

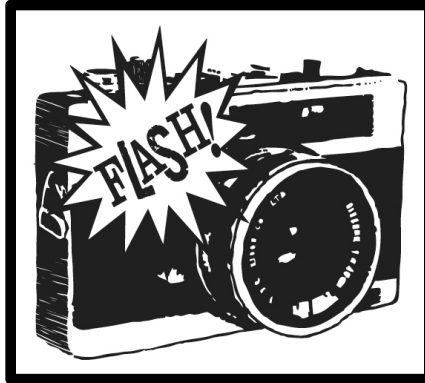


Flushing International  
High School  
Queens, NY



# [Snapshot]

**Author:** Tania Romero, school social worker, 2014



**Grade Levels:** 9-12

**District:** 25

**Number of Students:** 412 (we share a building with a Junior HS with 765 students)

**Scanning:** No

**Number of School Safety Agents:** 4 (that serve the whole building)

**Number of students or % Title 1:** 98% Free Lunch

**Demographics:** (According to *Inside Schools*), 59% Asian, 2% Black, 3% White, 35% Latino. 86% ELL.

**Demographics of Staff:** About 50% people of color and about 50% white staff.

**Admissions:** The school is open to city residents who have been in the U.S. for less than four years, whose native language is not English, and who score in the intermediate, beginner, or below-level rank on a standardized language test, the NYSESLAT. (*Clara Hemphill, interviews, September 2011*)

# [Testimonial]

**Author:** Tania Romero, school social worker, 2014



The Flushing International High School exclusively serves recent immigrant students who are English Language Learners. Our students represent over 40 different countries and over 24 different languages are spoken at our school. In an effort to address violence and conflicts that were arising between Latino and Chinese students, our school began using Restorative Justice (RJ) approaches to promote unity, respect, peace, and heal relationships. In addition to this, we also observed that it was mostly boys (Latino boys) who were ending up serving suspensions. Further, just like the national drop-out rates, our Latino students also tend to drop out of our school at higher rates. We began to look at this more closely, and as a result, our goal became to implement non-punitive alternatives to further support population of students that face “higher risks” of being pushed out of school. We began this work in 2011.

Our process began with me (the school social worker) becoming trained to run Fairness Committees (FCs) and Restorative Circles (RCs). I then began to bring this knowledge and skills back into the workplace by running FCs and RCs mainly for students. Soon after this, our school counselor also began running Circles and FCs. We expanded this work to staff by facilitating a couple of PDs to get staff to learn the basics of RJ work in schools. During the very initial stages of this process, the RJ efforts were mainly driven by our school’s counseling department.

Throughout this period, many teachers and students sat in on FCs and Circles. They began to witness first-hand the powerful and immediate results of this work, particularly around building community and nurturing more meaningful relationships with students. Students also responded positively to these approaches, particularly to the Circle process. Some of the immediate results we observed with some students were: better attendance, better relationships with peers and teachers, and a stronger commitment to and motivation in school. By no means were Circles and FCs the “magic wand” that brought “magic solutions.” Some students who would participate in Circles and FCs at times would regress to old patterns of behavior that were not constructive, however, overall, a deeper sense of community was developing in our school.

We also observed that Circles began to provide a safe space for staff and students to share their stories, celebrate one another, and learn from each other. Through the sharing of personal and meaningful life stories, students and teachers began to create more intimate and caring relationships. Circles began to provide an outlet for students and staff to grow and heal, and to create new levels of self-awareness.

In the process of doing this work, we built a partnership with Teachers Unite. Teachers Unite played a very critical role in guiding our school and eventually helping us get funding to expand our R/J efforts. Upon receiving funding from the national organization NESRI, our school was able to hire a series of R/J consultants and trainers. The consultants came in to run staff PDs on the history of R/J in the United States and support us in taking a deeper look at the challenges we were having, particularly with Latino boys. Finally, we also brought in a trainer who worked closely with the counseling team to develop a Circles training that would suit the needs of our school. With the support of this trainer, our staff attended a 3-hour Circles training during one of our staff retreats. We also began to examine more closely issues of race, power and privilege that impact our work with students of color who are also recent immigrants. This training opportunity was followed by PDs that the counseling team facilitated to continue to support teachers in becoming more knowledgeable and skillful in doing Circle work with students.

The R/J work was further expanded at our school last summer and fall when a total of 14 staff members attended a 5-day intensive Circles training with Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility. Many of these teachers returned to school to begin to take more leadership in the use and implementation of Circles. Some teachers began running their advisories in Circles, and some even began using Circles for instruction in their classes. During this time, we saw more teachers requesting Circles and FCs to support struggling students and to deal with wrongful behavior in the community. As a result, we saw less teachers relying on punitive measures, particularly around disciplinary issues.

This school year, the work has evolved to include one-on-one staff support on running Circles, a Circles training for students, and more staff PDs using Circles to address issues of racism, prejudice and discrimination. With the support of a Circles trainer from Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, we were able to provide follow-up support to all teachers who previously attended the 5-day Circles training. This person also trained a total of 12 students in the basics of running Circles. We also partnered with the organization Project Reach, who came in to run various staff PDs on issues of discrimination. They also supported us in training 24 students who ran workshops and Circles at a school-wide event on race and racism. This school year, we also began involving parents in FCs, which proved to be a very important and meaningful addition.

Some next steps for us are:

1. Do a follow-up training for students who were trained to run Circles last year and involve them in the process of running Circles
2. Train new students to run Circles and involve them in the process of running Circles
3. Continue to do “anti-discrimination/oppression” work amongst staff through the

use of Circles

4. Involve more parents in FCs and Circles
5. Continue to support trained staff to use Circles to support students socio-emotionally and/or academically
6. Get new staff to train to run Circles

## **What is Restorative Justice?**

**Restorative Justice** is a philosophy based in the practices of ancient communities all over the world. The belief is that when someone has done something hurtful or wrong, the whole community is affected. Therefore, something needs to be done to restore the damage caused by these hurtful actions. Restorative Justice is not about punishing. Instead, people get to confront their unacceptable behavior, and assume responsibility for it while receiving support from their school community. Also, people who are affected by the hurtful or wrongful behavior get to express how these actions have affected them.

### **Some examples of Restorative Justice at FIHS:**

- ***A Fairness Committee:*** A meeting of people in where community problems or violations of our school Community Principles are addressed through peaceful dialog. A Fairness Committee is made up of the person or people who committed a violation, the person or people who were affected by this violation, and students and teachers who are there to support everyone resolve the problem.
- ***A Restorative Circle:*** A meeting that takes place in a circle in where everyone has an equal opportunity to speak. Circles can be done to address a community problem or violation of our school's Community Principles, manage conflict, give support, build community, or to talk about academic topics or academic progress in your classes.
- ***A Mediation:*** A meeting that takes place between two people that had a conflict with each other. Mediations can be done to address a fight or manage conflicts between students.

### **Background & History:**

At Flushing International High School (FIHS) we are moving in the direction of building a culture of community accountability, peace, and respect through Restorative Justice (RJ). RJ practices are alternatives to the more punitive zero-tolerance approaches to student discipline. RJ practices are rooted in the traditions of many Native American, African, and other Indigenous cultures throughout the world. In the United States, RJ practices have been introduced to address the high rates of student drop out (also known as student "push out") that has been found to have a direct link to punitive student discipline methods.

Educators and activists have also introduced R/J practices in U.S. schools to address what is being called the “school-to-prison-pipeline”. Statistics show that particularly Black and Latino students are being pushed out of schools at higher rates while ending up in prison also at higher rates. Research shows that students of color are disciplined in harsher ways and are also suspended at higher rates, therefore leaving them at higher risk of being pushed out of schools and ending up in prisons.

### **Key Principles of R/J:**

- Punishment does not address root cause of lead to long-term change.
- Interpersonal harm impacts the entire community.
- People impacted by harm have the right and responsibility to shape and influence the process to repair harm and restore peace.
- Cooperative processes can lead to the transformation of relationships, people, and entire communities (*taken from Natalie Havlin’s PowerPoint presentation on the History and Politics of R/J in the U.S.*)

### **R/J at FIHS:**

R/J at FIHS is a preventive approach that aims to build a safer and more inclusive school community while also aiming to have higher student school retention (particularly of those groups at higher risk of dropping out). Instead of “pushing students out”, R/J at FIHS creates opportunities for those who engage in wrongful/harmful behavior to self-reflect and take responsibility by restoring the damage caused by their actions. Further, it creates opportunities for those who are harmed to have a voice around the impact the wrongful/harmful behavior had on them. Finally, R/J approaches create the opportunity for different members of the community (from students, to teachers, to administrators, and even families) to participate in providing support and holding community members accountable. R/J practices can also be implemented to support members of the community who are struggling academically and/or socio-emotionally, and to celebrate their victories/successes.

### **FIHS Community Principles:**

R/J approaches at FIHS are guided by our school Community Principles. Through a collective and democratic student-staff-parent effort, we identified the following Community Principles: Collaboration, Peace and Justice, Self-Expression, Academic Excellence and Learning, Love and Belonging, Holism, Respect, Caring for our Environment, Honoring Diversity, Community Building, Leadership, and Creativity. When a FIHS Community Principle is violated, we restore balance through R/J practices.

#### **Collaboration:**

Each member of our school community does well by doing our individual best and by cooperating with one another like a unified family. We come together through group work and by sharing the common language of English.

### **Peace and Justice:**

Our school community is one without fighting, bullying, sexual harassment and other acts of violence. If the peace is broken, it is the community's responsibility to help solve the situation. We all have the right to be judged fairly and we are all responsible for one another.

### **Self-Expression:**

Members of our school community are free and safe to express themselves individually or collectively in a constructive and respectful manner. Community members have the freedom to express themselves in English and/or in their native languages.

### **Academic Excellence and Learning:**

Learning is an inclusive and active endeavor in which all members of the school community contribute to academic excellence. Students use their native language and English to further their learning.

### **Love and Belonging:**

All members of our school engage in building strong and positive relationships. We value those relationships as the foundation for a caring, trusting and successful learning environment.

### **Holism:**

All members of the school community have access to the resources and guidance that can contribute to their healthy academic, physical, social and emotional well-being.

### **Respect:**

The learning process is developed in a comfortable and nurturing environment based upon mutual respect among all members of the community.

### **Caring For Our Environment:**

All members of our school community contribute to keeping our school beautiful by recycling, picking up after ourselves, and by making our school spaces clean and inviting.

### **Honoring Diversity:**

All members of our school community are equal and valued. The school environment is free of discrimination and oppression for all ethnic groups, cultures, gender expressions, sexual orientations, languages and religions.

### **Community Building:**

As a school we become stronger and unified through team activities, community discussions, celebrations and school-wide events. We accomplish more together than we do alone.

### **Leadership:**

All members of the school have the opportunity to develop their leadership through group work and projects in class, participation in extracurricular activities, and by creating positive social change in school and in their communities.

### **Creativity:**

Everyone in the school community has the right to nurture his or her creativity and imagination through music, art, dance, drama and academic expression.

## **RJ Practices at FIHS:**

The following are some restorative practices/approaches that are implemented at FIHS:

- **Circles:**  
The Circle Process is a story-telling process. Every person has a story, and every story has a lesson to offer. In the Circle, people touch each other's lives by sharing stories that have meaning to them. Circles create a positive school and classroom climate, help resolve behavior problems while restoring the damage caused by wrongful behavior. Circles can also support students who are struggling academically, socially and/or emotionally.
- **Fairness Committees:** A Fairness Committee is a formal meeting of students and adults to hear the concerns of any community member who feels that a Community Principle has been violated. The Committee inspires self-reflection by confronting a member of the community with his or her actions and how they affected others. The group decides how to repair the community after actions have violated its principles, and how to reintegrate the member of the community who has committed the violation back into the culture of the school.
- **Mediations:** A Mediation is used to help resolve conflicts, fights and/or misunderstandings between members of our school community. A Mediation includes a trained facilitator and the people who are in need of resolving their differences. The intention is to support those who are involved in the conflict to engage in a peaceful and respectful dialogue about what happened and come up with solutions and/or agreements to ensure mutual respect.

## **Flushing International High School Circle Processes:**

Circle Processes at FIHS fit within our Restorative Justice model of school discipline and community support. For hundreds of years, many world cultures have used group circles for storytelling, healing and developing open communication. The routine of regular dialogue in a circle allows students to practice developing empathy, listening, encouraging participation and inclusion of each individual. The Circle Process is a story-telling process. Every person has a story, and every story has a lesson to offer. In the Circle, people touch each other's lives by sharing stories that have meaning to them.

Circles create a positive school and classroom climate, help resolve behavior problems while restoring the damage caused by wrongful behavior. Circles can also support students who are struggling academically, socially and/or emotionally.

There are many different types of Circles. At FIHS we mainly practice the following types of Circles:

1. **Community Circles:** Can take place in a classroom/advisory setting to discuss academic, social to even personal student issues. *Can be easily facilitated by any staff member.*
2. **Support Circles:** Are used to provide moral and emotional support to students who may be struggling emotionally, socially or academically. *Should be facilitated by someone with Circle experience and training.*



3. **Restorative Circles:** Are used when there has been a violation of our School Community Principles. A restorative action plan by the harmers is decided collectively and is required. *Should be facilitated by someone with Circle experience and training.*
4. **Reintegration Circle:** Used to reintegrate and provide support to students who have been out of school for an extended period of time. A plan for support beyond the Circle is required. *Should be facilitated by someone with Circle experience and training.*
5. **Talk Circle:** Participants explore a particular issue or topic from many different perspectives. Talk Circles do not attempt to reach consensus on a topic. Rather, they allow all voices to be respectfully heard. They offer an opportunity for learning and reflection. *Can be easily facilitated by any staff member.*
6. **Healing Circle:** The purpose of a Healing Circle is to share the pain of a person or persons who have experienced trauma or loss. A plan for support beyond the Circle may emerge, but is not required. *Should be facilitated by someone with Healing Circle experience and training.*
7. **Acknowledgement or Celebration Circle:** Can be used to celebrate and/or acknowledge a member of the community that has excelled, shown growth, and/or contributed to school in a positive way. *Can be easily facilitated by any staff member.*

*Anyone in the school community can request a Circle for him/herself or others in need of it.*

### **Flushing International High School Fairness Committee:**

The Fairness Committee of FIHS fits within our Restorative Justice model of school discipline. Discussions emphasize the violation of our School Community Principles. A Fairness Committee is a formal meeting of students and adults to hear the concerns of any community member who feels that a Community Principle has been violated. The Committee inspires self-reflection by confronting a member of the community with his or her actions and how they affected others. The group decides how to repair the community after actions have violated its principles, and how to reintegrate the member of the community who has committed the violation back into the culture of the school.

A Fairness Committee is democratic and includes all teachers and students. A Fairness Committee meeting includes 6 people: one facilitator, 2 student supporters, 1 staff supporter, and the two people who are involved in the violation. A Fairness Committee can be called by any member of the school community, and anyone can be taken to Fairness when a FIHS Community Principle has been violated.

Fairness Committee supporters are chosen randomly. It is a privilege to serve at a Fairness Committee although it is not mandatory for supporters to participate. Supporters should not participate if there is a conflict of interest or friendship with any of the people being called to Fairness, since this could interfere with objectivity and fairness.

There are certain violations that may require other disciplinary actions in addition to a Fairness Committee. In these cases, a Fairness Committee meeting may be postponed.

### **Flushing International High School Mediation:**

Mediation at FIHS fits within our Restorative Justice model of school discipline. Discussions emphasize the violation of our School Community Principles. A Mediation is used to help resolve conflicts, fights and/or misunderstandings between members of our school community.

A Mediation includes a trained facilitator and the people who are in need of resolving their differences. The intention is to support those who are involved in the conflict to engage in a peaceful and respectful dialogue about what happened. A Mediation gives the opportunity for the harmer (s) to take responsibility for their wrongful behavior. At the same time, a Mediation gives the opportunity for the harmed to express how the wrongful behavior affected them and what they need to make things right. Those involved in the conflict will commit to taking concrete actions to ensure mutual respect in their classes, hallways and school as a whole.

There are certain violations that may require other disciplinary actions in addition to a Mediation. In these cases, a Mediation may be postponed.

## **[Tools]**



## **The Flushing International H.S. Circle Log**

*\*To be filled out by the Circle Keeper\**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle Keeper: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Who called for this Circle?** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Who attended the Circle?** Teacher Support (ers): \_\_\_\_\_

Student Support (ers): \_\_\_\_\_

-If applicable-Harmer (ers): \_\_\_\_\_

-If applicable-Harmed: \_\_\_\_\_

**-OR-**

-If applicable-Student (s) in need of support: \_\_\_\_\_

What type of circle was this?

Support Circle    Talk Circle    Restorative Circle    Healing Circle  
Community Circle    Acknowledgement/Celebration Circle    Reintegration Circle

**\*What was the issue/reason that led to the Circle?**

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**\*What were the outcomes/results of the Circle?**

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**\*Next Steps:**

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*\*Note:* The Circle Keeper is responsible for ensuring there is follow-up on the harmer's action plan. Please also fill out the RC Follow-up sheet in the back of this page. Thanks.



**The Flushing International H.S. Fairness Committee (FC) Log**

*\*To be filled out by the FC facilitator\**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

FC Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Who called for this FC?** \_\_\_\_\_

**\*Who attended the FC?** Teacher Mediator (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Student Mediator (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Harmer (s): \_\_\_\_\_

Harmed: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*What was the issue that led to the FC?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**\*Outcomes:**

- 1. Did the harmer (s) take responsibility for his/her/their actions? YES NO
- 2. Was there an apology on behalf of the harmer (s)? YES NO
- 3. Was the apology accepted by the harmed? YES NO

4. What is the action plan for the harmer (s) to restore the damage that was done to the harmed and to our school community?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*\*Note:* The FC facilitator is responsible for ensuring there is follow-up on the harmer’s action plan. Please also fill out the FC Follow-up sheet in the back of this page. Thanks.

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**The Flushing International H.S. Fairness Committee Follow-up**

*\*To be filled out by the FC facilitator\**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

FC Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did the harmer (s) follow through with the action plan?      YES              NO

2. If not, why not? Is the student (s) being given anther opportunity to follow through? Is there an alternative plan?

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3. If the harmer (s) did fulfill on their action plan, what were the results?

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4. Other Comments:

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## Out of Class Reflection Time

Please take this time to reflect on what happened, and why you have been asked to spend this time away from class. This is not a punishment. This is meant to give you an opportunity to self-reflect, grow, and learn something new about yourself, and how your actions have affected us as a community.

Please be ready to share your reflections with one of your counselors. A Fairness Committee, Restorative Circle or Mediation will follow (please see definitions of these enclosed).

1. In your opinion, what happened? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What actions did you take in all of this (please be as specific and honest)?

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3. What were you thinking about at the time? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What have you thought about since the incident? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Who do you think has been affected by your actions? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. How have they been affected? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. How do you think this hurt yourself? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. How do you think this hurt your school community? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. What do you think you should do or should be done to repair the damage done? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **The Flushing International High School Mediation Protocol**

1. **Gather Information & Prepare Students:** Talk to all students involved separately and get a clear sense of the situation/conflict (there is usually “many sides to the story”). This conversation should also prepare the students to talk to each other at the mediation.

### ***Preparing students for the mediation:***

- Let students know that having a mediation is non-negotiable, and that at the same time it is important that they are willing and ready to go into the conversation in a positive way.
- ***For the Harmer***-get him/her to see how their actions affected themselves, the harmed and the larger school community. The harmer should be ready to take responsibility for his/her actions and acknowledge that to the harmed.

#### ***Questions you may ask:***

- What happened?
  - What were you thinking about at the time?
  - What have you thought about since the incident?
  - Who do you think has been affected by your actions?
  - How have they been affected?
  - How do you think this hurt yourself?
  - How do you think this hurt your school community?
  - What do you think you need to say to the “harmed” in order to take responsibility for your actions?
  - What actions will you take to rectify the damage made to your community?
  - Are you ready to have a conversation with the “harmed” to resolve this?
- ***For the Harmed***-allow the student to express how the actions of the harmer affected him/her. The harmed should also have the opportunity to ask for what he/she needs. The harmed should be ready to express how he/she feels and what he/she needs to make things better.

#### ***Questions you may ask:***

- What happened?
- What was your reaction at the time of the incident?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- How did this hurt you?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- How did this make you feel?
- How did your family and friends react when they heard about the incident?
- What do you need in this moment?
- What do you think we should do about it?
- Are you ready to forgive the person that harmed you?
- Are you ready to have a conversation with the harmer to resolve this?

- Have students practice how they will be talking and what they will be saying to each other. As a facilitator you may want to model this for them.
- There might be times in where all students involved in the conflict are both the “harmer” and the “harmed.” If so, it is important to allow students to reflect on their actions and feelings both as being hurt and as being hurtful to the other person. In these situations, it is important that all students involved are open to going into the mediation willing to take responsibility rather than blaming the other person.

**2. Facilitate the Mediation:** Find a time that works for everyone to meet and secure a private location in where you will not be interrupted.

- Set the intention for the mediation-the intention of this meeting is to move things forward and resolve the conflict you had with each other.
- Set ground rules-
  - We keep confidentiality
  - We suspend all judgments
  - We actively listen to one another
  - We speak from our own experience
  - We do not blame each other
  - We take responsibility for our actions
  - We are honest and open about sharing our feelings

**\*Note:** Ask students if they all agree to these. If so, you can begin your mediation.

- Ask students who wants to share first. If no one volunteers, feel free to choose one person to go first.
- Apology/shaking hands/hugs-If you feel the time is right you might want to highlight that an apology could be appropriate at this time. Usually, if the conversation is productive, an apology followed by shaking hands or hugs will come organically.
- Action plan-once students have shared and apologized and you feel like they are in a good place, have them identify one or more actions they will take to ensure there is continued respect, peace and harmony amongst each other and within the school community.
- Closing-ask students to share one important thing they learned from having this conversation today. Thank and acknowledge students for being willing to resolve their conflicts in a peaceful and respectful way.