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# Restorative Practice/Restorative Justice

## TARGETED GRADUATION INDICATORS

OUT-OF-CLASSROOM DETENTIONS, SUSPENSIONS EXPULSIONS  
STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT FROM STAFF, ADMINISTRATORS AND STUDENTS  
GENERAL LOW SCHOOL CLIMATE SCORES REPORTED BY MANY STUDENTS  
INCREASED VISIBILITY OF SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS (SROS) TO DE-  
ESCALATE STUDENT-STUDENT AND STUDENT-STAFF CONFLICT



### OREGON EXAMPLE

Phoenix High School in Phoenix, Oregon, serves approximately 715 students in grades 9 through 12. PHS is ranked 20th out of 326 Oregon high schools by U.S. News & World Reports and offers a variety of advanced placement (AP) courses that were unavailable to students nearly a decade ago. Despite a high poverty rate characterized by multiple factors including unemployment, Phoenix High School touts its rigorous academic setting, community resources, high regard for and expectations of students by staff and the student mediation program as keys to its nurturing school environment (AdvancED, 2016).

### WHY WAS THE STRATEGY CHOSEN?

PHS teachers and administrators chose RJ to help reduce the out-of-school suspensions rate and eliminate expulsions altogether. To achieve these and other goals, staff shaped strategies to better support all students to achieve a 90% school attendance rate, on-track graduation by sophomore year for 100 percent of students and graduation on-time (in four-years) for 100 percent of students (AdvancED, 2016).

### DESCRIPTION OF THE STRATEGY

Restorative Justice (RJ) uses non-punitive interventions to heal harm done and strengthen relationships. It is defined as: "...an innovative approach to offending and inappropriate behavior which puts repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above the need for assigning blame and dispensing punishment. A restorative approach in a school shifts the emphasis from managing behavior to focusing on building, nurturing and repairing relationships." (Hopkins, 2003)

Restorative Practices, specifically RJ, is a system-wide approach to cultural overreliance on exclusionary discipline practices in schools. Using indigenous circles as a model for building upon relationships and activating the voices of all parties involved in an incident (both persons harmed and persons responsible for the harm), RJ practitioners have found Restorative Practices promote prevention, intervention and restoration. The practice emphasizes "...healing and repair over punishment, inclusion over exclusion and accountability." (Thomas, 2015)

RJ enables school staff, students and families to participate in an intentional, face-to-face encounter. Different from punitive measures that can create emotional distance and a lack of accountability, students are given the opportunity to reflect on behavior, and work toward understanding their role in the interaction, either as the harmed party or the individual that harmed. Listening to each voice is key to the success of the circle and ultimately allows everyone to be heard, honored and respected, regardless of their role in the incident.

Punitive suspensions policies often exacerbate behavior problems by further alienating students. Restorative Justice helps foster an inclusive school culture. It engages students and families in a meaningful way with the school and can promote a sense of connection. Restorative practices in conjunction with a trauma sensitive approach to school interactions can do much to improve the school culture and create the environment necessary for successful learning.



## EVIDENCE THE STRATEGY IS EFFECTIVE

According to *Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Research Review* (Fronius, et.al, 2016), RJ concepts and practices are still in the infancy stage. Strategies vary program to program, campus to campus, with emphasis put on the circle, mediation or reflective conference as a means to repair harm and engage the parties. While experimental tests on RJ continue to be developed, themes demonstrate the effectiveness in schools when embedded into the overall school culture. Noting the observations are documented by practitioners of RJ, and not necessarily from objective observations and data (Fronius, et.al. 2016), themes include: improved school climate, student connectedness, community and family engagement, academic achievement and student support from staff. Discipline disparities among students of color compared to white peers appears to decrease.

## FUNDING OF THE STRATEGY

PHS's Restorative Justice implementation is in partnership with Resolve Center for Dispute Resolution and Restorative Justice, located in Medford, Oregon. Via a one-time grant of \$60,000 from the Youth Development Council in 2015, PHS hired a Restorative Justice Facilitator three days per week to provide ongoing training and implementation of restorative practices. This Facilitator was able to build Restorative Justice principles into PHS's long-time peer mediation program as an alternative to punitive disciplinary measures.

## THE STRATEGY IS WORKING IN OREGON

Phoenix High School decreased its out-of-school suspensions over a two-year span (37 in 2015-16, compared to 52 in 2014-15). Due to the implementation of restorative justice practices and peer mediation programming, the school also reported zero expulsions over a three-year span (AdvancED, 2016). PHS continues to maintain a higher-than-state-average graduation rate based on a four-year cohort (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). On-track graduation for the freshman class showed marked improvement (85% during 2015-16, compared to 79% during 2014-15).

## LINKS TO RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

**(2016). Resolve: Education & Training.**  
[www.resolvecenter.org/pg3.cfm](http://www.resolvecenter.org/pg3.cfm)

**Allard, B. (2015). Addressing the Disproportionate Discipline Problem in Oregon Public Schools using Restorative Justice.**  
<https://www.oregon.gov/OCBA/PDFs/Allard%20-%20Restorative%20Justice%20in%20Public%20Schools%20report.pdf>

**Fronius, T., et.al. (2016). Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Research Review.**  
[http://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RJ\\_Literature-Review\\_20160217.pdf](http://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RJ_Literature-Review_20160217.pdf)

**New Settlement Parent Action Committee. (2016). Restoring Justice to Our Schools: Community Research and Solutions to End Pushout.**  
<http://static1.squarespace.com/static/54486cbce4b0b1d30fc22d8f/t/569c69ce1f4039527f967e65/1453091279623/NewSetPAC.pdf>

**Sumner, M., et.al. (2010). School-based Restorative justice as an alternative to zero-tolerance policies: Lessons from West Oakland.**  
[https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/thcsj/10-2010\\_School-based\\_Restorative\\_Justice\\_As\\_an\\_Alternative\\_to\\_Zero-Tolerance\\_Policies.pdf](https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/thcsj/10-2010_School-based_Restorative_Justice_As_an_Alternative_to_Zero-Tolerance_Policies.pdf)

**Swift County Restorative Justice. (2016).**  
<http://scrj.webs.com/schoolcircles.htm>

## CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS

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