

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program - Anchorage Public Schools
Evaluation: Executive Summary

Prepared by:
Metis Associates, Inc.
February 2001

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program: Anchorage Public Schools
Evaluation: Executive Summary
February 2001

Planning for the evaluation of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) in the Anchorage Public Schools (APS) was initiated during the 1998 - 1999 school year. In January 1999, Metis Associates, an independent research and evaluation firm, was contracted by the Anchorage School District (ASD) to conduct a study of RCCP implementation in the APS. The study, consisting of four phases carried out over a period of two years, was designed to capture information on the status and history of RCCP in Anchorage and enrich understanding about the intensity and quality of implementation (Phase One); characterize schools based on level of implementation (Phase Two); identify relationships between level of implementation and student outcomes (Phase Three); and examine at a deeper level implementation at three *ideal* schools (Phase Four). Each phase is described in greater detail in the following paragraphs:

Phase One. At the onset of the study, in January 1999, Metis Associates attempted to obtain a complete picture of RCCP implementation in the APS. Phase one activities included the development and administration of an extensive mailed survey and on-site focus group interviews. The survey, administered to Anchorage teachers and administrators in March 1999, contained several items requesting background information about the respondents, and items regarding the population served and trained through the project, the details of project implementation, and the perceived value of and obstacles to project implementation. By the close of the initial phase, more than 1,100 completed surveys were returned for analysis, representing 78 of 88 (almost 87%) of Anchorage's schools. Data obtained through the surveys and focus groups resulted in the identification of 45 sites that incorporate some elements of the RCCP model into daily school life. These data also informed the construction of a schoolwide inventory used to acquire a deeper understanding of the extent to which these schools implement the RCCP model¹.

Phase Two. In fall 1999, phase two of the evaluation began with the development and administration of a schoolwide inventory to determine the degree of RCCP implementation at the selected 45 ASD schools. The schoolwide inventory, customized to systematically define what an *ideal* RCCP school might look like, was developed by the evaluator in collaboration with ASD staff. The inventory was completed by APS staff (principals, assistant principals, SDFS/RCCP coordinators, school counselors, teachers, and department heads for core subject areas) at the selected schools in the winter of 2000. On the inventory, the six RCCP components identified by ASD staff (classroom environment, school environment, teaching of conflict resolution skills, managing conflict within the building, parent and community outreach, and student leadership and empowerment) are

¹See *Anchorage RCCP Implementation Survey: Survey Results* (April 1999); and *Findings from Focus Group Interviews* (July 9, 1999).

of implementation is related to academic achievement, an in-depth examination of *high* implementation schools (or *ideal* schools) was conducted to answer the question: *What can be learned from these ideal schools that can inform practice elsewhere*⁶?

Phase Four. The fourth phase of the two-year study included an in-depth examination of RCCP implementation at three *ideal* schools⁷. These schools included Williwaw Elementary School, Wendler Middle School, and Chugiak High School. Activities conducted at these schools included individual interviews with each school's administrator; and focus group interviews with a total of eight RCCP coordinators, 11 parents, 29 teachers, 34 students, and two community members.

All interviews followed protocols designed to ascertain what the decision-making process for selecting the RCCP was, how the program was implemented, how the program fit in with the school's mission, and how participants perceived the impact of the program on teachers, students, and school/classroom climate. Questions were created based on the six components of the RCCP.

Overall, data obtained during this phase of the study provided deeper insights regarding RCCP implementation at the three *ideal* (i.e., model) schools. It was clear that successful implementation of the RCCP resulted in the following positive impacts:

- the creation of a common language throughout the school for understanding and managing conflict;
- the development of a sense of community among staff members;
- the growth of teachers' skills that support them in forging positive relationships with students and enable them to better manage conflicts among their students;
- and
- the birth of new skills for students that empower them to articulate their feelings and understand the triggers of conflict.

As identified through the two-year study, ASD can support elementary, middle, and high schools within the APS by encouraging staff to view the RCCP as a set of tools that enable them to achieve their missions. At the onset, staff developers may need to assist schools in understanding how the RCCP aligns with the vision staff have for their school. Furthermore, staff developers should work with school staff to ensure that they understand that the RCCP skills are essential for the whole school community -- in fact, it is vital that the program be a whole-school initiative in which teachers and administrators model the behavior and actively use the vocabulary of the RCCP. Finally, it is important that schools

⁶It should be noted that no significant patterns were found between the other variables examined and level of implementation. Additional studies are needed to investigate the lack of association between these variables.

⁷See *Summary of Individual and Focus Group Interview Data, December 2000*.

represented through specific descriptions of what an *ideal* RCCP school might look like. Three to six specific descriptions are listed for each component². Using a scale from one to ten (where 1=*Does Not Describe My School At All*; and 10=*Describes My School Exactly*), staff were asked to indicate the extent to which the descriptions represent their school.

In total, 300 inventories were collected from the 45 schools (34 elementary schools, six middle schools, and five high schools). In order to classify each school into an implementation level, an average total score was compiled by summing up the ratings from each of the six components. The lowest possible average total score is six raw score units, meaning that the descriptions for each of the components *do not describe their school at all* and the highest possible average total score is 60 raw score units, indicating that the descriptions for each of the components *describe their school exactly*.

Based on schoolwide inventory data, as well as data collected from the phase one mailed survey and ongoing feedback from ASD staff, the sample size was narrowed down to 36 schools. These schools were characterized as *low*, *medium*, or *high* implementation schools using each school's average total score³.

Phase Three. This phase of the study began with the identification of key indicator variables to examine the relationship between level of implementation and student outcomes⁴. In winter 1999, the evaluator and ASD staff identified the following key indicator variables: students' spring 2000 reading, language, and math achievement scores on the CAT-5; rate of attendance, rate of retention (for elementary and middle schools only), rate of drop-outs (for high schools only), rate of disciplinary referrals, and rate of suspension⁵. Data analyses were conducted to try and answer the following question: ***Is the extent to which schools implement the RCCP related to students' academic achievement, and rates of attendance, retention, drop-out, disciplinary referral, and suspension?***

When reviewing students' reading, language, and math scores, it was clear that a very strong positive association exists between level of implementation and academic achievement. This trend was most apparent in reading, with students in *high* implementation schools significantly surpassing their peers in *low* implementation schools. Similar results were found in language and math. Because these findings provide strong evidence that level

²See attached schoolwide inventory for specific descriptions of each of the six components.

³In this context, a *high* implementation school is considered an *ideal* or model school.

⁴See *Summary of Outcomes Schoolwide Inventory and Key Indicator Data, December 2000*.

⁵Suspension data were used from the fourth quarter only.

understand that becoming an *ideal* RCCP school requires a long-term commitment to the process.

To nurture success, ASD should strive to ensure "buy in" and ownership of the program at each school level by promoting a democratic decision-making process. In addition, staff developers should continue to work closely with school administrators, encouraging them to become active participants in the program by taking part in training and utilizing the RCCP model in their interactions with students. Finally, ASD should:

- strive to maintain flexibility and tailor implementation to the needs of each individual school;
- implement the program as a schoolwide initiative by setting aside specific time periods for conducting RCCP lessons;
- assist schools in identifying an on-site staff person to serve as the program coordinator;
- include extensive one-on-one peer coaching as a follow-up to training; and
- garner and maintain the full support of the school administrator.

In order to assist schools in overcoming common obstacles with the program, including limited time to implement RCCP lessons and developing the parent component, it is recommended that ASD continue to develop strategies for integrating RCCP lessons with the core academic subjects. This will likely involve peer coaching whereby the staff developers model techniques in the classroom; and focus additional attention on providing targeted strategies to schools for implementing a parent component of the RCCP.

These data suggest that fostering certain RCCP characteristics and including these elements will promote the emotional, social, and ethical development of students while fostering a caring and cooperative learning environment in the Anchorage Public Schools.

RESOLVING CONFLICT CREATIVELY PROGRAM (RCCP)
ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
SCHOOL-WIDE INVENTORY
1999 - 2000

The Anchorage School District (ASD) is interested in learning more about your school's involvement with the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). As part of the evaluation of the Anchorage RCCP program, ASD hired Metis Associates, Inc., a firm specializing in educational research and evaluation, to assist them in developing and analyzing an inventory tool completed at all school levels (elementary, middle, and high). The information gathered from this inventory will be used to assist ASD in planning programs and providing technical assistance and support to schools. It is very important that you complete and return this inventory to Metis (instructions are provided below).

We estimate that completing this should take approximately 10 minutes. The inventory has six parts describing what an "ideal" RCCP school might look like. After each description, you will be asked to what extent the picture describes your school using a scale from one to ten, where one equals "Does not describe my school at all" and ten equals "Describes my school exactly." If you have a question, please call Metis at 1-877-METISNY (a toll-free number) and speak with Joy or Rebecca.

Upon completion of the inventory, please return it to the Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinator in your school. Place it in the envelope provided by the Coordinator and place a check (✓) next to your position on the sheet provided by him/her. PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN YOUR INVENTORY NO LATER THAN MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2000.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this!! The information is very important, and we appreciate your efforts to provide us with accurate data!!

Date: _____ School: _____
(Please use complete school name)

School Level: K-6 6-8 9-12
 K-8 7-8 11-12
 K-12 7-12 Other, please specify grades: _____

Your Position (check one):

- Principal/Assistant Principal
- Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinator
- School Counselor
- Representative for primary teachers (grades K-3)
- Representative for intermediate teachers (grades 4-6)
- Department head for core subject area (please circle one):
 English Math Science Social Studies
- Other, please specify: _____

SECTION 3: TEACHING OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS

AN IDEAL RCCP SCHOOL MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

- ✓ Administrators support RCCP by allowing time for RCCP training and classroom implementation, by providing materials and resources, and by expressing a commitment to the long-term process of implementing RCCP.
- ✓ Staff participate in on-going RCCP training, such as inservice/faculty meetings on RCCP, the RCCP Intro/Bias Awareness course, the RCCP Infusion course, RCCP mediation training, and RCCP mentoring.
- ✓ Students receive individual RCCP lessons on conflict resolution skills on a consistent basis.
- ✓ Faculty integrate RCCP strategies, skills, and concepts into subject matter.

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL?

Does Not Describe
My School At All

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Describes My
School Exactly

(Please circle the most appropriate response)

SECTION 4: MANAGING CONFLICT WITHIN THE BUILDING

AN IDEAL RCCP SCHOOL MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

- ✓ Discipline procedures are consistent, respectful, and productive.
- ✓ The school offers a range of discipline options which maximize student growth.
- ✓ School staff model appropriate behaviors and interact with one another and students with respect.
- ✓ The school has an active peer mediation component.
- ✓ The school offers mediation services for the adults in the building (e.g., teachers, administrators, and parents).
- ✓ All stakeholders are aware of procedures for accessing mediation services.

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL?

Does Not Describe
My School At All

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

Describes My
School Exactly

(Please circle the most appropriate response)

SECTION 5: PARENT AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

AN IDEAL RCCP SCHOOL MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

- ✓ Parents and community members are aware of the school's goals relating to RCCP and the creation of a peaceful school environment.
- ✓ Parents and community members/organizations are involved with the school and support the school's goals related to RCCP and the creation of a peaceful school environment.
- ✓ The school engages in a variety of community outreach activities.
- ✓ The school offers a forum to facilitate a dialogue among stakeholders.
- ✓ Parents and family members are regularly offered "Peace in the Family" classes and other activities promoting a peaceful environment.

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL?

Does Not Describe My School At All										Describes My School Exactly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

(Please circle the most appropriate response)

SECTION 6: STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT

AN IDEAL RCCP SCHOOL MIGHT LOOK LIKE THIS:

- ✓ Students have on-going opportunities to serve within the school and the larger community.
- ✓ Students' voices are built into the system, such as through participation in committees and task forces and planning school activities and procedures.
- ✓ Students feel that there are clubs and activities in the school which meet their interests.

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL?

Does Not Describe My School At All										Describes My School Exactly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

(Please circle the most appropriate response)

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS INVENTORY TOOL!!
PLEASE RETURN IT AS PER THE INSTRUCTIONS ON PAGE 1.**