

Resolve

Lanigan Elementary kids learn how, when to mediate disputes

Conflict resolution. Peer mediation. They are buzz words in education. But, really, it's all about kids learning to get along with kids.

Throughout Farmington Public Schools, innovative efforts are continuing at virtually every building to teach student "mediators" what to look for and how to peacefully and constructively settle disputes.

Today's article about Lanigan Elementary marks the first of a two-part "Today's Lesson" series about some of those efforts. On Sunday, we will chronicle North Farmington High School student mediators' visit to the Boys and Girls Republic ropes course, where they learned about teamwork and communication.

BY TIM SMITH
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Pick a school, any school. It's inevitable that fights, squabbles and disputes occur regularly.

Settling them is a whole different matter. Do so-called peer mediators or managers intervene when two students are "enraged" or "boiling mad" at each other, or do they point the disputants in the direction of adult supervisors? What should they do if the dispute is only in the lukewarm, "annoyed at each other" category?

Finding out for themselves where that line needs to be drawn was one key reason why 36 fourth- and fifth-graders at Lanigan Elementary School recently went through two days of conflict resolution training. Most of the students volunteered for the program, although staff members recruited some of them.



Student mediators-in-training discussed, and participated in activities about, the wide array of feelings with licensed professional counselors Jan Lewis and Michelle Century, of the Lake Orion-based "There's a Better Way." The session took place in one of the portable classrooms outside the Farmington district school, not far from the playground where the peer mediators will put their newly-found diplomacy skills to the test.

Why?

At the start of the second day of training, Miriam Leventhal, a social worker at several elementary schools including Lanigan, discussed why peer mediation programs are becoming the late '90s norm rather than the exception.

"We feel it's important for kids to resolve their own conflicts," Leventhal said. "This is a way to teach children to help other children resolve conflicts in a peaceful way."

Asked why such programs are popping up in schools everywhere, Leventhal put it down to the fact that "we have so much diversity in our schools and our country. It's to help everybody get along."

And if the students learn how to peacefully problem-solve in elementary school perhaps those skills will put them in good stead in their middle and high school years, she added.

Lanigan Principal Marva Turner said the training will help students "get a better handle" on identifying the feelings they come across while mediating a student dispute. They must make a judgment call about when to deal with it or not.

What's in a word

Students perused a one-page mimeographed sheet titled "How are you feeling today?" complete with caricatures and words describing 27 human emotions. Lewis and Century went across the page, asking students to

raise their hands if they didn't know what a particular word meant.

Among words needing explanation were lovestruck, mischievous, and anxious.

Lewis likened being lovestruck to someone daydreaming in class about playing at home with a brand new puppy.

For mischievous, the counselor described it as "somebody who likes to tease a lot, get other people into trouble."

Her take on anxiousness: "How you feel just before Christmas morning. You can't wait for that moment to come."

She then introduced an activity by explaining that there actually are many more than 27 feelings that people have.

Game time

The students broke into four groups. In each circle, an object was thrown from person to person. Whoever caught it said how they were feeling and gave an example, without repeating someone else's.

From the sidelines, Leventhal called the activity invaluable. "There's a point in the (peer mediation) process where conflict managers ask the kids who are disagreeing how they feel."

And so, it doesn't hurt to know the many human emotions, Lewis said.

Mediators will likely see whether students have anger toward each other, but "they have to go beyond that and identify the underlying reasons."

To further drive the lesson home, the counselors divided the



Learning: Teacher Jan Lewis works with students, who are learning a range of emotions available in any conflict they may be called upon to help resolve.

students into two groups. Each received a stack of flash cards, with words that define some degree of anger - including "irritated," "mad," "snarling."

Their task was to arrange the cards in order, from least-angry to most-angry, and then determine at what point should they 1. not mediate a dispute; 2. ask

for adult help. Crossing over from "annoyed" to "mad" seemed to do the trick for both groups.

It's another tool

"You are not asked to deal with people who cross that line," Lewis stressed. "When people are too angry, they generally need a time out. Adults will help you do that."

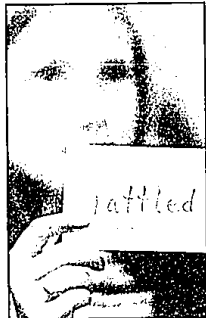
Students also were reminded that peer mediation does not replace the existing code of conduct. For example, students caught fighting could face suspension, Turner said.

And, Leventhal emphasized, the Lanigan Lifesavers program also remains in place to complement the new peer mediation effort. It's a "do-it-yourself" wall guide that includes drawings of situations and accompanying captions such as "listen and speak," "get help" or "compromise."

Doing the paperwork:

Student mediators at Lanigan Elementary School must complete the following conflict observation form after attending to a dispute between classmates.

1. What was the nature of the conflict? Examples: argument, fight, name-calling, violating school rules, other.
2. How did the conflict end? Examples: in a fight, an agreement, yelling, an adult stopped it, sent to principal, other.
3. What type of resolution style was it? Examples: denial, confrontation, problem solving.



Description: Heather Anderson wrote down the emotion, rattled during the conflict resolution training.



How do you feel? Matt Higley gives his answer

Cable from page A1

■ 'We're certainly aware of the competitive environment we work in.'

Tom Bjorklund
—Time Warner vice president

ing Fox News, WFUM from Flint and TV Food on Dec. 1;

■ A fiber optic upgrade of the system; and

■ Service improvements through its on-time guarantee program that gives free installation or \$20 credit on a customer's bill if they are late for an appointment.

Also, Bjorklund points out monthly bills could be higher.

In Oakland County, the cable company's rates are an average of \$7 below of what it could charge under Federal Communication Commission guidelines.

Only the increasing threat of satellite dish providers are keeping them in check.

"We're certainly aware of the competitive environment we work in," Bjorklund said. "That's why our rates are significantly

Changes in cable service rates						
A comparison from 1990 to 1998 (1999 listed as planned increase)						
Date	Basic	Expanded basic	Combined	Amount +/-	% Change	% Change since 1990
Feb. 1990	\$2.45	\$15.45	\$17.90			
Feb. 1991	\$FREE	\$10.95	\$10.95	-0.95	-5%	-5%
Feb. 1992	\$1.95	\$18.45	\$20.40	+2.50	+12.85%	+7.00%
Feb. 1993	\$1.95	\$18.45	\$20.40			
Sept. 1993	\$10.45	\$10.95	\$21.40	+0.50	+2.5%	+10.27%
Sept. 1994	\$10.45	\$10.95	\$21.40	+0.35	1.6%	16.27%
April 1994	\$10.62	\$11.11	\$21.73	+0.35	1.6%	17.02%
July 1994	\$10.79	\$11.28	\$22.07	+0.34	1.50%	18.89%
Jan. 1995	\$9.58	\$14.37	\$23.95	+1.88	7.85%	25.20%
Jan. 1997	\$10.30	\$16.12	\$26.42	+2.47	9.35%	34.25%
May 1997	\$10.30	\$16.47	\$26.77	-0.65	-2.52%	30.53%
Jan. 1998	\$10.50	\$16.57	\$27.07	+0.30	1.12%	31.33%
Jan. 1999	\$10.50	\$16.94	\$27.44	+0.42	4.66%	41.19%

below what we're allowed to charge.

"We want to continue to be the main multi-channel provider of programming and entertainment in the region."

SWOCC, the local regulatory authority, doesn't have a say on expanded basic rates where the lion's share of increases have taken place. The authority has a

voice on the broadband basic tier, which includes the municipal and school channels. The rates remain unchanged at \$10.50 a month.

SWOCC fields complaints on rate increases and forwards them to the FCC. SWOCC represents Farmington and Farmington Hills as well as Novi.

Downey elected chief of group

Judy Downey, executive director of the city of Farmington Downtown Development Authority, was elected president of the Michigan Downtown & Financing Association.

The MDFA, an organization of the DDA municipalities, financial advisers and consulting firms, has been in existence since 1992 and has the purpose of encouraging development in communities throughout the

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state with special emphasis on downtown areas.



Judy Downey

We're saving a seat for you.

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Welcome to the Holiday Suite in the South Rotunda of the Somerset Collection, sponsored by Michigan National.

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