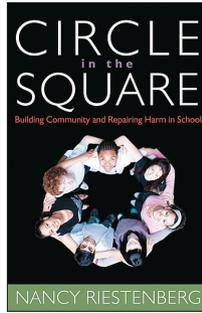


**Circle in the Square: Building Community and Repairing Harm in School.** Nancy Riestenberg. Living Justice Press, 2012, 256 pages.

**C**ircle in the Square: Building Community and Repairing Harm in School provides an alternate approach to detentions, suspensions, and expulsions.

“An administrator can either invest time with students up front by using a restorative process that involves all people affected by harm,” writes author Nancy Riestenberg, “or she can dole out her time over the course of the year dealing with increasingly harmful rule violations.” One way to build community and repair harm in schools is through restorative measures.

“Restorative measures represent a philosophy and a process that acknowledge that when a person does harm, it affects the person(s) they hurt, the community, and themselves. ... [A]n attempt is made to repair the harm caused by one



person to another and to the community, so that order is restored for everyone,” writes Riestenberg. Restorative measures in schools build community, civic engagement, and relationships. One way a school can repair harm is through a “Talking Circle,” which is, according to the author, “an intentional communication process guided by a community’s values. The Circle can be used to help people get to know one another, direct a meeting, teach, support someone in need, or hold someone accountable for harm or rule violations.”

Because of the shape of the Circle, everyone can see and hear each other, and the process is transparent for all participants. During Circle, students agree to maintain confidentiality,

develop common agreements, and make decisions by consensus. Circles provide structures and build relationships so that all participants feel safe to express themselves and develop solutions to problems.

Circles are a great way to facilitate communication between people. However, it may be difficult to use Circles to address school conflicts, since school leaders may feel pressure from victims’ parents, school staff, board members, and the community to punish those who cause harm. Schools should first educate their communities to reframe problem-solving and make a paradigm shift from a punitive approach to a restorative approach. *Circle in the Square* reminds educators about the need to offer students hope and to use every experience as a teachable moment.

*Reviewed by Kairvan Yuen, principal, Jefferson Middle School, San Gabriel, California.*

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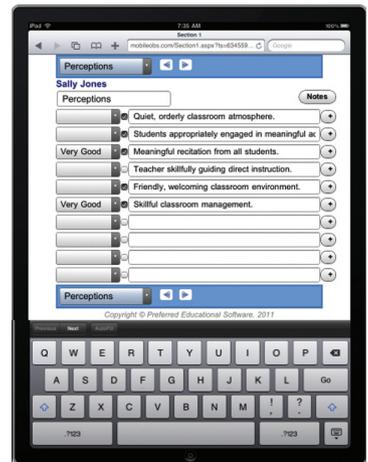


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