

Review of 2007 Training Program

By David K. Trevaskis, Esq., PBA Pro Bono Coordinator

Nearly 100 educators and lawyers representing more than 20 schools joined together to promote PEACE on November 8-9 at the Dolce Hotel in King of Prussia. Project PEACE (Peaceful Endings through Attorneys, Children and Educators) is the peer mediation and anti-bullying training program implemented in Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Bar Association (PBA) and the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office with generous support from the Pennsylvania Bar Foundation. Pennsylvania Attorney General Thomas Corbett and Pennsylvania Bar President Andrew Susko joined the group for lunch on the first day of training and both leaders emphasized the importance of conflict resolution and anti-bullying education in keeping our schools, and our children, safe. Susko shared that he had been part of Project PEACE from its beginnings, having presented the proposal for Project PEACE to the PBA Board of Governors back in 1999. Susko recognized past PBA president Lou Teti, who was at the lunch on behalf of the partner Bar Foundation, for his leadership in bringing the program to Pennsylvania schools. General Corbett then taught a lesson on cyber bullying, highlighting how technological advances have allowed the school yard bully to reach victims far beyond the traditional school setting.

Project PEACE combines conflict resolution education and bullying prevention training to provide educators with the materials and strategies to give their students an education in the problem solving skills that are necessary for positive civic participation in our schools and the community beyond. This public-private partnership introduces dispute resolution techniques to students of all ages throughout the Commonwealth, though the primary focus of the November training, and of Project PEACE generally, has always been at the elementary school level where students first learn how to deal with each other. For the King of Prussia training, nationally known trainers Artemus Carter and Mary Ellen Schaffer joined the PBA's own David Trevaskis and his team of Pennsylvania Project PEACE trainers in conducting the two days of hands on work with the latest materials and methods in the field.

Originally brought to Pennsylvania by then Attorney General Mike Fisher in 1999 after the tragedy at Columbine High School, the program has continued to flourish under Attorney Generals Jerry Pappert and Thomas Corbett. Nine presidents of the PBA have endorsed the program and over the past eight years Project PEACE has brought peer mediation programming, conflict resolution education and anti-bullying training to 105 Pennsylvania schools directly and another 180 indirectly. All schools, regardless of socioeconomic status, diversity and location, have been forced by the highly publicized outbreaks of school violence to confront the issue of conflict among school students, and to help students address and resolve it before it escalates into violence. That initial look at tackling the problem of violence has led to a broader look at building involved communities, first at the school level, and then beyond. In this era of high stakes testing, when double periods of math and reading are taking the place traditionally reserved for social studies in the early grades, Project PEACE also provides a valuable means of providing civic learning in the schools in keeping with the PBA partnership with Pennsylvania First Lady and Third Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Midge Rendell.

Project PEACE works to reduce conflict and violence in Pennsylvania's schools by teaching students how to discuss and mediate disagreements peacefully. It empowers children, who are still in their formative years, with the important life-skills that promote constructive communication, problem-solving, critical-thinking and self-esteem. Children become active participants in governing behavior in their classrooms by taking on the role of mediator and using the mediation process; they also impact their class and school climate by using the skills of conflict resolution that they learn to work out disputes on their own. With the help of neutral peer mediators, or through the exercise of learned skills by individual students, conflicts can be settled in a positive manner, benefiting the school climate as a whole. Students also learn that certain problems, such as bullying behavior, cannot be mediated and must be confronted by the entire school community.

You can learn more about Project PEACE and see pictures from the training at <http://www.pabar.org/public/education/constitution/constitutionwebsite.asp>.