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Determining Best Practices of Peer Mediation Methods in Kalamazoo Public Schools

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Determining Best Practices of Peer Mediation Methods in Kalamazoo Public Schools

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Background

Peer mediation is a method of conflict resolution in which a conflict between two people or groups is guided by a fellow student in order to reach an agreement. Peer mediation has been shown to be an effective tool in helping students resolve conflict and learning how to respond to future conflicts⁹. A reduction in school violence and suspensions has been seen in schools that have adopted this method¹⁴. However, there exist different methods for implementing peer mediation without a proven best practice. The two major methods are the whole school and the cadre approach. The whole school approach requires everyone at the school to be trained, while the cadre approach only requires a few students to be trained².

Our study was conducted in partnership with Gryphon Place, which was founded in 1970, and started as Youth Drug Drop-In Center. Today, with its 55 employees and 50 volunteers, Gryphon place offers a variety of services including mediation, restorative justice, peer mediation, school suicide prevention programs, and other crisis services.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the various forms of peer mediation and determine best practices for peer mediation in Kalamazoo Public Schools. The results will be compiled and presented to Gryphon Place for quality improvement purposes.

Methods

An online survey was distributed to a number of educators and administrators throughout the the Kalamazoo public elementary schools that currently run a peer mediation program. A total of 16 surveys were returned. Of the 16 responders, 9 were teachers, 3 were school administrators, and 4 denoted themselves as "other". Questions included their opinion on the effectiveness of the peer mediation program currently in place and if there were any barriers to successfully implementing the program. Multiple choice questions were scaled 1-5 (1 being least effective and 5 being most effective). Feedback was also encouraged and recorded for each question. Results were compiled and averages were calculated for multiple choice questions.

Results

16 Surveys were completed by variable professionals at multiple schools in the Kalamazoo area. Overall, the survey respondents found the peer mediation program to be somewhat beneficial to the students (3.69/5; 5 being most beneficial). The results show that the greatest barriers to using the peer mediation program are student willingness (50%) and time (38%). Respondents also feel there is not enough school-wide support for the program (2.94/5). Even so, most responders seem to encourage their students to go to peer mediation (3.8/5).

The respondents could also write in feedback about the program. Some of the feedback includes:

- "Some students actually settle their differences and go back to being friends"
- "More of a headache than anything else"
- "Lack of diversity in the mediation group"
- "Students learn positive tools to problem solve."
- "Great tool to help students problem solve small issues before they become bigger ones. It gives students a voice."

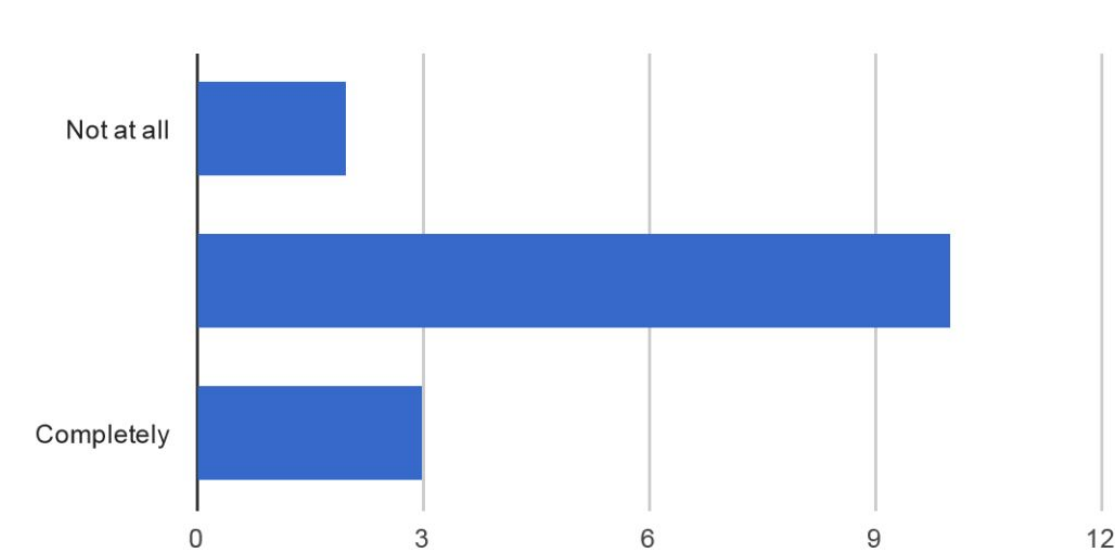


Figure 1. Results of survey question, "Do you think peer mediation is beneficial to students?"

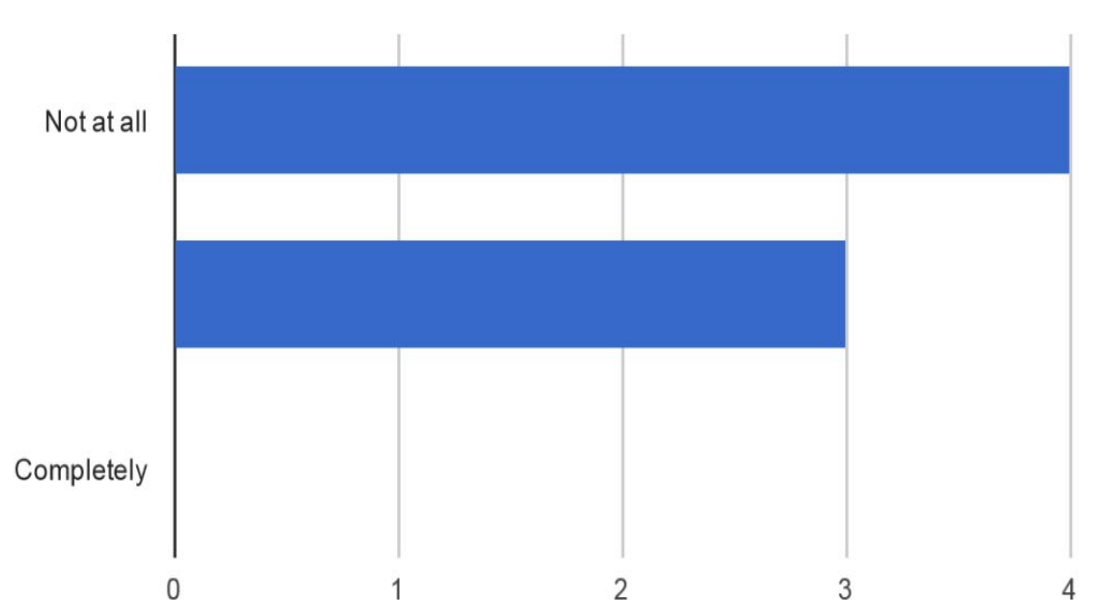


Figure 3. Results of the survey question, "Do you feel these is school-wide support for the peer mediation program?"

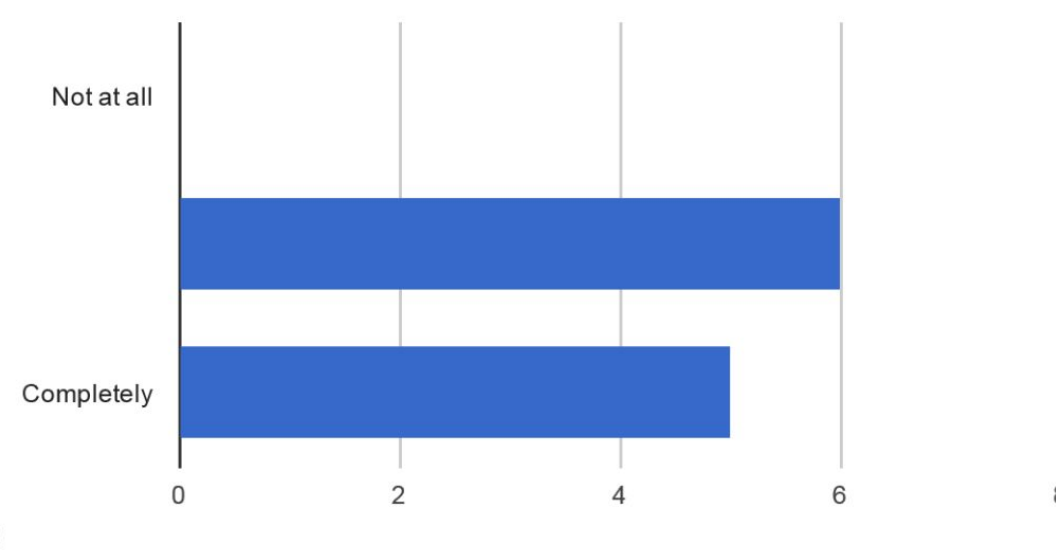


Figure 2. Results of survey question, "Do you encourage your students to go to peer mediation?"

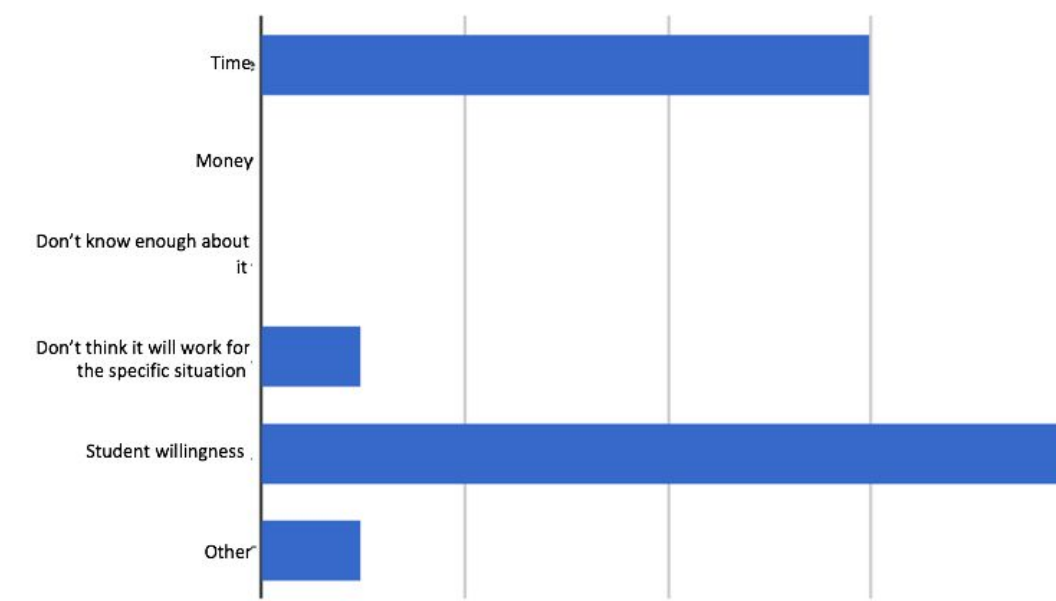


Figure 4. Results of the survey question, "What do you feel is the biggest barrier to peer mediation?"

Discussion

One of the main barriers to the peer mediation program is having school-wide engagement in the program. According to our literature review, the most effective way to implement peer-mediation is through the school-wide approach. Because none of the schools under the Gryphon Place program use this model, many of the respondents have found that the program could be beneficial, but is not currently functioning at its full potential.

Taking the program from a cadre approach to a school-wide approach would take a significant amount of time and effort on the part of the administration, teachers, students, and parents. The most feasible changes to be made at this time would be somewhere in between the cadre approach and the school-wide approach. Increasing awareness of and participation in the program at all levels from students to administration through events such as assemblies or in-class presentations of the program.

Conclusions

- School wide approach is most effective, but there are barriers in Kalamazoo preventing this.
- Increased awareness of the peer mediation program and the potential benefits it has to offer students.
- More school-wide support and time is needed to improve the current program.

Acknowledgements

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