AAA-ICDR 2019-2020 Grant Recipient Final Report

Submitted by: Asian Pacific American Dispute Resolution Center (APADRC)

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The Future of Restorative Justice in LA County Schools

PURPOSE

This report aims to: (1) provide an honest overview of what implementing a restorative justice peer mediation program in schools looks like on the ground, (2) identify how the planning and implementation of restorative justice programs in schools can be improved, and (3) illuminate the actions that stakeholders need to take to be more effective at supporting restorative justice in schools.

There remains a high need for restorative justice programming in LA County Schools. The report intends to provide insight and guidance to the various stakeholders involved in the planning, implementation, and funding of restorative justice programs in schools -- including schools and partners, nonprofits providing youth and educational support to schools, organizations that are generally interested in dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, the conflict resolution community, and grant-making institutions supporting youth development and school programming.

Report Outline

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Part I.
Looking Back

Part I: Looking Back

A. APADRC Grant Implementation

a. Overview

APADRC received an AAA-ICDR Foundation grant in March 2019 to implement a restorative justice (RJ) peer mediation initiative in five LA County schools in communities of color.

APADRC spent the first two months of the grant outreaching to individual Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) schools before learning that individual schools are not at liberty to work directly with organizations and organizations seeking to implement programs in schools must negotiate directly with the LAUSD. APADRC implementing staff were informed of this unexpected challenge roughly a week before the Phase I grant deadline. APADRC turned to The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools (The Partnership) to help them recruit five schools to participate in the program and to meet the deadline. The Partnership is an "in-district" partner to LAUSD that works with 19 of the most historically underserved schools in the district including elementary, middle, and high schools in Boyle Heights, South LA, and Watts. APADRC secured an MOU agreement with The Partnership, which then recruited the following schools to participate in the grant program -- Edwin Markham Middle School (in Watts), David Starr Jordan High School (in Watts); Robert Louis Stevenson College and Career Preparatory (in East Los Angeles), Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School (in Pico-Gardens), and Santee Education Complex (in South Central Los Angeles). Within two weeks, APADRC drafted customized training schedules and a 10-week RJ training curriculum for each school.

In the first phase of the grant, APADRC administered pre-training surveys to the students before implementing the 10-week in-class training for students in each school. The training was split into two sections -- six weeks dedicated to teaching conflict resolution theory and subject matter and four subsequent weeks of hands-on role-play exercises to provide students the opportunity to put the theory into practice. A mid-point evaluation was also administered at the end of the fifth week of training. Approximately 110 to 125 students and 15 to 20 teachers and staff from the five schools underwent training. Students completed a final survey after the training.

The second phase of the grant required APADRC to work with the schools to establish Restorative Justice (RJ) Councils to oversee peer meditations on each campus. The RJ Councils would also be charged with promoting peer mediation on each of their respective campuses. While the Councils would be adapted to the needs of each school -- e.g. liberty to devise selection criteria to select the students that would serve on the Councils -- APADRC intended to help the schools choose anywhere between 8 to 10 students (primarily from the pool of RJ trainees).

APADRC initiated this process after winter break in January 2020 by completing an onboarding meeting with The Partnership and the participating teachers and staff at each of the

five schools. The meeting served to instruct teachers and staff on how to start the process of establishing RJ Councils at their schools -- providing development materials, reviewing the tasks and requirements, etc. However, the COVID-19 pandemic made moving forward with the creation of the RJ Councils impossible. APADRC scheduled a follow-up meeting to provide additional support to the teachers and staff -- troubleshoot early roadblocks they were encountering, to help them customize a plan to integrate the RJ Councils into the unique disciplinary processes for each school, and to help them develop a peer mediation class that would serve as a standing period for members of the RJ Councils at each school to receive additional training and to mediate cases. However, the LAUSD soon suspended in-person schooling indefinitely in response to the first wave of the pandemic.

APADRC would have spent the remainder of the grant period providing technical assistance to each of the schools as they moved forward with implementing RJ Councils on their campuses and working with them to draft a sustainability plan to preserve RJ Councils at each school.

Proposed Schedule	Actual Timeline
---------- 2019 ----------	
MAR to JUN -- Outreach to local schools and recruit 5 schools from low-resource neighborhoods in LA County	**MAR** -- Received grant
	APR -- Conducted outreach to LAUSD schools
	MAY -- Conducted outreach to LAUSD schools
	JUN -- Conducted outreach to LAUSD schools
JUL -- Sign MOUs with five participating schools	**JUL** -- Conducted outreach to LAUSD schools
AUG	**AUG** -- (1) Conducted outreach to LAUSD schools; (2) Recruited 5 schools through The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools (The Partnership)
SEP -- (1) Administer pre-training survey; (2) Start 6 week in-person training (Part I: Conflict Resolution Theory)	**SEP** -- (1) Signed MOU with The Partnership (on behalf of the 5 participating schools); (2) Developed customized training schedules for each school; (3) Administered pre-training survey; (4) Started 6 week in-person training (Part I: Conflict Resolution Theory)

OCT -- (1) Complete 6 week in-person training; (2) Administer mid-training survey	**OCT** -- (1) Conducted feedback interviews with teachers from each school; (2) Modified program curriculum using teacher feedback and APADRC staff observations; (3) Continued 6 week in-person training
NOV -- (1) Start 4 week in-person training (Part II: Conflict Resolution Practice); (2) Administer post-training survey	**NOV** -- (1) Completed 6 week in-person training; (2) Administered mid-training survey; (3) Started 4 week in-person training (Part II: Conflict Resolution Practice)
DEC -- (1) Complete 4 week in-person training; (2) Establish Restorative Justice (RJ) Councils at each school	**DEC** -- (1) Completed 4 week in-person training; (2) Administered post-training survey; (3) Conducted feedback interviews with teachers from each school in preparation for developing RJ Councils at each campus, during which APADRC was notified that the schools were unaware of the requirement to develop RJ Councils (as outlined in the MOU with The Partnership)
---------- 2020 ----------	
JAN to APR: (1) Provide technical assistance and support to the RJ Council on each campus; (2) Conduct focus groups consisting of students, teachers, and staff to support ongoing development of RJ Councils; (3) Complete analysis of survey data and share results with participating schools and funders; (4) Help each school draft RJ Council Sustainability Plans to ensure continuity of program	**JAN** -- (1) Met with The Partnership and each school to affirm understanding of MOU requirement to develop RJ Councils on each campus; (2) Conducted meetings with each school to achieve school buy-in to establish RJ Councils on their campuses; (3) Completed analysis of survey data
	FEB -- (1) Worked with each school to begin developing RJ Councils on each campus; (2) Conducted planning meetings with each school to support their efforts to secure schoolwide buy-in to establish RJ Councils on their campuses
	MAR to APR -- WHO and CDC declares COVID-19 pandemic. LAUSD suspends in-person schooling indefinitely.

b. School Demographic Profiles (2019-2020)

All five schools that were recruited are majority minority schools with a high proportion of English learners. Almost all students qualify for free or reduced lunches. Two middle schools and three high schools were recruited.

A. **Edwin Markham Middle School** (Watts)[1]
   a. Enrolled: 698 students
   b. Grades: 6 to 8
   c. FRL: 98 percent of the student body qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Lunches

d. Homeless: 67 students
e. English Learners: 26 percent of the student body are English learners
f. Race and Ethnicity: The student body is 74 percent Latino and 26 percent Black (2018-2019)

B. **David Starr Jordan High School** (Watts)[2]
   a. Enrolled: 534 students
   b. Grades: 9 to 12
   c. FRL: 99 percent of the student body qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Lunches
   d. Homeless: 34 students
   e. English Learners: 28 percent of the student body are English learners
   f. Race and Ethnicity: The student body is 82 percent Latino and 18 percent Black (2018-2019)

C. **Robert Louis Stevenson College and Career Preparatory** (East Los Angeles)[3]
   a. Enrolled: 1,100 students
   b. Grades: 6 to 8
   c. FRL: 93 percent of the student body qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Lunches
   d. Homeless: 50 students
   e. English Learners: 15 percent of the student body are English learners
   f. Race and Ethnicity: The student body is 100 percent Latino (2018-2019)

D. **Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School** (Pico-Gardens)[4]
   a. Enrolled: 1,013 students
   b. Grades: 9 to 12
   c. FRL: 92 percent of the student body qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Lunches
   d. Homeless: 23 students
   e. English Learners: 12.5 percent of the student body are English learners
   f. Race and Ethnicity: The student body is 98 percent Latino, 1 percent Black, and 1 percent White (2018-2019)

E. **Santee Education Complex** (South Central Los Angeles)[5]
   a. Enrolled: 1,788 students
   b. Grades: 9 to 12
   c. FRL: 93 percent of the student body qualify for Free and Reduced-Price Lunches
   d. Homeless: 65 students
   e. English Learners: 15 percent of the student body are English learners
   f. Race and Ethnicity: The student body is 92 percent Latino, 6 percent Black, and 2 percent White (2018-2019)

Part I: Looking Back

B. Program Impact

a. Expected Outcomes

APADRC intended to reach 100 students and 20 staff through the grant. It proposed the following expected outcomes:

1. Students will experience improved social and emotional outcomes and develop leadership skills that will help them lead their peers through conflict resolution.
2. Each school will establish an RJ Council that will resolve at least two conflicts by the end of the school year.
3. The cumulative efforts of the engagement with teachers and school staff through the implementation of the RJ peer mediation program will lead to an improved school climate with students feeling supported by adults and connected to resources they need.

b. Evaluating Outcomes

APADRC is evaluating the first expected outcome using the evaluation surveys that were administered pre-, mid-, and post-training. The second expected outcome -- had the COVID-19 pandemic not rendered the creation of the RJ Councils impossible -- would have been evaluated based on case management documentation that the RJ Councils from each school would have shared with APADRC. Additionally, APADRC had planned on developing a record-keeping system that would for each school (1) track the number of cases brought to the RJ Council by month and school year, (2) categorize cases by type of conflict, (3) identify whether cases were referred by teachers or students, and (4) identify conflict trends over time.

As for the last expected outcome, pre-pandemic, the teachers from the participating schools had agreed to administer school climate assessment surveys to the entire school body (students, teachers, and staff). APADRC planned on supporting the schools in their efforts to administer paper or electronic surveys at the beginning and end of each semester (four surveys in total annually). However, in recognition that schools are often stretched thin when it comes to time and resources, APADRC was prepared to reduce the number of annual surveys to three -- once at the beginning of the year, once either at the end of the first semester or the beginning of the next semester, and one at the end of the year. APADRC planned on analyzing the survey results to identify changes in school climate.

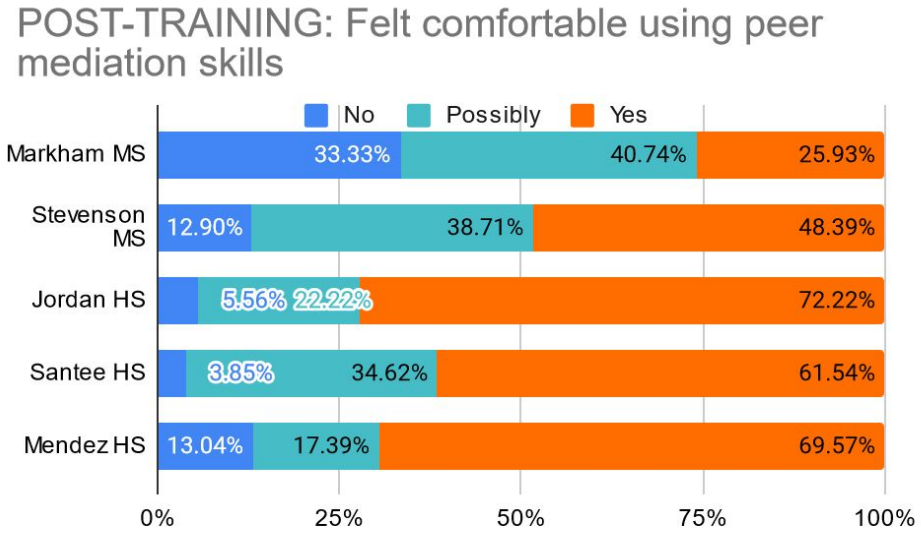
c. What Students Learned: Evaluations

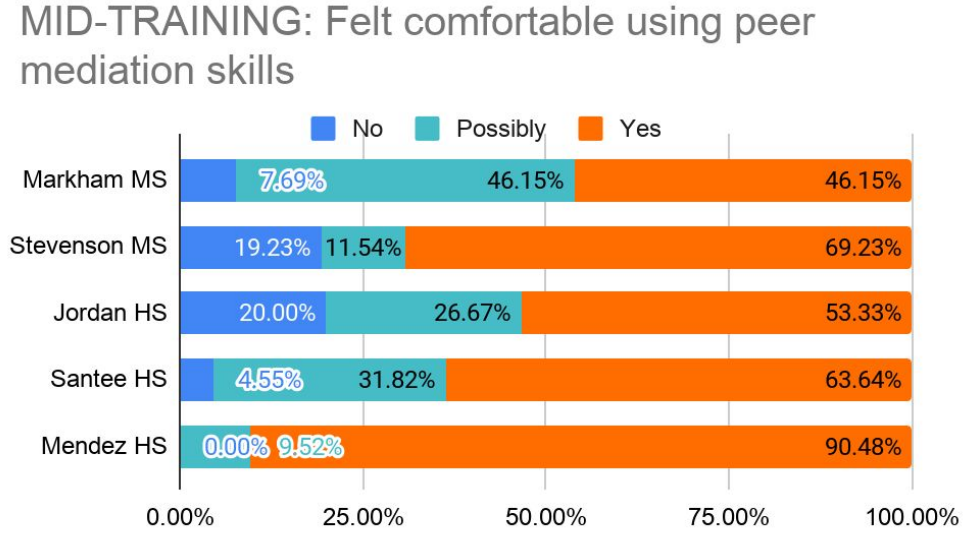
APADRC conducted 110 mid-training and 125 post-training surveys total from the five participating schools. A selection of responses are highlighted in the report. Please note that changing members in the cohort of trainees from each school may impact the conclusions that can be drawn from the data.

Table A. Number of students who completed the 10-week in-person training by school

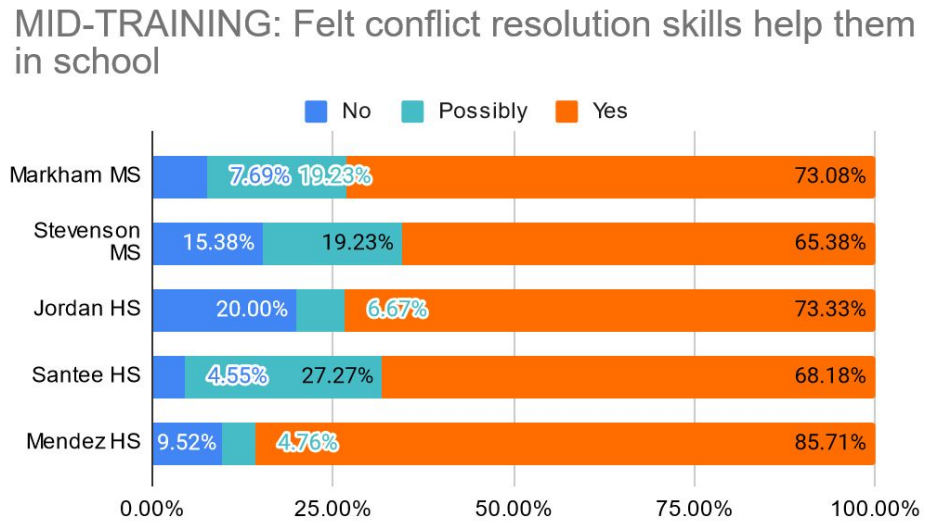
	Markham MS	Jordan HS	Stevenson MS	Mendez HS	Santee Ed.
Weeks 1-6 (Theory)	26	15	26	21	22
Weeks 7-10 (Practice)	27	18	31	23	26

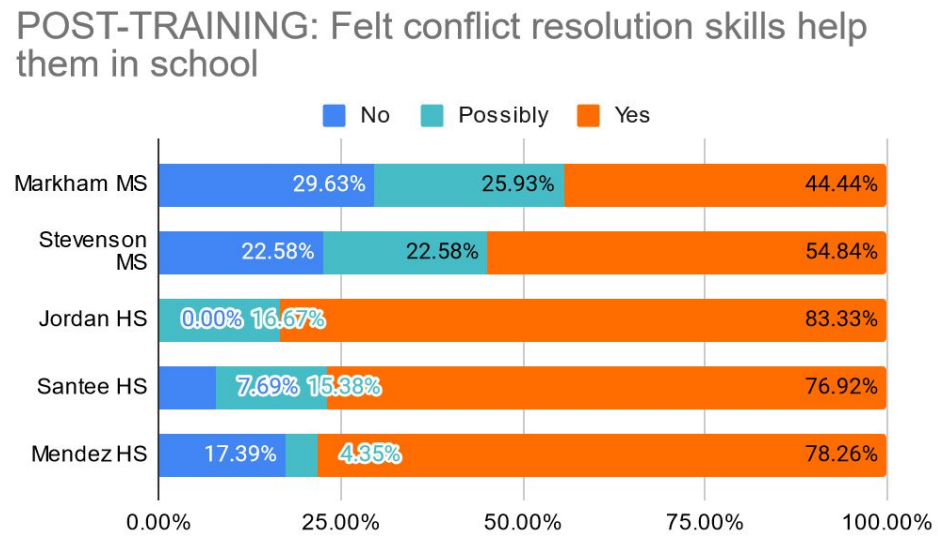
*** roster of trainees altered from the first to the second half of the training program*



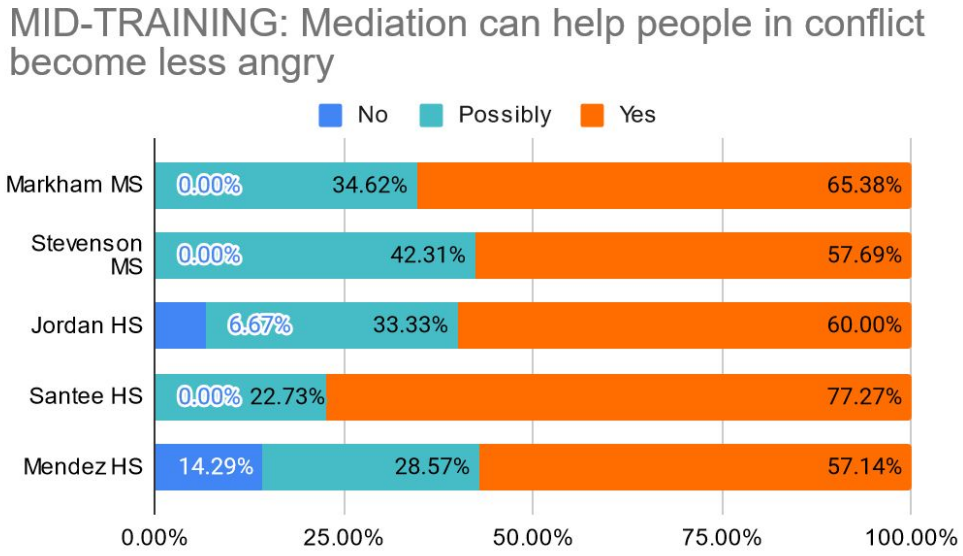


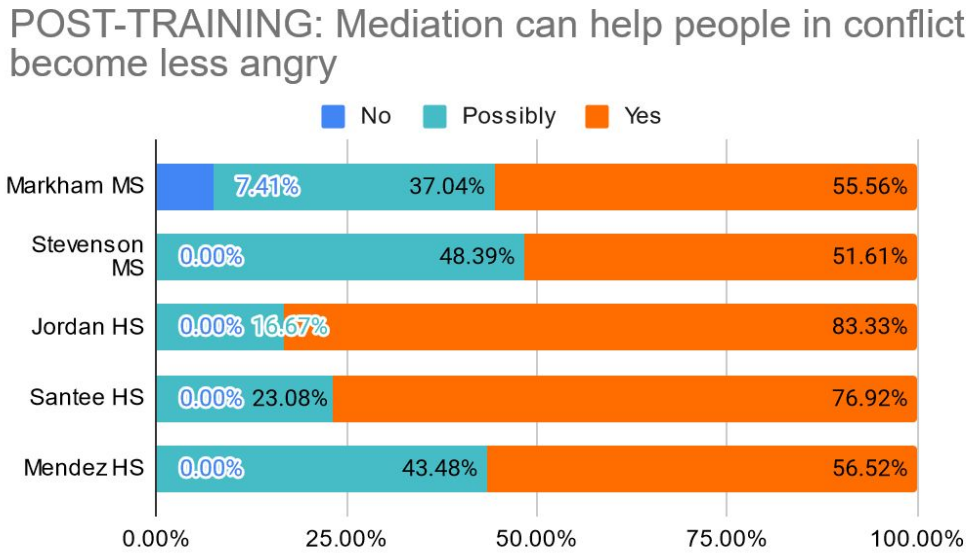
A majority of the students that underwent training from each school felt comfortable using peer mediations skills in the middle of and at the end of the training. However, the proportion of students who felt certain about their abilities decreased from mid- to post-training, with the highest attrition rate coming from the middle schools (Markham MS and Stevenson MS) and Mendez HS. Most notably, the students from Mendez HS, which reported the highest levels of certainty in their abilities (over 90 percent) in the mid-training evaluations, reported a decrease in their confidence levels post-training (69 percent). Jordan High School was the only school whose students reported feeling more certainty about their conflict resolution abilities at the end of the training.



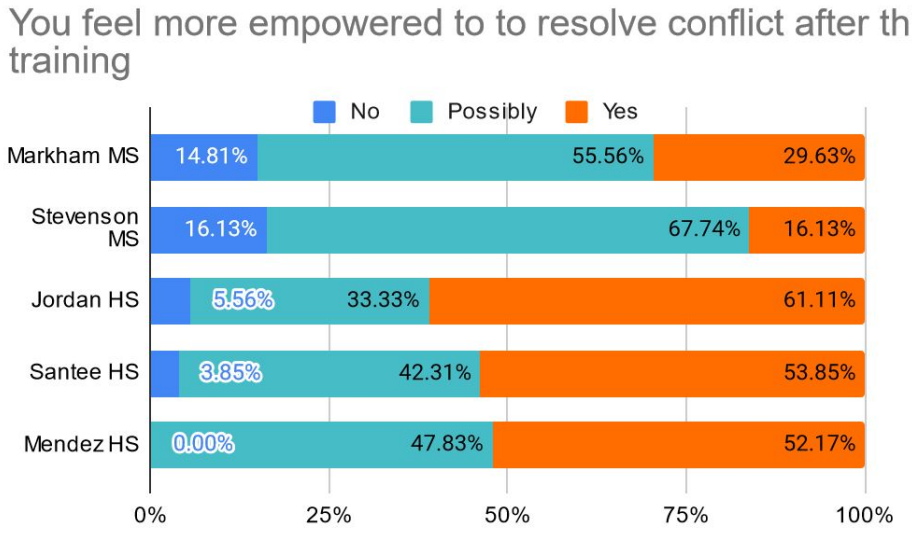


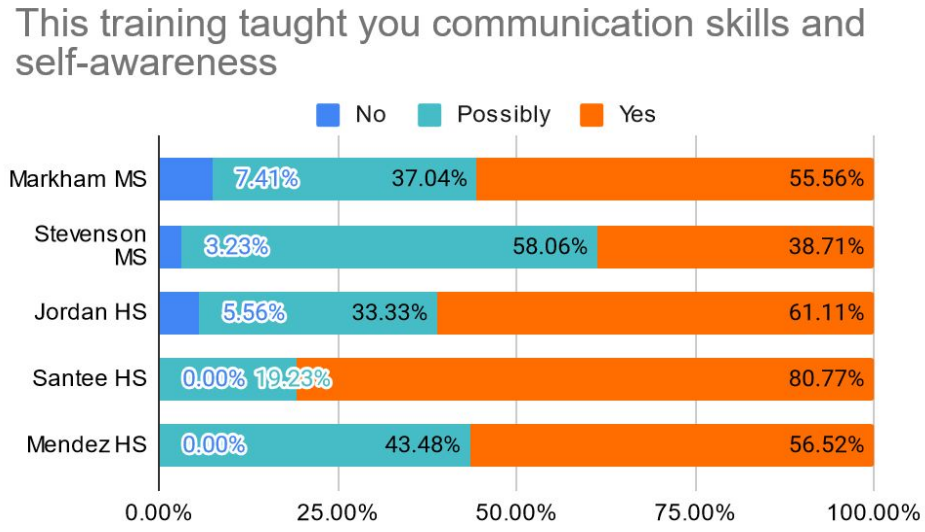
Similarly, a majority of the students from each school felt that the conflict resolutions skills they were taught helped them in school during the middle of and at the end of the training. Likewise, the proportion of students who felt that the conflict resolutions skills they were taught helped them in school decreased from mid- to post-training, and this decrease is particularly dramatic for the middle schools. However, Jordan HS and Santee HS observed modest increases in the proportion of students who felt the training helped them in school.





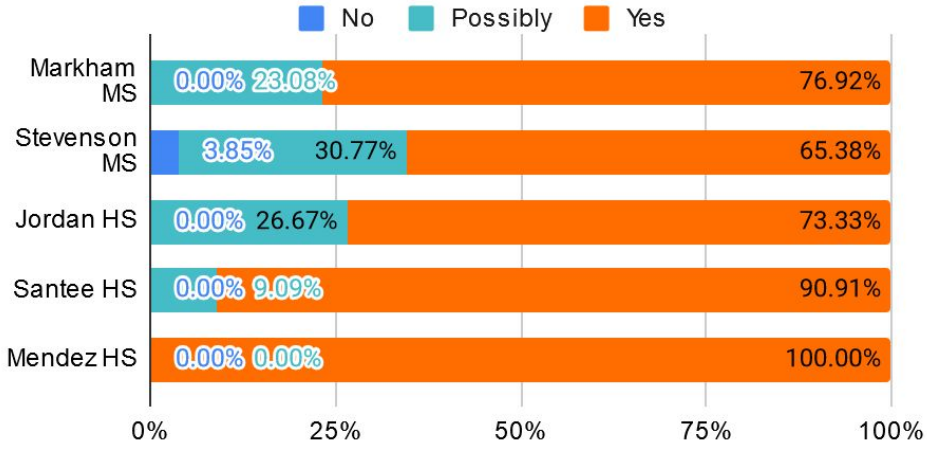
Overwhelmingly, most students -- mid- and post-training -- felt that mediation can help resolve feelings of anger resulting from conflict. Only a minority of students from Markham MS (7 percent) doubted mediation could mitigate feelings of anger post-training, while the minority of students mid-training from Jordan HS (7 percent) and Mendez HS (14 percent) who doubted mediation could resolve feelings of anger shrank to zero post-training.



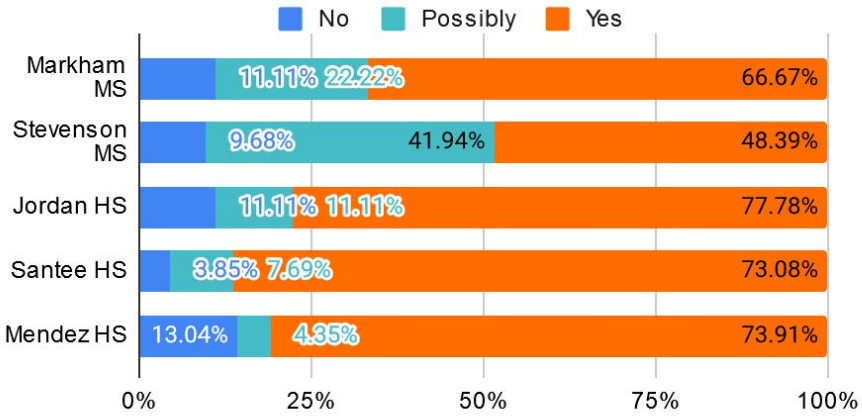


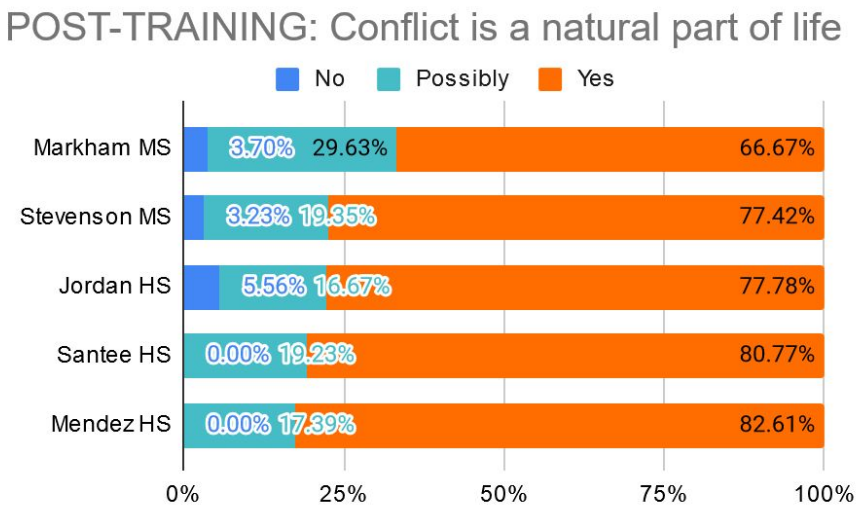
Overwhelmingly, most students felt both empowered by the training to mediate conflicts and that the training taught them communication skills and self-awareness. Notably, though a small overall proportion of the trainees, more students from the middle schools and Jordan HS did not feel the training empowered them in this way or taught them conflict resolution skills.

MID-TRAINING: There are many non-violent ways to resolve conflict



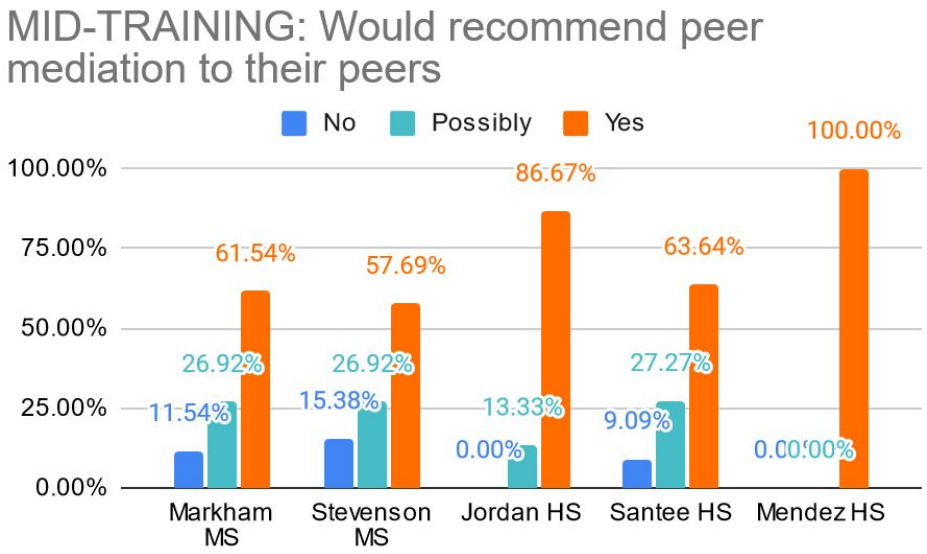
POST-TRAINING: In resolving a conflict, it is not okay to embarrass or humiliate the other person

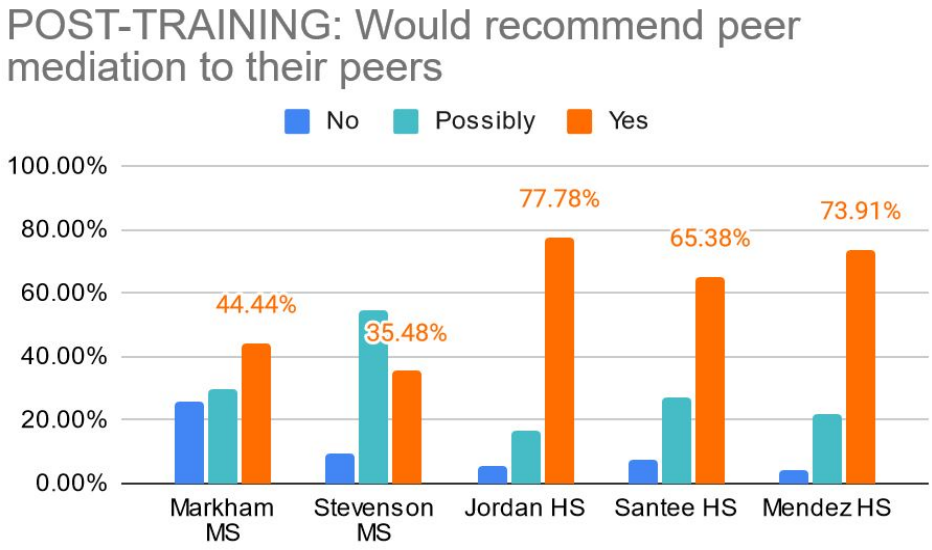




While a majority of students felt that resolving a conflict should not involve embarrassing or humiliating the other person, 4 percent of students from Santee HS and between 10 percent to 13 percent of students from the other schools did not agree.

However, with the exception of a small minority of students from the middle schools (4 percent for Markham MS and 3 percent for Stevenson MS) and Jordan HS (6 percent), almost all students came out of the training with the understanding that conflict is a natural part of life. Moreover, with the exception of 4 percent of students from Stevenson MS, all other students agreed that there are many non-violent ways to resolve conflict.





Generally, the percentage of students that would recommend the training to their peers decreased between the mid- and post-training periods. However, compared to the middle schools, a higher proportion of students from the high schools reported that they would recommend the training to peers mid- and post-training. Meanwhile, the students from Markham MS and Stevenson MS reported a significant decrease in their willingness to recommend the training to peers between the mid- and post-training periods (from 62 percent to 44 percent and 58 percent to 35 percent, respectively).

Overall, the survey results indicate that students appear to have retained the mediation techniques the training emphasized that would support their ability to engage with their peers with an open mind and empower them to problem-solve in social settings. However a couple notable trends emerged from the survey data that could provide APADRC direction for program modification:

A. Either limit program implementation to high schools in the future or modify the training curriculum so that it is more effective at imparting mediation skills to middle school students and more enjoyable for middle school students to complete.

B. To some extent, the consistent drop the students reported in their feelings of certainty about their peer mediation competencies between mid- and post-training was expected. The post-training survey was administered after the more challenging, practical role-playing portion of the training, which required students to navigate the real ambiguities of practically applying the theory that they were only very recently taught in the first section of the training. APADRC should consider reviewing and revising the role-playing portion of the curriculum for clarity, relevance, and efficacy in providing realistic and relatable opportunities for trainees to apply and work through conflict resolution theory. Moreover, to be certain about what other causes might have contributed to these outcomes, APADRC should complete an in-house assessment to identify the other factors that may have contributed to declined interest in and perception of the effectiveness of the training between the mid- and post-training periods.

Part I: Looking Back

C. Reflections on Challenges to Grant Implementation

a. School Buy-In

As stated in the overview of program implementation, APADRC began the school outreach process without the knowledge that individual schools in LAUSD cannot negotiate with external partners on their own behalf, and must instead rely on the district office to negotiate any collaborative program partnerships. The APADRC program coordinator for the grant had spent roughly two months negotiating with individual LAUSD schools only to learn about this rule the week before the Phase I deadline. To meet the time sensitive needs of the grant, APADRC's leadership worked with The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools to quickly secure five schools to participate in the grant. This alternative was thought to be the most rational and expedient solution, given that The Partnership already (1) works with LAUSD school that have a strong focus on restorative justice and (2) has developed the bureaucratic infrastructure that would be necessary to facilitate quick and easy collaboration with their partner schools to implement the APADRC's RJ peer mediation grant.

However, because APADRC could not be directly involved in recruiting the individual schools that eventually participated in the grant, it is unclear how the schools that were eventually enrolled in the program came to be selected and what motivations, if any, the schools had for being involved in the program. It would become clear that being unable to develop direct relationships with the schools that would be involved in the program early on strongly affected the levels of buy-in from the school teachers, staff, and students who were involved, which then contributed to the major implementation obstacles that APADRC faced for the duration of the grant.

Consequently, APADRC faced more challenging than expected dynamics that required continual problem-solving in the course of working with the schools to implement the grant. Given that entire classes were volunteered to participate in the training without student consent, APADRC observed a lack of general disinterest, and sometimes disruptive and disrespectful behavior, from students in some schools throughout the duration of the training. Because classes held in specific periods were volunteered for the training -- in lieu of a dedicated pool of student trainees -- and that training was split between two semesters, changing class schedules between semesters resulted in a changing pool of student trainees and cohorts of students receiving incomplete training. Finally, as the students in leadership/art class periods were volunteered to complete the training, unanticipated scheduling conflicts often resulted in students missing lessons and/or dividing their attention between the lessons and tasks related to other campus activities that they were required to complete during the class period.

Moreover, the levels of individual interest in RJ among the teachers that were volunteered to participate in the program impacted their initial and overall engagement and commitment to the program. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, APADRC planned on reinforcing

what the teachers learned by sitting in on the student RJ training by completing full mediation training for all teachers who would be directly overseeing or supporting the student mediators on the RJ Council. APADRC opened up one of its quarterly mediation trainings -- facilitated shortly before COVID-19 lockdown measures were enacted -- to the teachers from the participating schools. However, only one teacher from Markham Middle School attended.

Full mediation training was not mandatory but was highly-encouraged. APADRC did not mandate full-mediation training in recognition that doing so would have required teachers and staff to take at least one full day off from work, and most of the teachers were not confident that they would be reimbursed for this particular professional development opportunity. Prior to the pandemic, APADRC attempted to reconcile this challenge by offering to provide each school with a customized on-campus teacher and staff training at a time of their choosing.

b. Intra- and Inter-Organizational Communication

APADRC was able to quickly secure five schools to partner with for the grant through its collaboration with The Partnership. However, as the process was by necessity fast-tracked, potential communication issues arose that impacted grant implementation. For example, the five schools that were secured were aware that the program involved students, teachers, and staff completing a 10-week in-person training (Phase I), but did not seem to be aware that the grant required participating schools to subsequently establish and maintain an RJ Council that would facilitate peer mediation on their respective campuses (Phase II). The APADRC staff implementing the grant were not made aware of this issue until after the first half of the training before winter break had been completed. It is unclear whether the documentation outlining both Phase I and II were made available to the teachers and staff from the participating schools.

A lack of clear expectations and communication protocols between APADRC and school teachers and staff may have also led to challenges to documentation of grant implementation activities. For example, the attendance sheets for the in-person trainings at each school were not consistently available to the APADRC.

APADRC also underwent managerial/leadership staffing changes throughout the period of grant implementation, which may have also contributed to miscommunication between staff internally and between APADRC, The Partnership, and the participating schools.

Part II.
Looking Forward

Part II: Looking Forward

A. The Need for RJ in LA County Schools

a. LAUSD School Climate

The LAUSD School Experience Survey is administered annually each fall to all LAUSD schools. The survey provides important feedback from teachers, staff, students and parents.

Survey results from 2019-2020 (which had a 94 percent response rate from students) suggest that while LAUSD has undertaken efforts in recent years to provide more social and emotional development resources for students, some students still find their school's social environment to be challenging. Thirty one percent of students report having had mean rumors or lies spread about them, 21 percent of students have been teased about what their bodies look like, 19 percent of students have been made fun of because of their looks or the way they talk, and 28 percent of students have been unjokingly pushed, shoved, slapped, hit, or kicked by someone. One-fourth of students feel that their peers are not kind to each other. Meanwhile, 15 percent of students reported not being able to stay calm when others bothered or criticized them, and 18 percent of students report that they are not able to clearly verbalize their feelings.

The survey results also indicate that teachers and staff might welcome more resources devoted to helping them manage student-student and student-teacher conflict. Seventeen percent of LAUSD teachers do not feel that their school handles disciplinary problems fairly, with 23 percent of staff feeling that their schools do not effectively handle student discipline and behavioral problems. Thirty-three percent of staff feel that disruptive student behavior is a problem at their school. Sixty-one percent of LAUSD teachers reported wanting support in developing social emotional learning curricular and/or programs at their schools.[6]

b. History of RJ in LAUSD

The LAUSD has made significant investments in restorative justice in recent years, with its most recent budget allocating more than $10 million for restorative justice programming. This turn toward restorative justice was initiated formally in 2013, after over a decade of activism protesting against the district's disciplinary policies. That year, the LAUSD established the *School Climate Bill of Right*, which mandated the implementation of RJ in LAUSD schools and made the LAUSD the first district in the state to ban out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for "defiant" and "disruptive" behavior. The district set a goal to have a cohort of teachers and administrators trained in restorative justice in all of its schools by 2020.

LAUSD previously employed a "zero tolerance" policy for students who failed to comply, in any way, with any direction given by teachers or staff -- providing a mandate to suspend students for "willful defiance." Prior to the change, "willful defiance" accounted for almost half of all school suspensions in California.[7] "Willful defiance" is a vague term that has been

disproportionately applied to Black and Latino students.[8] Numerous studies have shown that students of color and students with disabilities are suspended and expelled at disproportionately higher rates than white students and students without disabilities.[9] A 2013 study by the UCLA Civil Rights Project found that Black students are three times more likely to be suspended than white students. English learners were also found to be more likely to be suspended.[10] Research has also shown that zero tolerance disciplinary policies are ineffective at curbing student misbehavior.

Under the new policy, schools began instituting a set of practices meant to improve student relationships with school staff and peers and prioritizing interventions that kept students in school.

c. The Future of Restorative Justice in LA Schools

The protests that have arisen in response to the police killing of George Floyd have forced all institutions to reevaluate the punitive philosophy behind the current criminal legal system and its incarnations in other institutions. The LAUSD board voted in June 2020 to cut the LASPD budget by $25 million (35 percent of the school police budget), with the intention of reallocating the funds to support student health and well-being. The LASPD has been attributed as the largest independent school police force in the country. Activists have called for more student support services, such as additional counselors and social workers.

Over the past decade, a rising movement to transition from punitive disciplinary actions to a process based on a more rehabilitative philosophy has pushed the LAUSD to bring more restorative justice into social and emotional development programming for students. Many educators and youth advocates assert that restorative justice has led to significant reductions in suspensions and expulsions and transformed school climates by strengthening relationships between students and teachers. These claims appear to be supported by the data. Between 2011 and 2018, the LAUSD reported a 41 percent drop in suspensions. In 2016, LAUSD reported a 92 percent decrease in the days lost to suspension as a result of the implementation of restorative justice in its schools.[11] In 2019, the district saw a 75 percent drop in suspensions across all categories and a narrowing of racial disparities among students who were suspended.[12] Moreover, a 2019 WestEd review of restorative justice in U.S. schools found that restorative justice improved teachers' respect for students and students' respect for teachers.[13]

However, even in school districts with well-established programs, retaining enough funding to sustain such programs remains a challenge. The perpetual threat of state budget cuts to public education leaves schools intending to develop and maintain restorative justice programs in a precarious position. Since the late 1970s, California has spent less than the national average on K-12 education.[14] Despite yielding the highest annual state GDP in the U.S., California invests a smaller fraction of its economy on public education than most other states.[15]

Greater Los Angeles is the second most populous metropolitan area in the U.S. Meanwhile, the LAUSD is the second largest school district in the nation, serving over 600,000 students from K-12 at over 1,000 schools (not counting charter schools that are also located in the service area). In LA County, 46 percent of households are rent-burdened (spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing), with one in three households struggling on a monthly

basis to meet basic needs.[16] Students whose basic needs are not met at home are primed to experience more challenges to their social and emotional development than their peers with more secure home lives.

The LAUSD serves many high need schools and students that will require more funding than is currently allocated to support the implementation of restorative justice in its schools. Further financial support is needed to maintain and grow the positive gains from restorative justice in schools that have been seen over the last several years.[17]

Part II: Looking Forward

B. Lessons Learned: What Is Needed Moving Forward to Implement RJ Programs in Schools

a. APADRC

Securing Buy-In: At the start of grant implementation, APADRC spent at least two months outreaching to schools. However, APADRC completed this process prior to learning that it could not negotiate directly with individual LAUSD schools. If APADRC wanted to replicate program implementation with LAUSD schools not affiliated with The Partnership, it would need to budget between three to six extra months before the start of grant implementation to negotiate with the LAUSD headquarters.

The lack of buy-in from schools also impacted the consistency, and ultimately the effectiveness, with which APADRC was able to implement the program. For purposes of expediency, schools often volunteered entire classes (like their leadership classes), without giving students the option to opt-in or opt-out, resulting in inconsistent levels of interest and engagement in the in-person training. Moreover, the schools did not require the same set of students that started the first half of the training to complete the second half of the training, resulting in some schools having a set of students that underwent only the first half of the training and another set of students that underwent only the latter half of the training.

APADRC understands that an RJ peer mediation program should be designed with adaptability in mind for it to be replicable in other schools. However, APADRC also believes that it needs to establish baseline criteria that schools wanting to establish an RJ peer mediation program must meet to ensure that schools have both the personal investment and resource capacity to implement the program effectively and sustainably. Such criteria might involve: requiring that students who opt-in to training be committed to complete training and more selective criteria guiding the student selection to participate in the program.

Lastly, APADRC found that its efforts were also hampered by their failure to devote enough time and resources to relationship-building with teachers and staff prior to the start of the training. It was not until the end of the 10-week training period that APADRC felt that they had developed a personal connection with the teachers, who they only then saw become invested in peer mediation and the potential of RJ Councils on campus. APADRC realizes that it would need more time and freedom in the outreach process to engage directly with teachers that might be involved in the program, which would allow it to recruit schools that both have the capacity and are truly invested in working with APADRC to implement an RJ peer mediation program.

Impact Evaluation: APADRC learned that its program evaluation instruments and protocols need to be updated. While APADRC implemented mid- and post- training surveys, it did not implement a proper baseline pre-training survey. A pre-training survey was administered to

students, but the questions were recycled from a previous program and, upon closer inspection, were not suitable for evaluating the impact of the 10-week in-person RJ training program. Secondly, evaluations were not also administered to the teachers that participated in the training, which would have provided useful information about the effectiveness and impact of the training from the teacher and staff perspective. Lastly, the student survey process also did not provide "free response" questions that might have enabled students to provide more context -- as well as potential instruction for program modification -- for their answers.

b. LAUSD Schools and Partners

Given that LAUSD is invested in supporting the development of restorative justice programming in their schools, the district needs to make it easier for organizations that want to provide this support to work with them.

- ❏ *Make the process of collaborating with the district and individual schools more transparent to external partners.* The inability to negotiate with schools one-on-one in the course of the outreach process significantly interfered with APADRC's ability to establish strong school buy-in and to work with schools with high investment in the program from the start. LAUSD might consider developing a "resources" page on their website that provides clear instructions to potential external partners about the process of contacting and negotiating with specific contact persons at the district to collaborate on school programming and other opportunities.

- ❏ *Enable school teachers and staff who will be directly involved in program implementation to sit at the negotiation table.* While proxy institutions that work directly with individual LAUSD schools, like The Partnership and the district itself, aim to streamline and standardize negotiations with outside partners on potential collaborations by negotiating on behalf of individual schools, teachers and staff need to be directly involved in the negotiation process. Individual schools often have school-specific needs and constraints that proxy institutions are not aware of and therefore cannot account for during negotiations about which schools to volunteer to pilot or expand programming.

- ❏ *Designate within the portion of its annual budget allocated to restorative justice funding for teacher and staff professional development.* While LAUSD has been steadily increasing funding allocated to growing the implementation of restorative justice at its schools, it needs to provide additional funding to support the training needed for teachers and staff to effectively develop and retain restorative justice facilitation skills. Schools often rely entirely on a dedicated restorative justice coordinator and/or a small cohort of teachers with a personal interest in restorative justice -- resulting in these teachers serving double-duty as both teachers and the school's designated restorative justice staff. But for restorative justice to be actualized not only on paper but in practice on school campuses and truly embedded into a school's culture, schools require more than just a handful of dedicated teachers and staff who are informed and well-versed in restorative justice. Even skilled practitioners in the conflict resolution field -- of which

restorative justice is a subspecialty -- need to continually update their skills through additional professional development. Schools cannot expect to be able to effectively facilitate restorative justice on their campuses without providing additional opportunities for more teachers and staff to meaningfully retain and develop their restorative justice knowledge base and facilitation skills.

c. Grantmaking Institutions

To ensure that they develop grants that more effectively support the implementation of restorative justice programming in the field, granting institutions should consider the following recommendations:

- ❏ *Budget more funding and time for organizations to conduct outreach and stakeholder engagement activities.* Granting institutions often underestimate the time that it takes for an organization to build inroads with communities and partners to collaborate on a program, even with communities and partners that might already be familiar with them. The process of building trust cannot be short-changed, and as the lessons learned in this report indicate, the process of securing buy-in is foundational to being able to effectively implement a grant. Moreover, navigating administrative educational bureaucracies and negotiating with individual participating schools -- which each have their own culture, politics, personalities, and set of needs and constraints -- takes time and the process, if done right, cannot be expedited. This oversight also places grantmaking institutions out of step with the rising movement for community-engaged, participatory program design, which at its core requires that more resources be devoted to support stakeholder engagement in designing programs.[18]

- ❏ *Budget more funding to support program evaluation.* Program evaluation is a key complementary component of program implementation. Yet grantmaking institutions tend to focus almost exclusively on supporting program implementation tasks with program evaluation serving as an afterthought. Program evaluation is essential to discerning whether and how to modify programming. However, it is an often resource intensive process and therefore deprioritized in the nonprofit world; nonprofits are often under-resourced and must devote what resources they have to tasks directly related to program implementation. That APADRC struggled with building program evaluation into the RJ peer mediation program is less an indictment of the organization's capabilities -- given that lack of effective program evaluation is pervasive in the nonprofit world -- and more reflective of (A) insufficient understanding of and expertise in program evaluation and resources in nonprofits to dedicate to program evaluation and (B) a lack of consideration by grantmaking institutions about program evaluation in the grantmaking process.[19] According to a 2016 study on evaluation practices in the nonprofit world, only 8 percent of nonprofits have staff that are dedicated to evaluation, with 52 percent of organizations reporting insufficient financial resources as a barrier to program evaluation. Only 12 percent of nonprofits spent 5 percent or more of their budgets on program evaluation, with most (68 percent) spending between 2 percent to 5 percent of

their budgets on program evaluation. Around 68 percent of organizations that received funding to support program evaluation identified foundations and philanthropy as their top funding source. The use of data science and evidence-based decision-making are quickly becoming the new gold standard in program management and policy-making -- 38 percent of nonprofits already currently use big data. Grantmaking institutions that fail to give greater consideration to supporting program evaluation in the grantmaking process will set themselves behind the new curb.[20]

- *Budget funding to enable meaningful stakeholder involvement in program implementation*. Where program implementation requires teacher and staff involvement, granting institutions should factor into the grantmaking process that teachers and staff need to be compensated for any additional time -- that they must commit apart from their expected teacher duties -- they would need to dedicate to program implementation. While schools should and sometimes do reimburse teachers and staff for professional development, in practice, schools can be rigid in their application of criteria for what qualifies for reimbursement. As was the case in the course of program implementation for the RJ mediation program, schools may not consider training activities completed in the course of program implementation reimbursable “professional development.”

Part II: Looking Forward

C. What's Next for APADRC

a. Peer Community Circles

Along with continuing to identify opportunities to support RJ in schools, APADRC is also focusing on supporting students in a time of unprecedented crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in an era of remote-learning that has not only challenged students academically but curtailed their social and emotional development. Unable to engage with peers in an in-person school setting, students are losing out on opportunities to develop the soft skills needed to navigate their personal and professional lives in the future.

APADRC has answered this crisis by creating virtual community peer circles. In March of 2020, APADRC began hosting informal weekly virtual Zoom gatherings to create space for middle school, high school, and university students who needed opportunities to discuss issues they faced in light of the pandemic. APADRC formalized the gatherings in December -- Peer Community Circles -- under its Peer Mediation program.

APADRC coordinates two designated recurring Peer Community Circles -- (1) a school-specific circle it is working with school administration from individual campuses to facilitate that is held during each school's advisory period, and (2) a communal lunch period circle open to students from all LA County schools to self-reflect and decompress with others as they navigate the stresses of daily life. The circles are held at the same time on the same day of each week.

Peer Community Circles provide students the opportunity to reclaim a sense of autonomy in a time of unprecedented insecurity as they grapple with the personal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic -- the loss of relatives, jobs and a stable household income, and the reliability of an established school routine. The virtual format of the Peer Community Circles increases critical opportunities for students to engage in cross-school communication with social groups outside of their nucleus communities. This opportunity to engage with students from different academic, cultural, social-economic, and ideological backgrounds (1) nurtures open-mindedness, (2) grounds their perceptions of each other in reality, (3) fosters in them a sense of mutual accountability, and (4) encourages the development of a diverse sense of community.

In the immediate term, Peer Community Circles aims to establish a safe space for students to share their thoughts, to vent, and to experiment with communication during this formative period of their lives. In the long-term, Peer Community Circles intends to teach students positive communication by modeling skills that students are encouraged to adopt -- including conflict resolution and decision making through consensus.

APADRC initially took a more active role in facilitating the circles to help students from different schools become familiar with engaging with each other -- which included leading students through meditation sessions, mindfulness moments, and facilitating student discussions. As students develop their conflict resolution skills, APADRC intends to prepare

some of them to take on facilitation responsibilities and to transition Peer Community Circles into a student-led space. APADRC hopes that Peer Community Circles may encourage students to participate in more traditional peer mediation programs once in-person schooling resumes.

b. Peer Mediation Partners Network

APADRC's recent leadership transition in November 2020 brought with it a renewed focus on strengthening collaboration within the peer mediation community. APADRC has convened a peer mediation community partners network with the intention of nurturing more effective collaboration to address community needs. The network intends to facilitate data-sharing between community partners to promote awareness of best program reporting and evaluation practices in the field.

To that end, APADRC has initiated a collaborative relationship with Western Justice Center (WJC), a prominent peer mediation organization that specializes in peer mediation curriculum development, school district relationship development, and student and adult leadership engagement. WJC's "student driven, and adult supported" approach places student needs at the center of program development. APADRC has also partnered with Kids Managing Conflict (KMC), a conflict resolution resource hub for students, teachers, and school administration that is committed to fundraising for peer mediation programs.

APADRC is working to provide students additional opportunities for positive community engagement and to further develop their conflict resolution skills outside of the Peer Community Circles. Such efforts include (1) raising awareness about a new KMC virtual community platform, Peer Mediation Community, that connects members of the peer mediation community with one another and (2) collaborating with WJC and KMC to connect students from Peer Community Circles with student mentors from WJC and KMC's peer mediator program alumni network.

To raise the visibility of the peer mediation field, APADRC is also collaborating with WJC to promote their annual spring youth mediators summit -- Peer Mediation Invitational -- and with KMC to promote their annual peer mediation symposium.

Along with efforts to further formalize its working partnerships with WJC and KMC, and in the hopes of nurturing a more robust peer mediation community that can more effectively realize its shared commitment to meeting the current and future needs of youth, APADRC aims to grow this peer mediation partner network nationally within the next 18 months.

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