

Pilot Project Profile: Mount Anthony Union High School (Bennington)

The Bennington pilot project began in the fall of 2002 and formed the Alternatives to Suspension Task Force with community partners, youth, and school personnel. Early meetings identified community value of education and youth engagement as key concerns. This group joined with an already existing school-community group that was planning Study Circles around education. The combined efforts resulted in youth facilitated Study Circles in March 2003. A report, Helping All Students Reach Their Full Potential: Schools and Community Working Together, was issued to the community in April 2003.

“The Bennington Study Circles Committee made a commitment to engage students as equal partners. The student involvement from the beginning has gone a long way in developing important links in this community, but helping to build a climate for change. Many members of the study circles committee would state that the first study circles in Bennington were a success as soon as the adults and students trained together to be co-facilitators. One of the most important products of the study circles process is the building of trust and respect among the participants and the energy that comes from taking part in the process.”

Themes that emerged were evaluation, communication, mentoring, academic environment, and curriculum. Each of these areas has a committee that continues to develop resources to address concerns.

A new administration in the high school has brought renewed energy around the possibilities for creating a school where all students achieve. The school and community, building on the Study Circle findings and the task force work, is investigating the “community school” model. A summer program for freshman at risk, Bridges, was initiated this summer.