ABSTRACT

TITLE:	School Climate and Relational Bullying: Effecting Student Behavior Through a Restorative Justice Model
AUTHOR(S):	Coggins, Jennie; Wasserman, Robert
PRESENTED AT:	2014 Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Symposium, Fort Lewis College

ABSTRACT: Bullying at school causes enormous stress for many children and their families, has long-term effects, and has been identified as a risk factor associated with antisocial and criminal behavior. Bullies are more likely to drop out of school and to engage in delinquent and criminal behavior. Victims have a propensity towards higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression and other illnesses, and there is shown to be a strong link between bullying and suicide. Discipline in schools has the potential to help young people learn to take responsibility for their own behavior while offering classroom management and control, however, many schools have imparted more punitive disciplinary sanctions that do not educate students or resolve conflict, and may even make schools less safe and cause further harm. We intend to show how a restorative model and a healthy, inclusive school climate can reverse this trend. Restorative justice is a philosophy based on a set of principles that guides the responses to conflict and harm, and is based on practices that have been used for centuries in indigenous cultures and religious groups. These practices and policies can offer an alternative to other more punitive responses used by schools. Handling conflict and misbehavior (such as bullying) in a restorative way, allows students and staff to actively make amends and repair harm. In addition, restorative practices in schools can promote positive feelings, rather than resentment and alienation within the school setting. Restorative discipline can provide opportunities to socialize youth and teach them how to be productive members of society. Along with restorative disciplinary practices within schools, we believe there needs to be social-emotional learning modeled through an individual, family, school and community partnership that allows for a shared interest in the responsibility for students, with "caring" as a core concept. By initiating healthier communication, interactions, and exchanges, it is our hope that our youth will see the need to keep the learning environment safe, through strategies that build relationships and empower the school and its students, while promoting a safe, non-threatening, learning environment.