

12/21/19

Follow up from the Inside Out - Restorative Justice Meeting

Hi everyone,

I wanted to follow up from our Inside Out Group Meeting. Thank you all again for taking the time to attend the meeting, I know you are all very busy and this is another “new” (but yet still similar or the same) idea of working with students. I strongly feel one of the best ways to reach some of our most at risk students is to build a connection and sense of community with them. To find ways to show them that we care and will continue to care no matter what mistakes they make. However, we also need to find ways to help them understand the impact of mistakes that are made and to hold students accountable in the most productive and meaningful ways we can.

Sorry this is lengthy, I have been processing our visit over break and I am really excited about everything we talked about and saw. I would like to present some information to the school board and Mr. Grams but want to get our groups

I will start with a caveat that I realize the inmates that we interacted with individually were a part of the population who are working hard (and successfully) at change. Also, that the general population moving between activities and doing jobs are the ones who have earned the right to be in those situations. However, we did see many people on our tour and one thing I noticed from walking around in the general population of inmates in the halls was that most of the inmates had their heads up, their eyes met ours, and they seemed socially aware and comfortable. They often greeted us with a smile, head nod, or even voiced a greeting. I did not see people with heads down, averted eyes, or hunched shoulders. I did not see the majority of people withdrawing from their peers and their body language was not angry, depressed, or frustrated. Most greeted staff, they were friendly, and I did not see animosity between inmates and guards. When we walked into the workrooms many people looked up and greeted us with smiles or nods and it was a positive experience. When I compare this to the body language we frequently see with some of our at-risk students (such as; heads down, hoods pulled over to block their face, hair pulled down to hide their face, hunched shoulders, clenched hands, challenging looks, or even purposeful defiance or anger) I wonder how we can increase our support so that when we walk through the hall or cafeteria at school we see almost all confident and secure students who feel connections to the staff.

McGregor Celebrations— it sounds like Moose Lake Correctional Facility has a focus on training staff to work with inmates on resolving conflict in a restorative way, whether that is between inmates or between inmates and staff. McGregor School District is already working on a plan for some of this through staff trainings, the Elementary PBIS team, our School Comprehensive Improvement Plan Leadership Team, and through Cheryl Meld's grant that has allowed for Dr. Grace to come in and offer support and training to our staff. The district also has a group of elementary staff that have been through Restorative Practices training through MDE with Paul and Lorraine Mickelson.

Reflecting back on our Moose Lake circle discussion some things that stuck out to me were;

- "Relationships, relationships, relationships." The discussion focused on teaching social emotional skills and building relationships between inmates, between staff and inmates, and outside supports and the preventative focus of doing this in the schools. This makes me wonder how best we can increase our positive community building between law enforcement/social service/outside supports and students, students and students, and students and staff.
- "Don't give up on students." "Be Persistent". No matter how hard students push us away we need to continue to show them we care and work on making a connection with them.
- "When your hammer everything looks like a nail" and "sometimes the person may need a feather." How best can we give this message to everyone who is working with students? How can we communicate that consequences should be meaningful, punishment doesn't have to be "putting the hammer down" but should be restoring the relationships and repairing the harm that has been caused? Detention, expelling, or other punitive measures shouldn't be the go-to for all undesired behaviors.

Thoughts on Next Steps? I would love to get feedback from our group that attended on what your thoughts were, whether this is an area that should be pursued for our district/county and what should be the next steps? Do we want to give our thoughts to the school board and Mr. Grams on next steps? Are there additional people who might benefit from attending? Do we want to talk about strengthening our contacts with other people in this group?

Some possible options we could recommend depending on group consensus;

- Having additional staff attend the Inside Out Group such as; the HS Counselor Kelsey Tessier, the BARR Coordinator Nicki Sather, the ADSIS Teacher Sara Moser, some teaching and specials staff?
- Rotate an elementary and HS staff to regularly attend the Inside Out Group (possibly the HS counselor and a PBIS representative?) to continue to coordinate contacts, work the Reality Check Program, and the Federal inmates mentoring in schools' program?
- Increase collaboration between Aitkin Officers, Social Workers, etc to discuss alternate ways to build relationships with students at school and discuss restorative plans for students?

- Request PBIS and HS staff looking into how we would start student ambassador program in McGregor and training students to support conflict resolution?

Thank you again for attending and I look forward to your thoughts on what we should do with the information we learned at our group.

Thank you,

Sarah Pylvanen