

## Community ADR and Conflict Resolution in Schools

Litigation and traditional arbitration between private parties who might otherwise go to court are not suitable for every conflict. There are disputes that do not fit this mold so well because they cannot be reduced to dollars and cents or other narrow remedies, or do not involve a legally recognized cause of action. This is often because the source of conflict is relationally both more diffuse and more pervasive, affecting entire communities and evolving in unpredictable ways over long timeframes.

Methods of addressing such disputes are at times referred to as “community ADR” or may involve the process of “restorative justice,” and educational institutions are an important locus for such disputes. Schools are communities like any other, composed of educators, administrators, counselors, students, their parents, and others, with diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and interests. These differences can lead to conflicts without clear paths to resolution.

The AAA<sup>®</sup> and the AAA-ICDR Foundation<sup>®</sup> are committed to helping communities, including schools, to move from intractable conflict to more harmonious outcomes, because the stakes—in human terms—are so high and the unmet need so great. Several recent projects reflect efforts in this area:

**East Providence High School and the Center for Mediation and Collaboration Rhode Island:** AAA staff from the AAA’s Johnston, Rhode Island office were deeply affected by the stabbing of a 16-year-old student at East Providence High School in October of 2023. Thankfully the student survived, but the community was very shaken. In response, the AAA reached out to the school, connecting them with the Center for Mediation and Collaboration Rhode Island, and worked with the school and the Center to fund a \$25,000 three-year grant to teach con-

flict resolution and set up a school peer mediation program, viewing this tragedy as an opportunity to empower the staff, students, and school administration.

**Conflict Resolution Education in Los Angeles County:** In Los Angeles County, a \$150,000 grant from the Foundation in 2024 will bring conflict resolution education to 40 schools in the County, with the goal of driving transformative change in learning environments that serve 25,000 pre-K–12 students each year.

**Reducing the Police Footprint in D.C. Schools:** In 2022, the Foundation funded a \$50,000 grant to the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs to continue their work to effect policy changes aimed at reducing the presence of police officers in those schools while increasing the availability of services that instead employ trauma-informed techniques.

**Restorative Justice in Los Angeles County Schools:** A \$25,000 grant from the AAA-ICDR Foundation in 2019 to the Asian Pacific American Dispute Resolution Center (APADRC) funded a 10-week restorative justice peer mediation training program for over 100 students and nearly two dozen teachers at five County schools, each with majority-minority student populations and a significant number of English learners. Restorative Justice Councils at each of the schools were then empowered to oversee and promote peer mediation. Surveys of student participants reflected confidence in both their conflict resolution skills and the usefulness of those skills. A full report on lessons learned from the program and plans for future efforts by APADRC is available [here](#).

A core benefit of these programs is that they are extensible and repeatable. Each school or school system is unique, and there is no one formula for addressing the challenges they face. However, the frameworks developed to solve specific problems in these communities can offer a head start in addressing similar issues in other educational communities. For that reason, sharing insights about strategies that work—through reports, training programs, and implementation toolkits—is an essential part of the process.