

## Peer mediators make a difference

By: Jamie Valente

A baby among most other RHS Clubs, Romeo's new program Peer Mediation is rapidly gaining popularity.

Peer Mediation is a conflict resolution program run by students nominated by staff, administration, and their own peers. These students volunteer their time, helping others to solve their conflicts by serving as unbiased peacekeepers who are trained to move along the path to finding a positive solution.

"The mediators are referees," Mr. Robertson, the program's advisor, said.

There are several different ways for a student to take part in mediation. For instance, students may ask for one, or a staff member who notices a conflict may refer them. Peer Mediation is entirely voluntary, although on occasion students can be given a powerful ultimatum; the choice between mediation or braving the school's disciplinary actions, which range from detention to expulsion. Most students opt for the chance to work out their conflicts calmly with the help of their peer mediators.

An important aspect of the

program is that the organization is almost entirely student run. No teacher has ever sat in on an actual mediation, including Mr. Robertson.

"The program is what it is because of the mediators," Robertson said. He explained that for the program to be successful, it's imperative that the students realize there will be no teachers involved, therefore allowing them to feel more secure while discussing their problems during the mediations.

Students may also feel safe in knowing that every party involved must sign a confidentiality contract before the meeting can take place. The contract states, "As mediators we promise to keep everything within the mediation confidential." The contract also asks for the clients to sign, therefore allowing complete privacy for everyone involved. If any member of the mediation breaches the contract, the office will deal with the offense accordingly.

Last year the program had a total of 40 mediations. This year's first semester alone has already surpassed that number by one. These statistics imply that the mediations are successful.



Lesley Pawlaczky, one of Romeo's 22 Peer Mediators, agrees.

"We've seen people go from absolutely hating each other to becoming friends in a matter of minutes," Pawlaczky said.

Peer mediation also goes beyond the conflicts they help solve during school. The program sent the mediators to local elementary schools to inform the younger kids how to react in situations of conflict. They also brought lucky tray day back to the school, had their own dodge ball team named The Peacemakers, and spoke to the freshman class about the program.

The program has seen so much success that next year it will be offered as a semester long class students can receive credit for. The class will focus on issues such as diversity, cliques, and origins of conflicts, as well as train students in mediating.

"I am extremely excited about the skill level next year's mediators will have with the additional training they have already received," Robertson stated.

Peer mediation is a group of students hoping to make a positive impact in their school. In the words of Mr. Robertson, "Who wouldn't want somewhere else to turn to?"