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Preview of Article:

**Deepening Democracy**

*By Maria Hantzopoulos*

The fairness committee, which has existed since the school first opened in 1993 (as a mini-school), is a nontraditional model of school discipline that seeks to create, through dialogue and by consensus, appropriate responses for community norm violations, rather than simply mete out prescribed punishments.

The cofounders of the school, Perry Weiner and Christina Kemp, were interested in ways to strengthen the new school community and define a solid school culture built upon democratic ideals. The design of the original school included structures like town meeting, advisory, and thematic heterogeneous-aged classes, so that student voice was at the center of all school activity. Inspired by a visit to Scarsdale Alternative School in upstate New York, which had its own fairness committee, Perry, Christina, and a few students also realized that "discipline" could be done differently and inclusively. They decided to modify Scarsdale's version to fit the mission and needs of Humanities Prep.

As it currently stands, the fairness committee is a micro-form of "restorative justice" that is intentional and purposeful; it is a school structure that allows students, teachers, and any other member of our community to grapple with the broader ideals that define our school culture — and the ones that we hope shape all of our interactions beyond school. We hope the fairness committee can inspire empathetic and critical self-reflection and help us determine how best to restore and mend the community in the wake of actions inconsistent with its values.

**How It Works**

When a fairness committee session is called to order, it is because one member of the community believes that another has violated one of the school core values (respect for humanity, the intellect, truth, and diversity, or a commitment to peace, justice, and democracy). Anyone can be taken to fairness: A student can take another student, a teacher can take a student, and a student can even take a teacher. In Luther's case, he actually took himself.

Present at the committee meeting are the person who called the committee to order (that person may have been directly violated or simply witnessed the violation), the person who is being taken to fairness, one facilitator teacher, and a talking committee of one teacher and two other students who are unfamiliar with the situation at hand. The committee is convened ad hoc, though the facilitators reach out to new and veteran students and staff for inclusion on the committee. In this way, the entire school is involved in the process of creating, through dialogue and by consensus, consequences for the violation of school community norms.

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