

REPAIRING THE HARM... RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SUCCEEDS WHEN WE HONOR THE HUMANITY OF THE CHILD



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“Zero-tolerance” policies – suspensions, expulsions, and the more recent trend to police referrals or arrests – often are nourished by implicit biases and institutionalized racism, and aimed unevenly at Black, Latino male, and American Indian students, as well as students with disabilities.”¹

When zero tolerance nets zero results, it’s time for systemic reform whereby the embedded, retributive justice model is replaced with the more collaborative, problem solving methods of Restorative Justice. This new wave of thinking provides a path for K-12 schools to:

- Strengthen their community.
- Build trusting relationships among students and staff.
- Increase the safety and productivity of the learning environment.

The Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL) has taken an active role in implementing restorative practices at its network of 31 Schools of Excellence. Our policies are designed to align with, and complement, those of our partner in education, Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

THE GREAT DISCIPLINARY POLICY SHIFT

Classroom suspensions neither improve school culture, nor change student behavior. It can be said that “old school” discipline actually exacerbates bullying, violence, poor academic performance, and negatively impacts the social and emotional health of students, teachers, and staff.

¹ Flannery, Mary Ellen, [How Restorative Practices Work for Students and Educators](#), *NEAToday*, June 13, 2019. *National Education Association Today*.

Elements of Restorative Practice Culture Change



Source: Center for Urban Education Success, Warner School of Education, University of Rochester, 2020.

This paper will share the experiences of three AUSL school Principals who have introduced restorative practices in their buildings. They deal with the challenges of equitable justice each day, and are committed to refining and expanding their policies to analyze results and establish benchmarks for future measurement.

CASE STUDY: NATIONAL TEACHERS ACADEMY

“It’s a Marathon, Not a Sprint.”

— Isaac D. Castelaz
Principal at National Teachers Academy (K-8)

When Isaac Castelaz took over as Principal at National Teachers Academy (NTA) in 2012, he was not completely sold on the principles of Restorative Justice as it was still, in his view, an unproven practice.

He was “old school” and believed in swift, zero-tolerance discipline. Many teachers in his building did too, as they were accustomed to this entrenched approach where students were held fully accountable for their actions. Bad behavior resulted in suspensions, in-school suspensions, and being kept out of class for extended periods of time. In this environment, students were made to sit silently and do meaningless work, only to return to class and repeat the same behavior. While his views on swift response and accountability have not changed, accountability looks quite different now.

NTA also faced upwards of 300 to 400 suspensions in Principal Castelaz’s first year. By his account, the staff were exhausted when the school year finally ended, as fights and bad behavior had spiked at that juncture.

Initiatives:

By all indications, zero-tolerance had run its course, and NTA saw zero results for their efforts. Realizing that a change was needed, Principal Castelaz started looking into Restorative Justice practices at the beginning of SY 14. As he built buy-in among his teachers and staff, a restorative roadmap began to take shape:

YEAR 1:

- Study restorative practices as a staff.
- Pilot small programs with selected teachers and groups.
- Encourage restorative dialog between all stakeholders.
- Avoid out-of-school suspensions as much as possible.

YEAR 2:

- Facilitate circles in classrooms and in response to specific behavior infractions.
- Restorative dialogs/conversations are an expectation for all.
- Avoid out-of-school suspensions as much as possible.

YEAR 3:

- In place of in-school suspension and detention, establish bridge and skill-building programs which teach pro-social behavior:
- Example A: Students who got into a food fight in the cafeteria have to spend a week wiping down tables with the lunchroom/custodial staff.
- Example B: For fighting in school, students were made to understand how their actions had affected their community so they could develop a deeper understanding of their connection to other people.
- Ensure students spend more time in classrooms than in discipline.

Once up to speed, peace circles were implemented across the school by a growing number of staff, to the point where the circles became a “phenomenon” and eventually a pillar of school policy.

A Student’s Perspective:

“NTA is different from other schools I have attended. The school is full of understanding people, and they all know what to do with the kids that go to NTA, especially the ones who have a hard time with their behavior.”

Results

The process of moving NTA from a zero tolerance school to a fully restorative school took three years, and continues to evolve as new trends and tactics are identified and integrated. From the SY 2015 through SY 2019 time frame:

- Students reported a more supportive environment.
- School performance relative to the 5 Essentials Survey improved in terms of survey metrics – moving up from a “very weak” supportive environment to a high “neutral” supportive environment rating.
- While there were a few hiccups in SY 2019, and infractions still existed, suspensions fell dramatically from over 300 to just 13.
- Teachers became more skilled at leading restorative practices.
- Students were better able to participate in circles, and actively sought out staff members to help them navigate through their challenges.

Key Learnings

As Principal Castelaz recalls, Restorative Justice is a marathon, not a sprint. The critical takeaways from his first hand experience revealed that:

- There was an initial misjudgment in thinking you could train staff one-time, then implement the new system based on that training and sustain it, when just the opposite was true.
- Putting a Restorative Justice program in place requires continuous training and ongoing reflection. It must be done concurrently with how you build out your policies and practices.
- A strong, school-wide commitment that needs its fair share of quality time each and every year to succeed is required.
- The investment in Restorative Justice is approximately \$130K annually as compared to \$80-\$90K for a traditional program. At NTA, a Dean and Co-Dean role was added, plus a couple of part-time staff members. The school also added 10-12 hours of Personal Development for their seasoned staff. Principal Castelaz estimates that in the beginning, at least 24 hours was needed.
- Logical consequences and restorative conversations are essential for improving social and emotional learning, and building trust between teachers and students, and between students themselves.
- Managing a well-crafted Restorative Justice program is not easier than traditional disciplinary methods – it’s actually harder. But it’s the most equitable approach for students. Getting it right requires a strong financial and personnel commitment beyond existing staff.



CASE STUDY: THE FULLER SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE

“Honor the Humanity of the Child.”

– Marilyn McCottrell

Principal at the Fuller School of Excellence (K-8)

Improving perceptions of student behavior was a primary objective for Principal Marilyn McCottrell when she and her team came aboard at the Fuller School of Excellence. In fact, the first task she assigned herself was to meet one-to-one with each member of her staff. Her mission was to identify a set of universal practices to help get behavior under control so all students could be re-focused on receiving a quality education.

Principal McCottrell trained her entire team on systems and routines that became highly effective, standardized, restorative practices. These allowed the school to identify students who were truly misbehaving from those who were acting out simply because they had no structure to emulate.

The school’s restorative practices policy is now a cornerstone of its Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP). Principal McCottrell believes that educators need to “*Fundamentally change the way we think about students and their contribution to the learning experience*”. The CIWP enables the staff to get to the root is-sues of managing student behavior, delivering equitable solutions that drive social and emotional improvement within the school community.

Initiatives

A system for tracking misbehavior was put in place, not for the purpose of penalizing students, but for determining which students needed more support around social and emotional learning.

- Talking circles centered around gender were established, as certain issues are more predominant with female students, while others are more male-student oriented.
- This supportive, empathetic environment saw more students open up about their issues and self-perceptions enabling individual students and the school to:
 - Track how infractions were reduced over time.
 - Move students out of their circle as behavior improved and infractions fell below a certain threshold.

The circles provided an outlet for pent-up emotions, gave students a voice, and taught them basic principles of civic engagement. As a result, the school saw some drastic reductions in negative and unproductive behavior. They became so popular that students who were historically tardy in the morning rushed to get to their “circle” meetings.

A new, forward-facing hiring strategy was implemented as well. A Principal needs to think globally about every aspect of school activity. If a particular strategy rests on a foundation of closed-mindedness, is too teacher centric, or is rooted in systemic racist practices, then what difference would it make?

- The school chose to hire for the future, believing that if they hire for the past, they’ll get the past.
- It recruited teachers whose vision and mindset were closer to the direction of where the school wanted to be in five years instead of where it had been.
- New hires were on-board with supporting the school’s evolving Restorative Justice methods and no longer reliant on old-school, punitive discipline.

When Covid-19 pushed the school to remote learning in the Spring of 2020, the responsibility for continuing restorative practices fell to the social and emotional learning team. Using creative approaches that increased student engagement and productive outcomes, the team achieved strong attendance by:

- Getting students in the lower grades to focus on selective topics and using “readalouds” that supported those topics.
- Encouraging upper-grade students to source and choose the topics they thought important enough for discussion.
- In advance of school re-opening in November 2020, 70% of the school’s staff is building their re-entry plan which includes communicating with families – a core component of any Restorative Justice strategy.

Results

Restorative Justice was a gradual process. It was introduced to teachers and staff through a “culture and climate” plan so that acceptance and classroom applications would be sustainable.

- If transitioning to restorative practices happened too quickly, the building could be thrown into chaos, and people might see that change as negative and potentially leave.
- The culture and climate plan taught teachers and staff members how to build and implement quality systems and structure at the school level, and then introduce them at the classroom level.
- School administrators worked with teachers and staff on professionalism to ensure that all those who interacted with students knew what was and was not appropriate.

Building relationships with students was a priority, so everyone learned how to:

- Re-focus a student.
- De-escalate a student.
- Have a meaningful one-to-one with a student.

New detention guidelines were established requiring notification of the parent(s), followed by both a conversation and a peace circle with the Dean, teacher, and student before a detention could occur.

Teachers had to be available for peace circle conversations so that the student returned to the classroom knowing what he/she needed to do differently, and what the teacher would do differently. It is important that the teacher knows that they’ve collaborated with the student to mutually change attitudes and behaviors for the benefit of the student, class, and school community at large.



Key Learnings

- Our restorative practices must recognize the humanity of the child by honoring the fact that we are teaching human beings, not subjects. Educators must honor this just as students must reciprocate that honor for educators.
- The Principal must be an “equity champion” no matter what, and display a selfless view and strong commitment to train others to recognize injustice.
- Teachers and staff must be believers in Restorative Justice and equity, and overcome their reluctance to hold each other accountable for their beliefs. Teachers must speak out. Students and staff as well.
- Restorative Justice cannot work in isolation. Constant empowerment is needed as these practices require ongoing training with staff and students. In fact, all decisions come back to this principle. For it to be truly effective, Restorative Justice must be “Embedded in how we do school and how we think about kids”.

CASE STUDY: CHICAGO ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL

“Hire Strategically to Build the Right Team.”

— Lydia Menzer
Principal at Chicago Academy High School (9-12)

It was clear to Principal Lydia Menzer that equitable justice was not being dispensed equitably at Chicago Academy High School (CAHS). She recalls that:

- There was a high incidence of fighting, with 35 fights recorded in SY17-18.
- 90% of disciplinary referrals were owned by ten boys – eight of whom were students of color.
- Massive inequities existed within the school’s diverse population as to who was receiving discipline.

The realization that punitive policies were ineffective and inequitable sparked a transition to Restorative Justice practices that could help students socially and emotionally.

At the start of the next school year, Principal Menzer began putting an action plan in place, and soon realized the challenges she was up against:

- Her school struggled with its entrenched history of punitive outcomes.
- Teachers held a zero tolerance mindset.
- There was uncertainty as to what an effective, long-term Restorative Justice strategy looked like.
- Had to train staff and develop policies in order to build a restorative tool box.

- The school lacked men of color to provide relatable role models.

Initiatives

Strategic hiring was used to build the CAHS team and ensure the right people were brought in to mentor students and build trusting relationships – including security officers to help run restorative practices. In addition:

- Teachers of Color (TOC) were hired as exemplary role models who could connect meaningfully with students, give them a larger voice in remediating behavioral issues, and help repair the harm.
- Set up “Manhood First” male student mentoring group run by Black and LatinX teachers and staff. Successful relationship building helped change student behavior, and once involved, most students never ditched a class again.
- A parallel group, appropriately called “Ladies First”, was set up for female students by a female teacher of color with a passion for mentoring.
- Created a “peer mentoring” initiative in which upperclass juniors and seniors were paired with underclass students. The value of leveraging peer influence led to freshman and sophomores making better choices.
- The school engaged parents about their child’s behavior, and discussed logical consequences for bad choices to help avoid after school discipline. For example, if an infraction took place during lunch, the student, with parental permission, would spend a week helping to clean up the lunchroom.

The more confident Principal Menzer and her team got, the more creative and innovative they became in handling infractions:

- A male student, caught making negative remarks about a female student on social media, was sent on a “Positivity About Women” campaign in which he made posters about using respectful language towards women and posted them around the building.
- The student also had to create posts on Schoology – the CAHS equivalent of a Facebook page – that focused on the importance of speaking positively about women.

A Student’s Perspective:

“My basketball coaches, Coach Darius and Coach Steve, have made an impact on my development. They impacted me by teaching me basketball, helping me achieve a better mindset, and helping me control my anger.”

Results

- Strategic hiring of highly-skilled staff, team buy-in, and greater acceptance by students, created a more equitable Restorative Justice policy.
- The incidence of fighting was reduced from 35 in SY17-18 down to just two in SY19-20.
- The school's restorative practices helped determine at what point repairing the harm was needed if a student made a mistake.

Key Learnings

Principal Menzer lists five lessons she and her team have learned from the restorative practices implemented at CAHS:

- Strategic hiring is critical to find the right people.
- Work diligently towards shifting adult mindsets around discipline, and re-focus them on equitable justice for students of color.
- Make data available and visible to staff; build awareness of tactics, applications, and results.
- Making restorative practices work is a process, not an event. It took three years for CAHS to reach its goal of reducing student fights. Success requires putting in the time to gather input from all stakeholders to build a solid foundation.
- Be prepared to use the power of conversation to have difficult discussions with staff members who resist the process.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE EXPANDS ITS FOOTPRINT

After a long effort by discipline reform advocates, more Districts are considering restorative practices as alternatives... “Alternatives that don't push out an excessive number of students, don't create wide racial disparity gaps, and that overall foster a more inclusive and constructive learning environment.”² For example:

- Trussville City Schools in Alabama have seen disciplinary issues diminish since school restorative justice programs were implemented.

“Counselors teach character skills, and each student has at least five adults in the building with whom they are personally connected and to whom they can go for help or support.”³

- Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky plans to expand its restorative practice efforts to 20 more schools before the 2020-21 school year. “Engelhard, a high-poverty school near downtown Louisville, is in its third year of using restorative practices. Its suspension rate dropped nearly 80% after implementing things such as restorative circles, called circle time.”⁴
- In Oklahoma, Tulsa Public Schools believe in the power of restorative practices and interventions. Their initiative, the Journey to Destination Excellence, “Teaches students, teachers, and leaders to create safe, supportive, and joyful learning environments that promote acceptance and inclusion for all students.”⁵ The District's transition followed these steps:

FROM

Efforts to suppress misbehavior based on the view that misbehavior is evidence of failing students or classrooms.



TO

Recognizing and using the inherent value of misbehavior as an opportunity for social and emotional learning.

Authority driven disciplinary actions that focus only on the identified misbehaving students.



Restorative circles that bring together everyone who is most immediately affected by the incident.

Punishment and exclusion is used to control misbehavior and motivate positive behavior changes.



Dialogue leading to understanding and action to set things right, repair harm, and restore relationships.

- In California, the Oakland Unified School District found that “Restorative Justice has helped reduce suspensions, improve academic outcomes, narrow the racial discipline gap, and promote caring relationships between students and teachers, and among peers.”⁶ Their program showed that:
 - Approximately 70% of staff reported improved school climate, and...
 - 67% of students felt that Restorative Justice improved their emotional and social skills.⁷

²Walker, Tim, *Restorative Practices in Schools Work... But They Can Work Better*, NEAToday, January 30, 2020.

³Blackburn, Steven, *Why Districts Are Adopting Restorative Justice Practices*, District Administration, November 19, 2019.

⁴Krauth, Olivia, *20 More JCPS Schools to train in Restorative Practices for Student Behavior*, Courier Journal, November 25, 2019.

⁵Restorative Practices, Tulsa Public Schools, August 31, 2020.

⁶Gonzalez, Thalia, and Epstein, Rebecca, *More Than Reduced Police Presence: Schools Must Commit to Implementing Restorative Justice*, The National Law Journal, Law.com, July 9, 2020.

⁷Ibid. 6.

THE ROAD AHEAD

National Teachers Academy, The Fuller School, and Chicago Academy High School have experienced the benefits of restorative practices. Principals Castelaz, McCottrell, and Menzer, have set the bar for implementing strategies, tactics and best practices within their respective buildings. Their work is not done yet, and moving forward, will require:

- Entire-school staff commitment.
- Training and re-training.
- Funding for dedicated restorative practice professionals.

AUSL is preparing to expand its Restorative Justice initiatives when schools re-open, and Covid-19 is no longer a public health concern. We will continue to create positive school cultures where all students learn to:

- Resolve disagreements.
- Take ownership of their behavior.
- Repair the harm caused by their actions.
- Engage in acts of empathy and forgiveness.

it is our shared belief with CPS that restorative practices “Provide a way for schools to strengthen community, build relationships among students and between students and staff, and increase the safety and productivity of the learning environment.”⁸ Moving forward, we are in this together to achieve these goals.

A Student’s Perspective:

“I had a rough start to the year because of things going on at home. My teacher, Ms. Hausser, and my SECA, Ms. T, reached out to my mom every day to check in on me. Mrs. Feltes and Ms. Brown also checked in on me, making sure I was at school and doing ok. When we were in school, and I needed a break, I knew I could go and relax, work on puzzles, and control my anger in the counselor’s office. Those things never happened at any school I was at before.”

EDUCATING SAFELY THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges for our schools. To keep our students safe while they learn, CPS and AUSL network schools will begin the Fall 2020 school year using remote instruction.

AUSL is evaluating historical lessons learned, and curating the tools, strategies, tips, and best practices needed to ready schools and educators for online learning environments. The academic work will be equivalent in effort and rigor to typical classroom work, and will be structured to engage participation by all students. AUSL’s goal for the upcoming school year is to provide the most effective education possible during these uncertain times.

ABOUT AUSL

AUSL is a school management organization that works tirelessly to deliver on the promise that all students have access to an excellent education, right in their own neighborhoods. We inspire student achievement with our highly trained and passionate teachers who care for each child’s educational, social, and emotional needs. Our holistic model ensures our students experience more, with programs that aren’t always offered in public schools.

Today, we manage 31 Chicago Public Schools serving nearly 16,000 students.

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⁸Restorative Practices Guide and Tool Kit, Chicago Public Schools