

## Restorative Practices in Schools: Research Summary

As an alternative to punitive, zero tolerance policies, restorative practices have been adapted from criminal justice settings to school settings in an effort to keep children in schools and out of the juvenile justice system. The aim of modern restorative practice is to repair harm while preventing further harm through accountability and support. In school settings, restorative practices often involve reconciliation conferencing, mediation, restitution, and/or community service. Early observational studies of restorative practices in schools show reductions in suspensions, expulsions, violence, and disruptive behaviors and improvements in positive relationships and academic achievement. Recent randomized trials have produced promising findings in high schools, but more rigorous research is needed on the effectiveness of these practices among younger students.

### **After implementing restorative practices, schools report...**

#### **...reductions in suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary referrals**

- Multiple evaluations in various U.S. jurisdictions including Minnesota, Oakland, Denver, Baltimore, and Pennsylvania have shown marked reductions in detentions, suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary referrals following implementation of restorative practices, with some schools experiencing a 100% reduction in expulsions.<sup>1-5</sup>
- Restorative practices implemented in school systems in other countries including Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia show similar reductions in these exclusionary discipline practices.<sup>6-10</sup>

#### **...reductions in violence and improvements in school climate**

- National and international observational studies have shown reductions in school violence, fighting, and other disruptive behavior as well as improvements in positive relationships and staff morale upon implementation of restorative practices.<sup>4,5,8,9,11</sup>

#### **...improvements in attendance and academic achievement**

- Schools in Minneapolis and Ontario have reported increased attendance rates, improved grades, and increased proportions of students on track to graduate after implementation of restorative practices.<sup>11,12</sup>

#### **The federal government recently commissioned two randomized trials, which produced some promising findings**

- A randomized trial of a restorative practices program in 44 Pittsburgh Public Schools found that the intervention achieved its primary goal in high schools: the intervention improved school climate and reduced days of instruction lost to suspension, particularly among black students. This reduced the substantial racial gap in suspension rates.

The intervention did not significantly improve academic outcomes, reduce total arrest rates, or reduce suspension rates among middle school students.<sup>13</sup>

- A randomized trial of a restorative practices program in 13 middle schools in Maine did not find significant school-level changes; however, the implementation of restorative practices was modest—not much different than control schools. Nonetheless, students who experienced restorative practices reported improved school climate, peer attachment, and social skills, as well as reduced cyberbullying victimization.<sup>14</sup>

### Relevant state legislation:

- State level legislation has been introduced naming restorative justice practices as alternatives to zero tolerance policies in schools, for example Florida's 2019 Statute 1006.13(1) and Colorado's 2011 HB 11-1032. Some states have experienced reductions in suspensions following implementation of these laws.<sup>15</sup>

---

### References

1. Minnesota Department of Education. (2011). Restorative Measures in Schools Surveys, 2011 Executive Summary. Minnesota: Minnesota Department of Education.
2. Sumner MD, Silverman CJ, and Frampton ML. (2010). School-based restorative justice as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies: Lessons from West Oakland. In Thelton E. Henderson, Center for Social Justice, Berkeley: University of California.
3. Advancement Project. (2010). Test, Punish, and Push Out: How zero tolerance and high-stakes testing funnel youth into the school to prison pipeline. Washington DC.
4. Lewis S. (2009). Improving school climate: Evidence from schools implementing restorative practices. A report from the International Institute for Restorative Practices.
5. Mirksy L. (2003). "SaferSanerSchools: Transforming School Culture with Restorative Practices" Restorative Practices eForum, May 20, 2003.
6. Kane J, Lloyd G, McCluskey G, Riddell S, Stead J, Weedon E, Maguire R, and Hendry R. (2007). Restorative Practices in Three Scottish Councils: Final Report of the Evaluation of the First Two Years of the Pilot Projects 2004-2006. Scotland, UK: University of Glasgow.
7. Shaw G. (2007). Restorative practices in Australian schools: Changing relationships, changing culture. Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 25: 127-135.
8. Campbell H, McCord J, Chapman T, and Wilson D. (2013). Developing a whole system approach to embedding restorative practices in YouthReach youth work and schools in County Donegal. Donegal ETB Restorative Practices Report. Northern Ireland: University of Ulster.
9. McCluskey G, Lloyd GG, Kane J, Riddell S, Stead J, Weedon E. (2008). Can restorative practices in schools make a difference? Educational Review, 60: 405-417.
10. Schiff M. (2013). Dignity, disparity and desistance: Effective restorative justice strategies to plug the "school-to-prison pipeline." Center for Civil Rights Remedies National Conference, Closing the School to Research Gap: Research to Remedies Conference, Washington, DC.
11. McMorris BJ, Beckman KJ, Shea G, Baumgartner K, and Eggert RC. (2013). Applying restorative justice practices to Minneapolis Public Schools students recommended for possible expulsion: A pilot program evaluation of the Family and Youth Restorative Conference Program. School of Nursing and the Healthy Youth Development. Prevention Research Center, Department of Pediatrics, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.
12. Rideout G, Roland K, Salinirri G, and Frey M. (2010). Measuring the effect of restorative justice practices: Outcomes and contexts. EAF Journal, 21, 2: 35-60.
13. Augustine CH, Engberg J, Grimm GE, Lee E, Wang EL, Christianson K, and Joseph AA. (2018). Can restorative practices improve school climate and curb suspensions? An evaluation of the impact of restorative practices in a mid-sized urban school district. RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.
14. Acosta J, Chinman M, Ebener P, Malone PS, Phillips A, and Wilks A. (2019). Evaluation of a whole-school change intervention: Findings from a two-year cluster-randomized trial of the restorative practices intervention. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 48: 876-890.
15. Skiba RJ and Losen DJ. (2015). From reaction to prevention: Turning the page on school discipline. American Educator 39(4): 4-11.