**Peer Mediation has played a part in keeping peace for past 5 years**

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| Posted: 04/15/09http://www.romeoobserver.com/images/090415/peer.jpg**TALK IT OUT.** Above, students from the Peer Mediation group at Romeo High School help other students deal with issues like rumors and bullying by having private meetings to talk it over. From left, seniors Brittany Pebbles, Andy Stebbins, Marcela Toledo and junior Brian Palmer. Below, Peer Mediator Joey Jenuwine, a junior, demonstrates how students can submit an issue by leaving a note in a special locker checked daily by peer group mediators.**(Observer photos by Chris Gray)** **by CHRIS GRAYObserver Staff Writer****Continue….pg. 1 of 5**      At Romeo High School, a student catches wind of a vicious rumor about themselves. Upon finding out the source they confront them, but not with harsh retort or fists, but debate.       After making a referral, the students take advantage of the Peer Mediation program, where they are able to freely express their feelings and resolve the problem peacefully.       **http://www.romeoobserver.com/images/090415/mediation.jpg**Since its establishment in 2003, the Peer Mediation class at Romeo High School has helped students solve issues regarding rumors, relationships and other issues in more than 300 cases.       Dave Robertson, teacher and Peer Mediation coordinator, was asked to begin the program by former principal, Gavin Johnson. Once it began, he wrote his master's thesis about it, allowing him to know the ins and outs of the program.       "It takes dedication to get it going, but I think it's become part of the school after five years," he said. "And we're always talking about it, because if you don't, people will forget about it."       The class has handled 327 cases from 2003 to 2008, with 120 referred by students. The data shows the average caseload hovered around 31 mediations per semester, with the highest amount recorded in the first semester of the 2007-08 school year with 52 cases.       The most common sessions handle rumors and gossip, name-calling and friendship or relationship problems. Anyone from students and teachers to administrators can make referrals.       "A lot of the conflicts are solved before they even escalate, and we solve a lot of problems and prevent a lot of problems," said junior Brian Palmer. "It's completely confidential, so the kids are more comfortable talking to other students."       At a session, students introduce themselves and explain the ground rules, with a top priority on "no respect, no mediation." A confidentiality statement assures the discussion will remain private unless the person talks of potentially harmful issues.       Both parties are given a chance to tell their side of the story, and after resolving any misunderstandings, dialogue is initiated to figure out ways of solving the problem. Once an agreement is reached, a contract is written in the parties' own words and signed.       "I think mediations are successful," said Andy Stebbins, a senior and all-state wrestler. "There was one I did where there were a couple of guys close to fighting, but by the end they're cool with each other and talking, and it's pretty cool to see."       Topics that aren't handled by mediation include weapons, drugs, physical or sexual abuse and sexual harassment. Coordinators are notified about such topics to handle them appropriately.       "With a big situation I work with them pretty closely," Robertson said. "Otherwise, confidentiality is a big thing<it could kill the program if kids aren't confidential."       He said this year alone 120 kids requested the class, though he only had 64 slots. Once enrolled, students take a test to see if they qualify to mediate.       Surprisingly the group is a mix of students, ranging from athletes like Stebbins to exchange students and everything in between. Robertson said he likes to keep the class as eclectic as possible.       "That's part of being successful, I think," he said.       Marcela Toledo, a senior who came from Brazil in August, said she enjoys the class and believes it creates a better environment at school.       "I think it helps the students in school to concentrate and it helps at home," she said.       The class serves two purposes: The first half helps students get to know one another better, while the rest is dedicated to teaching and learning methods for mediation.       "The best part is, most of the referrals come from students<it's a student run program," Robertson said.       One of the benefits of mediation is allowing for an alternative to discipline. If a student chose to go through a mediation for something like a physical altercation, their suspension could be lessened.       "It's a very productive program," said Principal Michael Kaufman. "It teaches a lot of good coping skills."        |





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