



Al Mijares, Ph.D.
County Superintendent of Schools

OCDE Newsroom

Orange County students will lead the nation in college and career readiness and success.

'Restorative practices' can nurture positive relationships, prevent unwanted behavior

March 3, 2015 by [ihanigan](#)

How can teachers address conflicts and behavioral issues in a manner that re-engages students — and keeps them in the classroom?

That's a question that has stirred plenty of discussion among educators. But the use of [restorative practices](#) is one potential answer that's been gaining momentum in Orange County.

If you've never heard of restorative practices, you're not alone. The core philosophy is that people are happier and more likely to make positive behavioral changes when those in authority do things *with* them rather than *to* them, or even *for* them. Taking it a step further, punitive actions — think detention or suspension — are often less effective in resolving problems, as are more permissive approaches.



What does a restorative practice look like? Well, a community-building "circle" would be considered one example.

Circles can work a number of ways depending on the environment, but the general idea is that each member of a group forms a circle and speaks one at a time, without interruption. The conversation moves sequentially, so those who want to respond must wait until it's their turn again. The objective is to de-escalate disputes by encouraging more meaningful dialog.

Dr. Lucy Vezzuto, coordinator of mental health with the Orange County Department of Education, characterizes the circle approach as a versatile restorative practice that can be used to strengthen adult-student and student-student relationships. It can also help educators make decisions and respond to wrongdoing and conflicts.

"Circles give people an opportunity to sit together, speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, equality and dignity," Vezzuto says. "The circle process allows all parties to be heard, tell their stories, offer suggestions and find solutions together."

There are other restorative practices as well, including formal restorative conferences and impromptu informal conferences. Each can be a way for educational leaders to improve school learning environments, build school communities, nurture positive relationships and prevent unwanted behaviors.

Dr. Vezzuto says restorative practices align well with multi-tiered support systems, including PBIS. Short for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, PBIS is a data-driven approach to improving learning environments that's in place at many Orange

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Dual language immersion, which clusters English-speaking students and speakers of a foreign language, has gained traction in recent years based on its ability to achieve bilingualism while narrowing the achievement gap, writes Dr. Al Mijares, Orange County Superintendent of Schools. Click through to read his latest column.

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Nearly 80 administrators, teachers and counselors from 12 Orange County school districts have already participated in restorative practice training, and more are expected to take part in sessions offered by the Orange County Department of Education this summer. OCDE staff have established a restorative practice community network to support educators using the strategies. A series of trainings will be offered throughout the 2015-16 school year, beginning in August 2015.

To learn more about the upcoming trainings, contact Dr. Vezzuto at lvezzuto@ocde.us or 714-327-1081. You can also read more about restorative practices [here](#).

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