

Restorative Re-Entry Conferences

Manitou Springs School District
Manitou Springs, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

When considering student discipline such as detention or suspension, it can be easy to get caught up in the reasons as to why a student was disciplined. In the Manitou Springs School District, however, the focus has shifted from the negative to examining the systems of support that high school students need in order to be successful.

Prior to re-entering school, a student who is out of school on a “time-out” engages in a re-entry conference with his or her parents/guardians, the assistant principal, Director of Partners for Healthy Choices, the student’s counselor, and any other relevant persons (i.e. friend of the parents, community member). The intent of this meeting is to focus on restoring any harm that has resulted from the student’s action, and restoring relationships.

The effectiveness of the conferences is assessed on a case-by-case basis. In the beginning, some conference attendees find it difficult to work the meeting into their busy schedules. However, once the meeting begins, everyone is able to see the full support of the team and understand that the intervention is meant to provide support for the students *and* the family, in and out of school. In addition, students report that they feel heard and respected, and that the school provides them support even in challenging circumstances.

These conferences maintain a strengths-based approach rather than one focused on deficit, and provide clearer expectations for students from the adults in their lives. Manitou Springs School District believes that their culture of restorative practices to guide discipline has a greater potential for continued student engagement, as opposed to punitive ones. In fact, Manitou Springs High School has high graduation rates and low dropout rates, and while this is not due solely to the restorative culture, the leaderships believe that it is a strong contributor.