

Madera High

Madera USD | Madera, CA | (559) 675-4444 | www.madera.k12.ca.us/Domain/47

Subject: Social-Emotional Health, Data Use, Peer Counseling Program

Practice: Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution Training

Peer Counseling

Madera High School's Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) grant made it possible to better foster the social and emotional connection of students to the school through a Peer Counseling Program. Here's an account of how they chose this program and its value by Jennifer Gaviola.

A few short years ago we had a wish list of amazing ideas to make Madera High an even better place for all students. Our California Healthy Kids Survey data indicated that we had students who felt that they didn't have anyone to turn to at school, that they needed help with problem solving, and that they wanted to feel like someone at school cared about them.

In response, our wish list was full of ideas and programs to foster the social and emotional connection of students to the school, an absolutely essential piece to the puzzle we call high school: peer counseling, Link Crew, positive culture and climate, and Olweus for bullying prevention.

Unfortunately with the state of the educational budget in California, adding such programs seemed like something for a fairy tale. Even though research tells us that a positive, safe environment where all kids feel connected and successful directly impacts test scores and academic achievement, how would we ever get our wishes *granted* when every budget seemed so pinched?

Grant(ed) was the key. The Safe and Supportive School Grant was the first star, the fairy god-grant we were waiting for. Madera High School received this grant during the 2011-12 school year and since then we have been able to implement all of our "wish list" ideas.

One of the first programs we established through our grant was Peer Counseling. We utilize Ira Sachnoff's *Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution Training* (www.peerresourcestraining.com). This past August, we created a class, found a fantastic teacher who relates to students and has an extraordinary desire to impact their lives, and then we got to work.

The first semester was spent training students in the following areas: paraphrasing, values, decision making, active listening, non-verbal communication, and much more. By second semester, our 24 students were well-equipped to begin their quest to help students help themselves. With the help of these young leaders of tomorrow, we have begun a huge cultural shift at our school that empowers students to solve problems. They are helping us achieve our goals that all students feel connected to school and never feel they are alone. Our peer counselors are leaders dedicated to our mission of making a difference in the lives of all students at Madera High School. They are just one of our many S3 shining stars changing the school culture, one student at a time.