



Vanguard
High School
Manhattan, NY

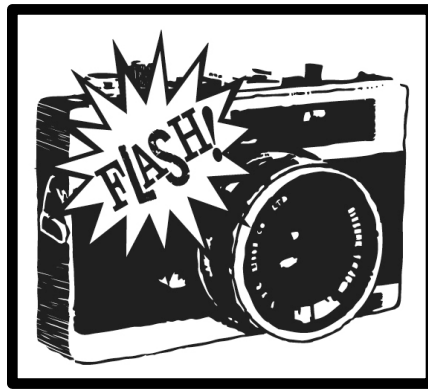


[Snapshot]

School: Vanguard High School

Borough: Manhattan, NY

Author: Josh Heisler, teacher, 2009



Vanguard High School is a Title I school and 66% of our students receive school lunch.

54% of our students are Latino, 33% Black and 8% are White.

The high school has 438 students and around 10 School Safety Agents.

There are no metal detectors in the school.

[Testimonial]

Author: Josh Heisler, teacher, 2009



Josh Heisler worked at Vanguard from 2003 to 2010. This testimonial was written in 2009.

I teach at Vanguard High School in the Julia Richman Complex in New York City. Vanguard belongs to the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and we emphasize performance-based assessment. We are a small community of around 400 students, and we work hard to build a sense of community. For the past few years, teachers have identified school culture and discipline as the number one area in need of improvement. Some of the primary concerns have been what to do with students that are disruptive in class, wander the hallways, and in general tend not to follow community norms. I was interested in finding an alternative discipline model that I could introduce to the school that would fit with our CES principle of decency and trust along with democracy and equity. Several years ago I learned of a successful practice used at Humanities Preparatory High School called a Fairness Committee.

The way the Fairness Committee works at Prep is when someone feels that there is a violation of the school's core values (Commitment to Peace, Intellect, and Democracy), they can be brought to a Fairness Committee to figure out what should be done about it. The committee is comprised of students and teachers, and the goal is not to find punishment, but to have the person take responsibility for their actions and to figure out a new way forward. In this way Fairness attempts to restore the community and make it whole. The people that I spoke to at Prep really liked the protocol and believed that it fit in well with their mission. Since they are also in CES I thought Vanguard could benefit from using this protocol as well.

After I got a commitment from my principal, I started in the summer to map out a plan that would allow Vanguard to create a Fairness Committee in the fall of 2008. I met with the person responsible for running the Fairness Committee at

Prep in August of 2008. We discussed the theory and philosophy behind Prep's use of the protocol. I realized that Vanguard would need to create our own core values before implementing a Fairness Committee. During our school's staff summer retreat, I led an introduction to what a Fairness Committee is and how it can be used. We agreed to embark on a pilot project with a limited number of cases to begin with. When the school year began, I gathered a number of students to help with the core values.

Vanguard is committed to personalized attention to our students and attention to our community as a whole. At the heart of these ideas is our advisory system, which allows our staff and students to develop close ties, and also reinforces ideas of personal and communal accountability. Advisory classes meet once a day for 40 minutes, and support academic achievement as well as personal growth, schoolwork, family concerns, and portfolio work. The students and staff working on the Fairness Committee implemented a plan to incorporate advisories' suggestions about what they believed Vanguard's core values were. We compiled those lists and organized them, had teachers add to it, and then sent them back to advisories again. We did that twice and ultimately agreed upon four core values: Being Respectful, Supportive Community, All Vanguardians Have Voice, and Being Committed.

Next, with the group of students who helped develop and organize the core values, we practiced and role-played what a Fairness Committee hearing might look like. We trained ourselves, and felt ready to go. Lastly, we worked on promoting the Fairness Committee: making fliers for it, visiting advisories to give an overview of the process, and answering questions. We started with a pilot and told people we were open for business.

The protocol is very simple. A person brings another person because they feel that a core value has been violated. For example Joe brings Richard because he feels that Richard has violated the core value of being respectful. Joe then explains why he feels that way. Richard has a chance to respond to Joe, and the committee asks questions. The committee is comprised of one facilitating teacher, and three students. In the spring, we added another teacher to get more people involved. The idea is that anyone in the school community can bring another member to a Fairness hearing. And anyone in the school community can sit in and participate on the committee.

At Humanities Prep, Fairness runs like jury duty. Everyone is expected to serve, when you are called you have to go. However, their student population is much smaller than ours. We decided to use volunteers and rotate as many as possible so that it was not always the same people participating. I developed a system so that depending on when the teacher or student had their prep period or elective class, we could schedule the hearing during that time. This would allow for the hearings to not have an adverse affect on students' academics, or teachers' instructional time. As a result we have four potential committees with rotating staff and students ready to sit on the hearings for each one.

I believe that a Fairness Committee is the first step in creating the type of school that we want our students to attend. A place that teaches the whole child, not just academics but what it means to be a caring person who believes in justice. This can happen when people are given the opportunity to practice democracy. If we gather and discuss community problems and how to address them, we can make decisions that really matter. We can treat people as individuals and recognize that not every solution to the problem will be the same. We must recognize that everyone develops at different rates. The key is to provide the space for students to help each other to take responsibility for their actions, figure out creative ways to make amends, and empower them to create the type of world they would like to live in.

Vanguard Fairness Analysis

Fairness Committee 2008-2009

The following is the data analysis of Vanguard High School's inaugural year of our Fairness Committee. The data comes from the Fairness Committee database, which logged the intake of all cases, what happened during the hearing and the follow-up results with the student. Other data includes teacher and student surveys, and two pieces of anecdotal evidence.

Database:

- There were 19 Fairness cases in the 2008-2009 school year. 9 of them were in the fall, which began in late October and ran through January. 10 were in the spring, which includes February through May.
- 9 students filed cases through the Fairness form on Edline with 5 cases actually making it to a hearing.
- 17 teachers participated in a Fairness hearing at least once (some multiple times), which is half the teachers at the school. 36 students participated in at least one hearing (again some multiple times), which is less than 10% of the students.
- Students were brought to Fairness for a wide variety of reasons including; bullying, verbal harassment (calling someone the derogatory term for homosexual or women,), disrespect toward their teachers and other students, poor attendance and performance in school, losing someone's Metrocard, plagiarism, disruptive behavior, issues with electronics.

Survey information:

Phase 1

- Thirty-three teachers were surveyed out of thirty-seven on February 2nd, 2009.

- One hundred and eighty one students were surveyed out of approximately four hundred in early March of 2009.

Phase 2

- Twelve teachers were surveyed on May 16-21.
- Forty-four students were surveyed on May 17-20.

The following summary reflects the results from the second survey, unless otherwise indicated.

Core Values

- When asked if the core values had improved the community only 33% of teachers were in agreement. However, 80% of students felt that they had.

Students have some control over making the school climate feel safer and welcoming.

- 92% of teachers and 89% of students agree.

Willingness to go to Fairness

- 84% of teachers and 39% of students said they would with 25% of students unsure.

Belief that students & teachers can come to a fair resolution to a school problem.

- 100% of teachers and 73% of students agreed.

Feelings of student-to-student respect

- 33% of teachers said that there was more respect up from 21% from the previous survey. A 12% increase.
- 55% of students feel there is more respect, which is up from 39% in the previous survey. An increase of 16%.

Feelings of safety

- 25% of teachers feel safer than earlier in the year up from 6% on the first survey. A 19% increase.
- 20% of students feel safer with 80% saying they feel equally as safe as before.

Impact of the Fairness Committee this year

- 82% of teachers see a positive impact.
- 48% of students see a positive impact.

Belief that a Fairness Committee should be an option next year

- 100% of teachers agree.
- 61% of students agree.

Anecdotes:

Teacher anecdote regarding her Fairness experience:

Then, I stated what I needed from her from now on, and she stated what she needed from me. Both of us requested simple, concrete things. It was good to hear some changes I could make in class to make sure that she felt comfortable and not badgered...It's been two and a half weeks since the hearing. The day after the meeting, my student came into class with a really positive attitude and did a great job. For the most part, she's kept that positivity up. She's 100% more respectful to me and completes her class work.

Student anecdote from their PBA presentation:

[Schools] should show children that they trust them, that they trust that they will respect one another. With trust comes responsibility and if they children feel like they have responsibility and some kind of voice they probably will want to make a safer school... In my school we have an alternative approach to discipline, called the Fairness Committee. The Fairness Committee is a way for the teachers or students to talk directly to the accused party and handle the situation verbally.

Interpretation:

Vanguard successfully created an alternative discipline process that meets our community's needs, with half the teachers having used the process already. Teachers and students agree that they can work together to resolve school problems in a fair manner. They agree that students have control of making the school climate feel safer and welcoming. In fact teachers and students perceptions of safety and respect are trending upward, two of the key indicators for climate and culture. While students offer encouraging signs that the core values have positively impacted the community, teachers remain unconvinced, highlighting a need to strengthen our core values. However the majority of teachers and students believe that Fairness should continue to be an option for next year. One teacher remarked that Fairness led to a "positive attitude" from the student and that the process allowed her to better understand the students' needs to feel comfortable and not feel "badgered". While the student perspective advocates for the community to give them more responsibility to make their school safer. She believes that Fairness is a good way for teachers and students to resolve problems when they arise.

Recommendations:

The following are a list of recommendations from teachers and students on how to improve the Fairness Committee for next year. They fall into two categories; systems that people believe are needed to improve the process and suggestions for how to enculturate Fairness to the larger community.

Systems:

- Make Fairness official policy; when certain infractions occur the policy will be the student should be brought to Fairness. List those infractions. This will also reduce suspensions.
- Clarify the ladder of referral for Fairness.
- Improve logistics. One suggestion is to have facilitators be responsible for certain weeks of the year. Perhaps have set times once or twice a week when Fairness meets.
- Improve follow through and communication about when hearings take place and clarify protocol about who tells the person that is being brought to Fairness. Improve communication between what happened in Fairness and the community. Follow-up: Hand write-up of resolution to advisor(s) of student brought to Fairness w/ a follow-up date. Follow up on that date. If student is not adhering to agreement, implement more serious intervention (parent/principal/student contract, service project, etc).
- Incorporate a greater use of consequences. They can be creative and perhaps involve community service. For example, if a student is offensive to women he would have to spend X number of hours working for the Girls Project.

Enculturation:

- Provide more clarification about what Fairness is. This should be introduced to the whole school in the beginning of the year through community meetings (school-wide or half the school) and advisory circle lessons.
- Return to core values, adding, subtracting, and agreeing to it in on a community meeting level.
- More sharing out. This could be from students writing.
- Improve transparency. This will help with community buy-in.

Next Steps:

Fairness can become the first option for handling norm violations. This will happen when more students are willing to bring other students and hold themselves accountable. In order to promote Fairness on a widespread basis, it should become official policy. Fairness can be used in place of suspension or sending students home. Research shows that suspensions do not improve student achievement and too often send students down the road to dropping out. The Fairness Committee has the greatest potential to restore the community and make it whole when norm violations occur.

[Tools]



Fairness Structure

Roles:

- Facilitator
- One Teacher
- Panel: two or three students
- Person taken to fairness
- Person bringing one to fairness

The facilitator convenes the fairness by introducing everyone and explaining the basic ground rules, which include confidentiality and openness to process. S/he also explains the way that the process works, including the speaking order and role of the panel.

The person calling the fairness is allowed to explain, uninterrupted, why s/he is doing it. S/he is asked to explain which core value s/he believes has been violated.

Next, the person brought to fairness explains his or her side of the story, also uninterrupted.

After that, the panel is allowed to ask questions to either person to obtain a more complete and holistic picture of the situation at hand. This process has no beginning or end and is dependent on the context of the situation and the nature of the dialogue. The intent is to come to some agreement or understanding among all parties. At times, this happens easily and other times this requires much more work.

Questions you can expect the panel to ask:

Clarifying questions like who, what, where, when, and why

Restorative Justice Questions:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking?
- How were you feeling?
- Who else has been affected by this?
- What do you need now so that the harm can be repaired?
- How can we involve everyone who has been affected in finding a way forward?
- How can everyone do things differently in the future?

Core Goals / Intro to the Fairness Committee Lesson Plan 1

Overview: The object of this lesson is to introduce the concept of a fairness committee to students and to discuss the rationale for it.

- Materials Needed: Handout about the Fairness Committee “**Deepening Democracy**” by Maria Hantzopoulos—originally published in *Rethinking Schools*: bit.ly/1kTrhRa

Pre-reading: Ask the students to think about a time that something happened that wasn’t fair at school. It could be a problem they had with another student or with a teacher. Or even something that happened to someone else. They can keep names confidential and they should avoid bringing up any issue that might still be unresolved.

- What happened?
- Was it resolved in a fair way? Why or why not?

Ask them to think about this experience for a few minutes.

Have a few students share their stories. Make sure they responded to the above prompts.

Ask students to share what they already know about the fairness committee. Have they participated in it before?

Reading:

Explain to the group that this year we asking more people to participate in the Fairness Committee as a way to address these issues in a fairer way. Ask for a few volunteers to read out loud the *Deepening Democracy* story about what a fairness committee is like at Humanities Prep, a similar school to Vanguard that is located in Chelsea.

Post-reading: You can ask any of the following questions:

- a. Ask students what stood out to them about the article.
- b. Ask students what questions they have about this.
- c. Ask students why it is worthwhile to include so many different stakeholders in a fairness hearing.
- d. Remind students that any violation of the core values (Being Respectful, All Vanguardians Have Voice, Supportive Community, Being Committed) can result in a hearing. Ask students to brainstorm some situations that might result in a fairness hearing. What might be the value of resolving these issues through fairness?
- e. What are alternatives to fairness? Why might someone choose that alternative?
- f. Lastly, review the fairness committee protocol and discuss what questions committee members would want to ask students based on some of the situations students brainstormed earlier.

The Fairness Committee *

The Fairness Committee of Humanities Preparatory Academy is a non-traditional restorative justice model of school discipline. Parameters and protocols for discussion place emphasis on the violation of community core norms and values rather than on the breaking of rules. Fairness seeks to create, through dialogue and by consensus, appropriate “consequences” for those violations, rather than simply meet out prescribed “punishments.”

As a model of restorative justice the Committee endeavors to 1) inspire empathic and critical self-reflection, by confronting a member of the community with his or her actions and how they have effected others; 2) collectively determine how best to restore and mend the community in the wake of actions inconsistent with its values; and 3) how to reintegrate the member of the community who has violated our values back into the fabric and culture of the school.

The Fairness Committee is a democratization of the traditional disciplinary process and includes all teachers and students. It typically convenes six people: one teacher facilitator, a teacher and two student committee members, and the two people who are involved in the norm/value violation. Any member of the community – teacher or student – can take another to Fairness.

The committee is convened ad hoc but regularly throughout semester and facilitators reach out to new and veteran students and staff for inclusion on the committee. The entire school, with students at the center, is thus involved in the process of creating, through dialogue and by consensus, consequences for the violation of school community norms.

The Fairness Committee embodies elements of several CES Common Principles: It contributes to a school "tone" that "explicitly and self-consciously" stresses values of "trust" and "decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance);" and models “democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school.”

* Adopted by Humanities Prep as a result of collaborations with the Scarsdale Alternative School in the early 90s.

Core Goals / Intro to the Fairness Committee Lesson Plan 1 (Alt.)

Overview: The object of this lesson is to 1) introduce the concept of a fairness committee to the school. 2) Generate a list of Vanguard's core values. Students should know that all advisories and staff members are working to create a list of what will eventually become 4 to 7 core values.

Materials Needed:

- Paper & Pens
- Handout about the Fairness Committee: "**Deepening Democracy**" by **Maria Hantzopoulos**—originally published in *Rethinking Schools*: bit.ly/1kTrhRa
- Method for recording core values

Pre-reading:

2. Ask your advisees to think about a time last year that something happened that wasn't fair at school. It could be a problem they had with another student or with a teacher. Or even something that happened to someone else. They can keep names confidential and they should avoid bringing up any issue that might still be unresolved. We don't want to start the school year opening up old wounds.
 - What happened?
 - Was it resolved in a fair way? Why or why not?

Ask them to write about this experience for a few minutes.

3. Have a few students share their stories. Make sure they responded to the above prompts.

Reading:

4. Explain to the group that this year we are going to start a "Fairness Committee" as a way to address these issues in a fairer way. Ask for a few volunteers to read out loud the *Deepening Democracy* story about what a fairness committee is like at Humanities Prep, a similar school to Vanguard that is located in Chelsea.

Post-reading:

5. Ask if there are any questions about the story.
6. Point out in story the bolded **core values**. Ask students to take a few minutes to think about what the core values are at Vanguard and/or what they would like them to be. As a prompt they might consider what makes this school special.
7. Have them generate the list. Remind them that the entire school is working to create our core values together.

Core Goals / Intro to the Fairness Committee Lesson Plan 2

Overview:

We are in the third phase of the core values/fairness committee initiative. In the beginning staff and students brainstormed a list of core values. Next a small group of students met and paired down the list to 4 core values. Now we are ready to polish them with the goal of agreeing to the core values by next week. The object of this lesson is to 1) Review the core values with your advisory and 2) have your advisory make any final suggestions. 3) Discuss with your advisees situations where these core values might come up.

Materials Included: (We will distribute these)

Core value list & Big paper to record

Lesson:

1. Remind advisory students that the fairness committee is gaining momentum. Review with them the objective above and explain that next week we will agree to the values that represent Vanguard. Make sure they understand this is a big step for the school and we all have to agree to this. The first step is defining what we stand for. Then tell kids we need their help with refining the core values we've identified together thus far:

1.) What does BEING RESPECTFUL mean/look like at VHS? What can be added or changed from this list?

2.) What does ALL VANGUARDIANS HAVE VOICE mean/look like at VHS? What can be added or changed from this list?

3.) What does SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY mean/look like at VHS? What can be added or changed from this list?

4.) What does BEING COMMITTED mean/look like at VHS? What can be added or changed from this list?

5.) After you have recorded their ideas explain that next week the school will be agreeing to these core values.

Reminder: Please bring the big paper to Wednesday afternoon's Professional Development. We will use these lists.