

Michigan Department of Education Message # 126 - Restorative Justice and the Achievement Gap

Restorative Justice has been shown not only to decrease suspension rates anywhere from 40% to 80%, but has also resulted in a nearly 50% drop in absenteeism, and a 60% decrease in tardiness (Restorative Justice Colorado-2/4/13 website). Restorative Justice has also been credited with 50% reductions in disciplinary referrals and recidivism rates (Transformative Justice Australia, 1990).

A Discussion of the Problem

“Research demonstrates that when students are removed from the classroom as a disciplinary measure, the odds increase dramatically that they will repeat a grade, drop out, or become involved in the juvenile justice system.” (The Council of State Governments, 2011).

Rates of suspension and expulsion have doubled since the 1970’s, with black students being expelled 3.5 times more frequently than their peers. A number of authors have argued that the increased use of suspensions and expulsions are directly responsible for increasing racial, ethnic, and developmental disparities in school discipline. Such disparities cannot be attributed to differences in socioeconomic status or to racial/ethnic differences in rates or types of misbehavior.¹

With more demanding high school curricula, attendance during instructional time is crucial. Schools need to rethink the impact of disciplinary measures that rely too heavily on school or social removal. “Connection to school is a critical factor in preventing youth violence; school alienation has been found to be a key factor in the development of both juvenile delinquency (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004) and school violence (Vossekuil et al., 2002).”¹

In their *Model Anti-Bullying Policy*, the Michigan State Board of Education recommends the implementation of restorative practices as an effective disciplinary intervention.²

The Alternative

“In an era of educational policy defined by accountability, it is appropriate and important to examine the extent to which any widely implemented philosophy, practice or policy has been shown on the basis of sound research to contribute to important educational goals.”¹

The American Psychological Association’s Zero Tolerance Task Force, in its full report, names restorative justice as one of three programs that “have been shown to be effective in reducing the risk of violence or disruption.”¹ Schools that have implemented restorative practices have demonstrated marked improvements in attendance, decreased instructional time lost to classroom disruptions, and increases in school climate ratings.

The following are examples of effective discipline frameworks:

- Restorative Practices
- Service Learning
- Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)/Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)

Call to Action

Learn more about positive discipline approaches by visiting cenmi.org, or www.safersanerschools.org. Find resources <http://ssdcop.neglected-delinquent.org/>, or www.iirp.org. Learn about implementing Restorative Justice approaches in your school or district restorativesolutions.us/schools, <http://www.restorativejustice.org/programme-place/02practiceissues/schools-1>, www.safersanerschools.org.

¹ Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in the Schools? An Evidentiary Review and Recommendations. American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force.

² State Board of Education *Model Anti-Bullying Policy* Retrieved February 1, 2013 from http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Model_Anti-Bullying_Policy_with_Revisions_338592_7.pdf