



# THE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE CONSENSUS REPORT:

Strategies from the Field to Keep Students Engaged  
in School and Out of the Juvenile Justice System

## **COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND FAMILY ISSUES PEACE CENTER WELLS COMMUNITY ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL CHICAGO, IL**

In 2010, Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) opened its first Peace Center for older youth at Wells Community Academy High School, a public four-year high school on the near north side of Chicago. The Peace Center hosts intensive restorative practice sessions and teaches students conflict-resolution skills. Parent facilitators, who are called "peacemakers" or "circle keepers," run the Peace Centers. They are members of the local community and receive extensive training from COFI and other Chicago area organizations on restorative justice practices. The model, first developed by parents in 2005, has been operating in several Chicago elementary schools for eight years.

Twice a week, peacemakers convene groups of students who can ask to be involved or are referred by teachers or parents based on a concern about the student's behavior or that the student is at risk for serious trouble in school or in the community. Peacemakers serve as mentors to youth, teaching them de-escalation and conflict-resolution skills that can be used in school and beyond. Peacemakers are responsible for helping youth resolve conflicts that frequently would otherwise lead to suspension or expulsion.

An assessment of the Peace Centers was conducted by Roosevelt University's Mansfield Institute for Social Justice and Transformation using participatory qualitative research methods. Findings revealed that the Peace Centers have helped implement restorative justice and conflict resolution strategies that enable students to interact with peers and adults in healthier ways. As a result, students are attending classes more and taking greater interest in their education. In addition, the use of the Peace Center has made it possible for administrators at Wells Community Academy High School to reduce their use of suspensions.<sup>137</sup>