperation, problem solving and respect for differences**

The days of passive learning have all but disappeared. In many parts of the world, students are being encouraged to work cooperatively with one another and take an active role in their own learning. Discussions, small group work, cooperative learning and attention to individual needs all contribute to a classroom environment in which students feel free to take risks without fear of failure.

Our students need to be creative, critical thinkers, capable of solving problems alone and as members of a team. The development of self-motivated, creative young people does not occur naturally in a classroom where children passively listen without opportunities to participate actively. On the other hand, in an environment where students are invited and encouraged to make choices and the differences in learning rates and styles are acknowledged and celebrated, creative, independent thinking flourishes.

Within the classroom, it is important to recognize the diversity among students and to find a respectful and inclusive way of dealing with it in order to make the learning experience a success. Ethnicity, gender, physical ability, and social class are just some of the differences that will exist in most classrooms.

In peaceful schools, children are encouraged to be open minded and accepting of others who may look different, have different customs or hold beliefs that do not correspond with their own. Teachers are focusing more and more on the importance of such understanding and acceptance as a means of creating harmony in the classroom and in society at large.

#### **4. Student and community centered conflict resolution strategies such as peer mediation**

In a school in which students are taught to be responsible for their own choices and behavior they are provided with a variety of ways to deal with conflict in a non-violent manner. From peer mediation to talking circles, peace tables and class meetings, a variety of proactive responses to conflict can be introduced through classroom activities, the school discipline policy and as the overall approach of the school.

When conflict resolution is implemented not only as part of the curriculum but also as a lifestyle to be lived by both adults and youth, respect, tolerance and community-building become “the way we do things around here.” Implementation of a conflict resolution program can help schools create their governance structures, develop policies, identify goals and make curriculum decisions.

Inherent in this context are many advantages. Members of the school community possess the knowledge and skills to create an environment in which diversity thrives. There is an understanding by all that conflict is an opportunity for growth, self-awareness and development of respect for others. There is a shared vision that conflicts are inevitable and that they enrich and strengthen school communities.

In many schools, peer mediation has become an integral part of the overall school approach to problem solving. When young people are given the freedom to solve their own problems, they are more inclined to make a commitment to the solutions they have created. Shifting the responsibility for solving non-violent conflicts to students frees adults to concentrate more on teaching and less on dealing with conflict.

#### **5. Community service projects**

As we spend more time encouraging our youth to become caring and compassionate citizens, it makes sense that we offer them

opportunities to put these principles into action in a variety of ways. Many schools organize school-wide or class-based community service projects that address student-identified needs at school or in the community. Often the goals and activities of these projects are woven into or drawn from curricular objectives.

In one school, for example, students send holiday cards to the seniors who live in a nearby residence. In another, as part of a social and environmental studies project, students spend an afternoon picking up litter in the neighborhood adjacent to the school. Such community outreach projects strengthen relationships between students and the community.

In its broad interpretation, community service can take place anywhere. In many schools older students read with younger students. The collection of food, clothing, school supplies, and first-aid items for those in need occurs in schools everywhere.

Whatever the initiative or project, be it big or small, students learn vital lessons in empathy, understanding and goodwill when encouraged to help others.

## **6. Opportunities for professional development for all staff focused on creating a positive school climate**

As the staff of a school grows and/or changes, it is crucial that the vision of the school and the means by which it is being achieved be clearly articulated to new staff members. In addition, all staff members benefit from ongoing opportunities for professional development related to enhancing school climate. There are many advantages to including all staff members in professional development sessions. From bus drivers to playground duty supervisors, everyone in the school community who interacts with the students should be included.

Some areas to explore are:

- training in a range of skills from de-escalating potentially violent classroom situations to responding to a serious crisis
- dealing with disruptive students
- preventing and responding to bullying
- peer mediation

- becoming familiar with programs that promote positive social skills
- anti-racism, anti-sexism policies and programs
- cooperative learning strategies
- conflict resolution skills
- peer helping programs
- helping students deal with peer pressure/gangs
- legal rights and responsibilities of school staff

Before planning staff development sessions, it is wise to survey staff about their interests and needs. Needless to say, this should be done annually as the school culture evolves.

In many schools, parents and community members are given opportunities to attend similar workshops with a focus on family relationships and interactions. These sessions are usually organized by school staff and may be presented by staff or by guests who have a level of expertise in a particular area.