

Tackling bullying, budgeting, and beyond

Residents of the small coastal city of Portsmouth, N.H., decided to take a different approach to address concerns around bullying and student behavior in the middle school: “study circles.” In 1999, nearly 200 students and 75 community members participated in the first of many dialogues in the “Portsmouth Listens” program.

Following the dialogues, schools noted an increase in awareness, and a decline in bullying. The program also did something equally important: it connected students, educators, and the community.



"Adults in the community, especially seniors, expressed surprise about how so many youth had meaningful things to say," noted Jim Noucas, Co-Chair of Portsmouth Listens. "Sixth-graders were surprised that adults would even listen to what they had to say. People left with a positive perception, not only of the kids, but of the school."



Learn more by visiting
<http://bit.ly/portsmouth-listens>

These first talks sparked enthusiasm among community members. Dialogues have continued in the Portsmouth education system for over a decade, tackling issues such as whether to relocate the middle school, how to handle unbalanced elementary school enrollment, and school budgeting.

Residents also began using the Portsmouth Listens approach to address a range of issues beyond education such as police-community relations, strategic community planning, sustainability, and the city budget. To date, more than 1,200 adults and young people have been involved in Portsmouth Listens dialogues.

Thanks to the success of the program, the University of New Hampshire started “New Hampshire Listens” to support dialogues around statewide issues. Bruce Malloy, Director of New Hampshire Listens, explained that “This is a way of going beyond contested divisive politics of special interest groups and partisan media, and enriching democracy in the United States.”

About Everyday Democracy

A national leader in the field of civic participation and community change, Everyday Democracy helps people of different backgrounds and views talk and work together to create communities that work for everyone.

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